

# FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

## Washington State Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program

November 2011

### INTRODUCTION

The United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency (FSA) on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) has prepared a Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) to evaluate the environmental consequences associated with providing the State of Washington additional Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) grant funds. The VPA-HIP is a program authorized by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) that provides grants to States and tribal governments to encourage owners and operators of privately held farm, ranch, and forest land to voluntarily open land for public access for outdoor recreation activities such as hunting, fishing, hiking, wildlife watching, and other outdoor activities. Projects receiving VPA-HIP funds are administered by the State or Tribal government that receives the grant.

The State of Washington, through the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), proposes to use additional VPA-HIP funds to expand public access for hunting and fishing, and to improve habitat for wildlife. VPA-HIP funds will be used through a combination of landowner incentive payments and physical improvements to facilitate and encourage access opportunities through three additions to its existing VPA-HIP program.

### PROPOSED ACTION

#### 1. Optimizing Hunting on CRP

Establish one replicated Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) inter-seeding demonstration plot per county in existing CRP in Columbia, Garfield, Lincoln, Walla Walla and Whitman Counties during the first year of the project including:

- Stopping at demonstration plots on Conservation District annual field tours with producers and partners potentially during the second and third years of the Project.
- Incorporating results in Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Technical Notes in cooperation with NRCS Plant Materials Specialist.
- Present outcomes to Washington Grain Alliance and other producer groups interested in results.
- Develop a brochures and location on WDFW's private lands website covering CRP inter-seeding techniques demonstrated by this project.
- Use demonstration results to secure commitments for three implementation projects in each of the five counties in the project area, for a total of 15 projects during the third year of the project.

### 2. Private Forest Land Access

Establish public access on at least 20,000 additional acres of private forest lands in eastern Washington.

### 3. Feel Free to Fish

Enroll 27 miles of both sides of the Walla Walla and/or Touchet Rivers in the Feel Free to Fish program.

## **REASONS FOR FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

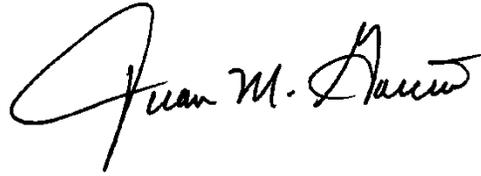
In consideration of the analysis documented in the PEA and the reasons outlined in this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), the Proposed Action would not constitute a major Federal action that would significantly affect the human environment. The state of Washington notes that there will be no additional SEPA process for this action. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared, and WDFW will not have a separate SEPA comment period. The determination is based on the following:

1. The Proposed Action as outlined in the PEA would provide beneficial impacts to both recreation and economic resources as a result of the increased amount of land available for public use and monies from these activities injected into local economies. Moreover, expanding lands available for wildlife-associated recreation would benefit vegetation and wildlife by maintaining suitable habitat rather than converting the land to another incompatible use.
2. Potential beneficial and adverse impacts of implementing the Proposed Action have been fully considered within the PEA. No significant adverse direct or indirect effects were identified, based on the resource analyses provided in the PEA.
3. The Proposed Action would not involve effects to the quality of the human environment that are likely to be highly controversial.
4. The Proposed Action would not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects and does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.
5. The Proposed Action does not result in cumulative significant impacts when considered with other actions that also individually have insignificant impacts. Cumulative impacts of implementing the Proposed Action were determined to be not significant.
6. The Proposed Action would not have adverse effects on threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat.
7. The Proposed Action does not threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

## **DETERMINATION**

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act and FSA's environmental regulations at 7 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) part 799 implementing the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality, 40 CFR parts 1500-1508, I find the Proposed Action is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Barring any new data identified during public and agency review of the PEA that would dramatically change the analysis presented in the PEA or identification of a significant controversial issue, the PEA and

FONSI are considered final 30 days after the date of initial publication of the Notice of Availability.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juan M. Garcia". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".

