

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI) AND  
ADOPTION OF USDA, ANIMAL AND PLANT HEALTH INSPECTION  
SERVICE, WILDLIFE SERVICES (WS)  
SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (SEA)  
  
ORAL VACCINATION TO CONTROL SPECIFIC RABIES  
VIRUS VARIANTS IN RACCOONS, GRAY FOXES, AND COYOTES  
IN THE UNITED STATES**

**Purpose, Need, and Background**

USDA, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services (WS) has completed environmental assessments (EA) on its national Oral Rabies Vaccination (ORV) program. WS, in cooperation with other federal and state agencies, disperses a recombinant vaccinia-rabies glycoprotein (Raboral V-RG® Merial, Inc.) vaccine to help combat the spread of raccoon variant (strain) of rabies virus into new areas. A WS EA, completed in July 2001, analyzed the potential effects of a proposal to continue and expand this cooperative program in a number of additional eastern and southern states, including Virginia and Alabama. A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was issued on July 30, 2001. A subsequent evaluation and FONSI for the program's further expansion into the states of Kentucky and Tennessee was issued on August 5, 2002. TVA adopted the WS July 2001 EA and issued its FONSI on June 18, 2003 (see the attached TVA FONSI). In an April 15, 2004 letter to WS, TVA granted conditional approval to use its public lands in Tennessee, Virginia, Kentucky and Alabama for the purpose of further implementing the cooperative ORV program.

More recently, because of increased federal involvement in ORV programs, a proposal to continue and expand the program into additional states and to expand monitoring and surveillance, WS prepared a supplemental EA (SEA) to include 26 states and the District of Columbia in the proposed action. Its FONSI for these expanded efforts was signed on September 9, 2004 (see attached SEA and FONSI). This expansion includes work in the additional Tennessee Valley states of Georgia, Mississippi and North Carolina. The program would continue to be implemented in Georgia, Mississippi and North Carolina as presently implemented and described in Section 1.2 of the attached EA. This additional TVA FONSI covers expansion of the same program initiatives into these remaining Tennessee Valley states.

Similar to its decision in April 2004, TVA proposes to execute a second or supplement to its letter agreement with WS granting conditional approval for the use of its land in Georgia, Mississippi and North Carolina for the purpose of further implementing the cooperative ORV program described under Alternative 1, Proposed Action (and preferred alternative).

**Alternatives Considered and Analyzed in Detail**

As considered in its more recent evaluations, this WS SEA evaluates in detail the environmental consequences of four alternatives; three other alternatives were

considered, but not evaluated in detail because they were impractical or infeasible. The anticipated effects of each alternative were determined to be the same as those included in WS's July 30, 2001 FONSI and are described in detail in the attached September 2004 SEA. Under Alternative 1, WS would continue to expand its existing cooperative ORV program into Georgia, Mississippi and North Carolina and purchase and distribute V-RG® oral vaccine baits within designated barrier zones. WS could also continue participation in implementing state contingency plans to eradicate, suppress, and stop the spread of localized rabies outbreaks beyond the barrier zones.

### **Impact Assessment**

In Georgia and Mississippi, TVA owns power generation and transmission facilities and land around all or a portion of four reservoirs. In North Carolina, TVA owns and operates four hydroelectric dams and associated shorelands. TVA has also conveyed thousands of acres of its lands in North Carolina and Georgia to other public agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to manage for public recreation. Much of this land is characterized as scenic mountain land.

In Georgia, Mississippi and North Carolina, land areas within the TVA service region are in the northern, northeast central and the western portions of these states, respectively. These areas in Georgia and North Carolina are extensively mountainous, rugged and forested while agriculture is the dominant land use in the rolling to flat terrain in Mississippi. In Mississippi, there is no TVA land in the present ORV program barrier zone, which is outside the TVA service region in the southern part of the state. However, the use of TVA land in the future elsewhere in these states could be important in helping ensure the program's effectiveness. These areas in all three states contain a diversity of land cover types, uses and habitats. Aerial distribution of ORV baits, the primary method of vaccine dispersal, would avoid urban and suburban areas as well as lakes and rivers, while primarily targeting rural and other areas known to have suitable raccoon habitat.

