

United States Department of Agriculture



Farm Service Agency



Grassland Reserve Program
Finding of No Significant Impact
February, 2004



FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
FROM IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
GRASSLANDS RESERVE PROGRAM

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires Federal agencies to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for major Federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. I have determined, based upon the reasons provided below, that there will be no significant individual or cumulative impacts on the quality of the human environment as a result of implementing GRP, particularly when focusing on the significant adverse impacts which NEPA is intended to help decision makers avoid and mitigate against. Therefore, an EIS need not be prepared.

The GRP authorizes activities that protect and improve the quality and quantity of grassland resources (EA pages 1, 8). This is accomplished by obtaining easements and entering into rental agreements (EA page 2). Cost-share payments may also be provided to restore up to 2 million acres of grasslands. The GRP easements and rental agreements themselves do not affect alter the physical environment at all (EA page 5). Thus, the primary effects of GRP on the environment will occur as a result of the conservation practices required either through the terms of the easement or rental agreement or under a restoration agreement (EA page 9). Though up to 2 million grassland acres can potentially be restored under GRP (EA page 2), USDA expects that funds will primarily be used for easements and rental agreements (EA page 9).

The EA indicates that the purpose of the conservation practices will be to improve and maintain the sustainability and viability of GRP grassland functions and values (EA pages 11, 12). Because of the potential to affect one type of resource while improving the condition of another resource, there may at times be minimal site-specific adverse environmental effects (EA page 13), individually or cumulatively. However, NRCS has in the past and will continue to prepare documentation of an environmental evaluation on a site-specific level and will consult with the appropriate organizations to avoid, reduce or mitigate adverse impacts on protected resources and will comply with requirements protecting unique geographic features and other resources, as well as NRCS policies protecting natural resources (EA page 11). Thus, any adverse effects that may result from this program will occur at a much lower threshold than the EIS threshold.

Because of the steps NRCS will take to work with other agencies to avoid, mitigate and reduce any potential adverse effects, there is no threat of a violation of any Federal, State or local law or other requirements for the protection of the environment. There is no impact on public health or safety identified in this EA or otherwise expected. Furthermore, there is no effect identified that might be considered highly controversial or uncertain or that might involve unique or unknown risks. Neither the proposed action nor any of the alternatives is likely to establish a precedent for future actions beyond those discussed in this EA.

Implementation of the GRP interim rule is not sufficiently related to other actions that either individually or cumulatively is likely to result in the type of significant impacts that NEPA is intended to address. To the extent other NRCS GRP activities may result in significant effects to the quality of the human environment, a State or area-wide EA or EIS may be prepared separately from this National EA.

Based on the information presented in the attached GRP EA, I find that neither the proposed action nor any alternatives is a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment that requires preparation of an EIS.

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Chief, Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture

DATE