11/15/2011

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature

Date

# **DRAFT SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program

Expanding Hunting and Fishing Access to Private Land in  
Washington

*Prepared for:*

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October 2011

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# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## **Background**

This Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Assessment (Supplemental PEA) has been prepared to analyze the potential environmental consequences associated with implementation of an Amendment to the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) in the State of Washington. The VPA-HIP is authorized by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) that provides grants to States and tribal governments to either expand existing or create new public access programs. Funds may also be requested to provide incentives for eligible private landowners to improve habitat on enrolled lands. Incentives encourage owners and operators of privately held farm, ranch, and forest land to voluntarily open land for public access for outdoor recreation activities such as hunting, fishing, hiking, wildlife watching, and other outdoor activities. The VPA-HIP grant award process is administered by the USDA Farm Service Agency on behalf of the CCC. The VPA-HIP programs are administered by the State or tribal government that receives the grant.

The State of Washington, through the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), proposes to amend its existing VPA-HIP funds to expand upon its long history of working with landowners to provide public access on private lands through various voluntary access programs. Under these programs, WDFW works with over 600 private landowners and over one million acres of private land under cooperative agreement in eastern and western Washington.

## **Proposed Action**

WDFW proposes to use VPA-HIP funds to expand upon the 1.3 million acres of private land currently enrolled in the “Feel Free to Hunt,” Register to Hunt,” and “Hunt by Written Permission” hunting access programs and expand existing public access opportunities for hunting and fishing. VPA-HIP funds will be used through a combination of landowner incentive payments and physical improvements to facilitate and encourage access opportunities through three individual initiatives:

- Optimizing Hunting on CRP
- Private Forest Land Access
- Feel Free to Fish Access

Details of how VPA-HIP funds will be used in each of these initiatives are provided in Section 2.0 of this Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA).

## **Purpose and Need**

The purpose of the proposed action is to use VPA-HIP funds to expand existing public access opportunities for hunting and fishing in Washington State.

## **Environmental Consequences**

This Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) identifies the possible environmental consequences resulting from the proposed implementation of these initiatives. The PEA process

is designed to inform decision-makers and the public about the potential environmental effects of the Proposed Action and to ensure adequate public involvement in the process.

The environmental consequences of the Proposed Action and No Action Alternative are addressed in this PEA and summarized in Table ES-1.

This PEA has been prepared by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act.

**Table ES-1 Summary of Environmental Consequences**

Resource	Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative)	No Action Alternative
Biological Resources (Wildlife and Protected Species)	<p>Expanding hunting and fishing opportunities could potentially result in increased pressure on game populations and additional incidental handling and/or release mortalities of ESA-listed steelhead. However, these impacts would be minimized through current WDFW hunting and fishing regulations. No adverse impacts to protected species are anticipated.</p> <p>Increasing land available for wildlife- and fishing-related recreation, and expanding the wildlife values of the Conservation Reserve Program would result in additional land being managed for wildlife values resulting in improved wildlife habitat over time.</p>	The current public access program would continue; however, the additional benefits associated with expanding acreage in the program would not occur.
Cultural Resources	<p>The Optimizing Hunting on CRP initiative is unlikely to have additional impact on cultural resources beyond what is already disturbed from agricultural plowing.</p> <p>Initiatives to provide increased access could increase the frequency and enlarge the area where hunters and anglers encounter cultural resources, but increased access alone is not anticipated to result in impacts to cultural resources.</p>	The current public access program would continue, with no change to the current program's minimal impact on cultural resources.

Resource	Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative)	No Action Alternative
	Increased public access could slightly increase impacts on hunting and fishing conducted as part of tribal culture and tribal subsistence; conversely, the “optimizing hunting” initiative could have slight benefits to tribal cultural and subsistence hunting.	
Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice	Potential for slight direct economic benefits for those landowners with eligible lands that voluntarily enroll. Indirect economic benefits are expected for local economies from traveling hunters and anglers and any purchases of necessary goods and/or services near enrolled lands. These local economic benefits could be substantial from steelhead fisheries and may expand if spring Chinook fisheries can be offered along these enrolled lands in the future.	No socioeconomic or environmental justice impacts would occur. However, the slight beneficial impacts from the Proposed Action would not be realized.
Recreation	Potential for increased private land enrollment would lead to increased recreational opportunities for hunting and fishing. Only positive, beneficial impacts would occur to recreational resources.	No impacts to recreational resources would occur. However, beneficial impacts from expanded recreational opportunities from the Proposed Action would not occur.

