FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Field Studies to Assess the Safety of Sylvatic Plague Vaccine in Prairie Dogs and Non-Target Animals

INTRODUCTION: In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) prepared an Environmental Assessment for proposed field studies to assess the safety of sylvatic plague vaccine in prairie dogs and non-target animals.

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 of SPV in wild prairie dogs and non-target animals.

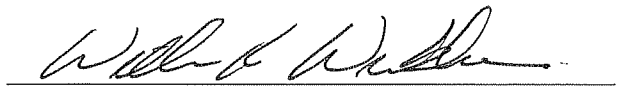
The selected alternative, Proposed Action—Alternative 1, is to conduct small, short-term field trials to evaluate the safety of SPV in wild prairie dogs and non-target animals under field conditions at selected sites in Colorado. The Proposed Action will provide important information regarding the uptake and safety of SPV in wild prairie dogs and non-target animals in a timely manner. The area of impact for the field studies would be limited in size (20-50 acres/site) and have restricted access.

Two alternatives were considered but not chosen. (1) Conduct the field studies at a later time. (2) Conduct the field studies in other locations. Conducting field studies at a later time will delay future studies on field efficacy of SPV and its subsequent use as a management tool for conservation. Selecting other locations will delay the field studies due to additional time spent identifying suitable colonies, obtaining necessary permissions, and holding public meetings.

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). The Colorado State Historic Preservation Office has determined that the proposed field studies will have "no adverse effect" on cultural resources.

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 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.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT: Following review of the attached 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.



5/17/2012

William H. Werkheiser
Acting Associate Director for
Administration, Enterprise Information, and
Human Capital
USGS NEPA Responsible Official
United States Geological Survey

Date