



ADOPTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT AND ISSUANCE OF FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

INTRODUCTION: In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) issued an Environmental Assessment (EA) for proposed field studies to assess the safety of sylvatic plague vaccine in prairie dogs and non-target animals and a Finding of No Significant Impact on May 17, 2012, for the proposed field studies. The USGS EA dated May 17, 2012, is incorporated herein by reference.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: Management of plague in prairie dogs is a critical step in continuing progress in the recovery of the endangered black-footed ferret and the conservation of remnant grassland communities. An oral sylvatic plague vaccine (SPV), developed and tested jointly by the USGS, National Wildlife Health Center and University of Wisconsin (Madison, WI), is intended as a pre-emptive method for controlling plague in prairie dogs, without the disadvantages and potential collateral environmental effects of insecticidal dusting. The proposed project involves field studies to assess the safety and efficacy of SPV in wild prairie dogs and non-target animals.

ALTERNATIVES: In its environmental review of Phase II of the project, the USGS considered the No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action—Alternative 1 of the Phase I EA. Under the No Action Alternative, USGS would not apply vaccine-laden bait or insecticide to prairie dog colonies nor would USGS conduct research for plague control or use resources available. Field efficacy studies would be prevented. Sylvatic plague would continue to pose an unregulated threat to existing populations of prairie dogs in the study states. The Proposed Action in Phase I of this project conducted small, short-term field trials to evaluate the safety of SPV in wild prairie dogs and non-target animals under field conditions at selected sites in Colorado. The Proposed Action provided important information regarding the uptake and safety of SPV in wild prairie dogs and non-target animals in a timely manner. The area of impact for the field studies was limited in size (20-50 acres/site) and had restricted access. Phase II of this project will be to conduct small, short-term field trials to evaluate the efficacy of SPV in wild prairie dogs and non-target animals under field conditions at selected sites in Arizona, Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming. As the impacts of Phase II of the efficacy studies have been adequately and comprehensively evaluated in the Phase I EA, the USGS is issuing this FONSI to include the above identified sites.

ANAYSIS OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT: The selected alternative will have no or negligible long-term impacts on earth, biological, water, air, cultural, aesthetic, socio-economic resources, or other environmental concerns (greenhouse gas emissions and hazardous materials).

There is a potential for short-term insignificant environmental impacts as a result of pesticide use at the field sites. No sensitive insect or arachnid species are associated with prairie dog colonies on the study sites. Insect and arachnid populations in the areas surrounding the study sites will have no potential for exposure to the treatment, which will leave adequate populations to re-inhabit prairie dog burrows when the effects of insecticide diminish which is expected to be eight –ten (8-10) months following treatment. Therefore, use of this product will not cause decline of individuals or populations of sensitive species nor contribute negatively towards population trends. The study sites have limited or no water bodies and the method of application (application at and around prairie dog burrows) will avoid any contact of the product with any bodies of water. A 50 foot buffer will be used around any body of water. Therefore, there will be no effect on any aquatic organisms. Based on this information and analysis, the effects of insecticide on non-target wildlife from the proposed action will be inconsequential.

No endangered or threatened species would be affected, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with this determination. No properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places would be affected by this action. The State Historic Preservation Offices in the identified sites have determined that the proposed efficacy studies will have “no adverse effect” on cultural resources.

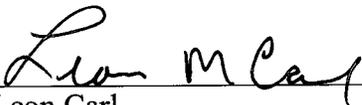
PUBLIC AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL REVIEW: The USGS consulted with the following agencies in the adoption of the EA:

- National Park Service
- Bureau of Land Management
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Arizona Fish and Game Department
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
- U.S. Forest Service
- Lower Brule Sioux Tribe
- Navajo Nation
- Wyoming Game and Fish Department
- Utah Division of Wildlife Resources

The USGS posted notices in local newspapers and on community bulletin boards announcing the field efficacy trials. These notices provided a 21-day opportunity for public review and comment on the proposed project. No comments or requests for a public hearing were received by the USGS, other federal and state agencies, or tribal nations. The Final EA and FONSI were placed on the public website of the National

Wildlife Health Center at
http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/disease_information/sylvatic_plague/

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT: Following review of the Environmental Assessment and all comments received, the USGS concludes that the proposed project is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA of 1969. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement for the field studies to assess the safety of sylvatic plague vaccine is not required and the USGS adopts the NWHC NEPA EA dated May 17, 2012, and selects the proposed action because it best meets the purpose and need to assess the safety of sylvatic plague in prairie dogs and non-target animals.



Leon Carl
Regional Director, Midwest Region
USGS NEPA Responsible Official
United States Geological Survey



Date