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## **Acronyms and Abbreviations**

CEQ Council on Environmental Quality

CRP Conservation Reserve Program

CREP Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

CTUIR Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation

FSA Farm Service Agency

PEA Programmatic Environmental Assessment

USDA United States Department of Agriculture

VPA-HIP Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program

WDFW Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

## **Chapter 1.0 Introduction**

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) proposes to implement an Amendment to the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Improvement Program (VPA-HIP) administered by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) in Washington State.

### **1.1 Current VPA-HIP Program in Washington**

The VPA-HIP program in Washington was analyzed in a PEA published in June 2011. That analysis provided a summary of WDFW's history of working with landowners to provide public hunting access on private lands. The VPA-HIP program as described in that analysis is just getting underway. It will provide the following expansions to WDFW's previously existing public access programs. It consists of the following five initiatives.

- Access Near Urban Centers
  - Increase acreage enrolled in the Snow Goose Hunting Program from 1,000 acres to 1,500 acres annually.
  - Increase the number of waterfowl hunting blinds made available through the "Feel Free to Hunt" Program from 10 blinds to 25 blinds.
  - Establish public big game hunting access on at least 5,000 acres of private forest lands.
  - Establish at least 5 new watchable wildlife opportunities on private farmlands.
- Snake River Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Enhancement and Access
  - Establish public hunting access on at least an additional 12,500 acres of private farm land.
  - Establish public access for hunting on an additional 15 farms also enrolled in our Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).
- Corn Stubble Retention
  - Double the amount of acres enrolled in the Corn Stubble Retention Program from an average of 1,000 acres annually to 2,000 acres annually.
- Southwest Washington Private Forest Land Access
  - Establish public hunting access on at least 50,000 additional acres of private forest lands.
- Improving Access to Private Lands Hunting Opportunities
  - Develop a new GoHunt interactive mapping program that utilizes new technology and results in improved usability.
  - Increase GoHunt webpage "hits" by 25% over 2009 use.
  - Develop an automated system where hunters can reserve hunting days on private lands enrolled in WDFW access programs.

## **1.2 Proposed Amendment**

The proposed Amendment will expand public access opportunities for hunting and fishing. VPA-HIP funds will be used through a combination of landowner incentive payments and physical improvements to facilitate and encourage access opportunities through three additional initiatives:

- Optimizing Hunting on CRP
  - Improve habitat values of aging CRP stands, thus improving hunting opportunities, by demonstrating and implementing interseeding on CRP lands.
- Eastern Washington Private Forest Land Access
  - Expand private land currently enrolled in the “Feel Free to Hunt,” Register to Hunt,” and “Hunt by Written Permission” hunting access programs by 20,000 acres in eastern Washington.
- Feel Free to Fish
  - Expand public access for fishing on the Walla Walla and/or Touchet Rivers.

Details of how VPA-HIP funds will be used in each of these initiatives are provided in Section 2.0.

## **1.3 Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action**

The purpose of the proposed action is to expand public access opportunities for hunting and fishing, and to improve hunting opportunities.

## **1.4 Objectives of the Proposed Action**

The objectives of the proposed action are discussed below according to the three individual initiatives that comprise the proposed action:

- Optimizing Hunting on CRP
  - CRP Interseeding demonstration and expansion.
- Eastern Washington Private Forest Land Access
  - Establish public hunting access on at least 20,000 additional acres of private forest lands.
- Walla Walla and/or Touchet River Feel Free to Fish access.
  - Enroll 27 miles on both sides of the Walla Walla and/or Touchet Rivers in the Feel Free to Fish program.

