

Finding of No Significant Impact Cattle Fever Tick Eradication Program Fence Deterrent in Cameron and Starr Counties, Texas Environmental Assessment June 2024

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA APHIS), Veterinary Services (VS) prepared an environmental assessment (EA) analyzing potential environmental consequences associated with the installation of high game fencing at specific locations in Cameron and Starr Counties, Texas, to prevent or limit the spread of cattle fever ticks by free-ranging wildlife hosts (such as white-tailed deer and nilgai). The EA, incorporated by reference in this document, is available from:

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Veterinary Services
2150 Centre Avenue,
Bldg. B Fort Collins, CO 80526

Ongoing cattle fever tick eradication efforts in southern Texas include surveillance and patrolling for stray or smuggled tick-infested livestock, treatment of tick-infested animals, and vacating of tick-infested pastures and premises. Unfortunately, these efforts seem to be insufficient given the persistent increasing number of tick-infested premises observed outside of the Permanent Tick Quarantine Zone in recent years and given the potential for both the ticks and the bovine disease to spread across the region including Cameron and Starr Counties. Installing high game fences and cattle fences in certain areas of Southern Texas, including Cameron and Starr counties, in addition to the above-mentioned ongoing eradication efforts, may limit the movements of tick hosts (such as white-tailed deer and nilgai antelope) and eventually contribute to the program's effort to reducing the use of chemicals needed to treat tick-infested cattle, as well as associated animal production costs overall. Therefore, by funding the installation of these fences against potential tick hosts, the USDA APHIS VS' cattle fever tick eradication program (CFTEP) expects to reduce the risk of the spread of the disease bovine babesiosis among U.S. cattle populations in southern Texas.

The EA analyses the alternatives of (A) no action under which USDA-APHIS would not fund the installation of high game fencing in Cameron and Starr Counties, which would then cause the continued spread of cattle fever ticks by infested wildlife ungulates in cattle ranches with the potential of increasing the likelihood of babesiosis outbreaks in the U.S. cattle populations and the related financial consequences; and (B) proposed action under which USDA-APHIS would fund the installation of high game fences and cattle fences in certain areas of Southern Texas, including Cameron and Starr counties to deter the movements of potential tick hosts, facilitating and improving current CFTEP efforts.

USDA-APHIS determined that there are no disproportionate adverse effects associated with the preferred action alternative to children, minority populations, or low-income populations over those effects to the general populations, in compliance with Executive Order 12898, "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations"; USDA-APHIS also complies with Executive Order 13990, "Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis"; Executive Order 13045, "Protection of Children from Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks"; Executive Order 14008, "Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad"; Executive Order 13045, "Protection of Children from Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks"; Executive Order 13985 "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government", which is furthered by Executive Order 14091 that extends and strengthens equity-advancing requirements for agencies for a better outcome delivery for the American people; and Executive Order 14096, "Revitalizing Our Nation's Commitment to Environmental Justice for All", by advancing equity for all, including minorities and underserved communities that are often in persistent poverty and/or adversely affected by inequality.

I found that the implementation of the proposed program will not significantly impact the quality of the human environment. I have considered and based my finding of no significant impact on the environment on the analysis contained within the EA. Because I have not found evidence of significant environmental impacts associated with the proposed action, I find that an environmental impact statement does not need to be prepared and that the program may proceed.

**Dr. Jennifer Siembeda
Acting Director, Ruminant Health Center
Strategy and Policy
Veterinary Services
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service**