Under Alternative 1, Proposed Action (and preferred alternative) WS would continue to expand its existing ORV program into Georgia, Mississippi and North Carolina. The SEA concludes that expansion of the program would continue to present minimal risks to humans from contact with V-RG® vaccine; consumption of baits containing the vaccine would have no adverse impact on raccoon populations (i.e., target species); no adverse effects on non-target wildlife, including fish, reptiles, amphibians or any invertebrate species are expected and there would be no effect on any federally or state listed threatened or endangered species. Expansion of the program would continue to present a low risk of adversely affecting pet dogs or other domestic animals that might consume ORV treated baits; a very low risk of causing disease in humans or animals; a very low risk of forming new viruses that could cause disease in humans or animals; and a very low risk of injury to people or domestic animals from being struck by aerielly dropped baits. WS believes, and TVA agrees, that the benefits of the program would exceed the costs; and, that many animals would be saved from suffering and death due to rabies. In light of managed harvest and natural mortality, the ORV program would continue to have no individual or cumulative adverse impact on local raccoon populations even through the implementation of contingency plan to control infected or isolated high populations.

Under Alternative 2, 3, and 4, the expected impacts are the same as those previously described in the attached June 18, 2003 TVA FONSI.

The WS FONSI of September 9, 2004 concluded that the proposed undertaking would not affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. WS determined that environmental impacts on the quality of the human environment from expanding the ORV program to include the states of Georgia, Mississippi and North Carolina would also be insignificant.

### **Public Involvement**

As previously noted, WS has analyzed the environmental effects of continuing and expanding its ORV program in several eastern states and Texas. Federal Register (FR) notices and letters have been sent throughout the planning processes and scoping meetings have been held with other federal, state and local agencies, state health departments, academic institutions, American Indian tribes and others organizations to identify issues addressed in its environmental reviews. Comments received were review to identify new issues or alternatives not already included in its previous analyses. A Notice of Availability (NOA) for this supplemental EA and Decision/FONSI was published in the FR on June 30, 2003. On November 7, 2004, WS published a notice in the Knoxville News-Sentinel among several other newspapers in the region to announce its plans to aeriually disperse vaccine-laced baits in 17 counties in southeast Tennessee, northwest Georgia and northeast Alabama (see attachment to this FONSI).

### **Mitigation**

Because of public and interagency involvement, as well as WS experience in the development and implementation of the ORV program, a number of key mitigation measures have been developed and incorporated into its standard operating procedures. To ensure consistent implementation, many of these measures have been incorporated into WS standard operating procedures and include all the measures described in Section 3.3 in the attached EA and reference in the attached June 18, 2003 TVA FONSI.

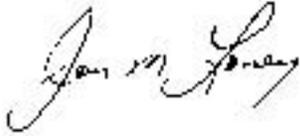
### **TVA Review**

Based on the SEA and its own staff expertise and experiences, TVA believes that there would be minimal impact on target wildlife species; no adverse effects on non-target wildlife and would have no effect on any federally or state listed threatened or endangered species in Georgia, Mississippi or North Carolina from expansion of the ORV program. Accordingly, TVA concurs with impacts of Alternative 1, the Proposed Action (and preferred) as described in the attached WS SEA. TVA also believes that the SEA adequately addresses all impacts of allowing use of additional land in its custody and control for the cooperative ORV program.

### **Conclusion and Findings**

TVA has critically and independently reviewed the impacts assessed in the WS SEA and confirmed its findings. The scope, alternatives considered, and contents of the SEA are adequate and the impacts on the environment, including allowing ORV program use on TVA lands, have been adequately addressed. TVA has decided to adopt the WS SEA and its associated FONSI of September 9, 2004. These documents are attached and incorporated by reference.

Based on the WS SEA, we conclude that the land use authorization and implementation of ORV program on TVA land would not be a major federal action significantly affecting the environment. Accordingly, an environmental impact statement is not required.



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Date

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