## **1.5 Organization of the PEA**

The Supplemental PEA is organized into six chapters:

**Chapter 1: Introduction** summarizes the current program and how the proposed action will increase access opportunities.

**Chapter 2: Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives** describes the proposed action, alternatives that were considered, and environmental resources that were excluded from analysis in the Supplemental PEA due to the nature of the proposed action.

**Chapter 3: Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences** provides a description of specific resources that may be affected by the proposed action and a discussion of the environmental consequences of the proposed action, including the level of impact and the effects of each alternative

**Chapter 4: Cumulative Effects** describes the cumulative effects of the proposed action. Following a brief introduction of cumulative effects, past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions are presented.

**Chapter 5: List of Preparers and Agencies Contacted** lists individuals who assisted in the preparation of this PEA and all agencies, agency personnel, and other experts who participated in supplying data for the PEA.

**Chapter 6: References**

## **Chapter 2.0 Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives**

### **2.1 Proposed Action**

The proposed action is discussed below according to the three individual initiatives that comprise the amendment:

#### **2.1.1 Optimizing Hunting on CRP**

This amendment would increase the scope of the existing VPA-HIP program by improving habitat values of aging CRP stands, thus improving hunting opportunities.

Habitat and hunting value in southeastern Washington's CRP tends to decrease over the length of a contract due to grasses outcompeting forbs, broadleaf herbicide application decreasing diversity, and the short-lived nature of some of the most commonly seeded forbs and legumes. Interseeding is one way to improve habitat and hunting value, but it has not been widely accepted in Washington, especially in the drier areas of the state. Demonstration of successful interseeding techniques that leads to acceptance of interseeding as a viable CRP management practice has potential to greatly improve habitat and hunting for pheasants and deer in the higher rainfall areas of our State's CRP range such as southeast Washington's Pheasant Focus Area.

Under this initiative:

1. Interseeding demonstration plots will be installed in the higher rainfall areas of the CRP range by modifying techniques proven to work in the Midwest so they apply to Washington's rainfall amounts and patterns. Timing and appropriate level of soil disturbance for seed bed preparation will be demonstrated, as well as seeding techniques and plant materials selection.

2. Results will be exported by

- a. including stops at demonstration plots on Conservation District annual field tours with producers and partners,
- b. incorporating results in NRCS Technical Notes,
- c. taking results to producer group meetings, and
- d. developing brochures and location on WDFW's private lands website covering CRP management and enhancement techniques demonstrated by this project.

3. Demonstration plot results will be used to secure commitments for 3 implementation projects in each of the five counties in the project area, for a total of 15 projects during the third year of the project.

#### **2.1.2 Private Forest Land Access**

This amendment would increase public hunting access to private forest lands by at least 20,000 acres in eastern Washington, resulting in a total of at least 70,000 acres of private forest land available through the VPA-HIP for public access in eastern and western Washington.

WDFW staff will contact key landowners within the Project Area to discuss partnering to manage public access, as described in the “Southwest Washington Private Forest Land Access” section of the June 2011 PEA.

### **2.1.3 Feel Free to Fish Access**

This amendment would increase the scope of the existing VPA-HIP program by increasing public access for fishing. The Walla Walla and Touchet rivers were selected because they currently have popular trout, steelhead, and bass fisheries, and nearly all of the access to the rivers is on private lands. Many miles of these rivers are inaccessible for angling, or are difficult for the general public to get authorization to access.

Under this initiative, a pilot “Feel Free to Fish” program would be implemented. Approximately 61.8 miles of the Walla Walla River and 34.0 miles of the Touchet River (Appendix 2) have been identified as eligible for the Feel Free to Fish Program. Tributary areas would not be included in this program because they have little value for fisheries, especially for steelhead or salmon.

Lands with access points posted as Feel Free to Fish will meet the following criteria:

- Minimum river frontage to be eligible for payment: 100 ft
- Annual landowner payment for fishing access: Greater of –
  1. \$500 or
  2. \$0.25 per foot of river bank per side (\$0.50 per foot for both sides of river; \$0.25 per foot for one side of river)

To avoid potential trespass issues, landowners on both side of river must agree to enroll in access program. Landowners owning only one side of river will be eligible to enroll only if the landowner on the opposite bank also enrolls or otherwise allows public access.

## **2.2 Alternatives**

The alternatives examined in this PEA are limited to the Proposed Action described above and the No Action Alternative noted below.

### **2.3 No Action Alternative**

Under the No Action Alternative, the current VPA-HIP program in Washington would remain in place. The Department would not implement the Optimizing Hunting and Feel Free to Fish Access initiatives, and would not expand the Private Forest Land Access initiative. The impacts of the original VPA-HIP program in Washington were assessed in the PEA for the VPA-HIP program prepared in June 2011 (USDA, June 2011). The No Action Alternative does not meet the purpose and need of the Proposed Action, but is being carried forward in accordance with CEQ regulations to serve as the baseline against which potential impacts of the Proposed Action are measured.

### **2.4 Resources Eliminated from Analysis**

CEQ regulations (40 CFR §1501.7) state that the lead agency shall identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not important or which have been covered by prior environmental review, narrowing the discussion of these issues in the document to a brief presentation of why they would not have a dramatic effect on the human or natural environment.

The environmental review of the current VPA-HIP program in Washington, assessed in “Environmental Assessment: Expanding Hunting and Wildlife Viewing Access to Private Land in Washington, Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program” (USDA, June 2011) eliminated the following resources from further analysis: air quality, noise, human health and safety, land use, transportation, soils, water resources, environmental justice, and coastal zones. The proposed amendment is not expected to change the conclusions reached in the previous analysis.

The environmental review for the current VPA-HIP program eliminated effects on tribal resources from detailed study, based on the fact that the proposed actions can only be implemented on privately owned lands, and therefore would not directly impact tribal lands. However, during the comment period, USDA received comment from one tribe expressing concerns about how expanded public access could affect tribal treaty hunting rights. Based on the concerns expressed in that comment, and in recognition that the Private Forest Land Access and Feel Free to Fish initiatives could affect tribal hunting and fishing resources, the present assessment includes an analysis of the potential effects of the program on tribal resources.

## **Chapter 3.0 Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences**

### **1.1 Biological Resources**

Many biological resources in Washington were described at a statewide level in the original Washington VPA-HIP PEA (USDA, June 2011). The affected environment would not significantly change with the initiatives considered in this Supplemental PEA. Therefore, discussions of those resources in this document are kept brief and refer to the original analysis.

#### **3.1.1 Affected Environment**

##### **Forests**

Forests in the area that would be affected by the expanded Private Forest Lands Access initiative are in eastern Washington (Appendix 1). The forests in eastern Washington are open, with an understory of grasses and shrubs especially at the lower elevations. Across the northeast region of the state, the forest is primarily made up of Douglas fir, Western red cedar, Western hemlock, and sub-alpine fir. On the eastern slopes of the Cascade Mountains, major species include ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, Grand fir, Western hemlock, and sub-alpine fir.

##### **Farms**

Farms in the area that would be affected by the Optimizing Hunting on CRP initiative are in eastern Washington (Appendix 1). The eastern side of the Cascade Range has large farms; potatoes, fruit, vegetables, and small grains such as wheat and barley are the primary crops. Farmlands are highly valued wildlife habitats for which the landowner is not often recognized. Game species such as pheasants, quail, deer, and waterfowl are attracted to private farmlands for their abundance of food and water.

##### **Species**

The species likely to be most affected by increased access are those that are hunted or fished.

In the areas that would be included in the expanded Private Forest Lands Access initiative, access would be primarily for deer and turkey hunting. Grouse hunting is also popular in the project area.

In the Walla Walla and Touchet Rivers, there are currently popular fisheries for trout, steelhead and bass. Spring Chinook salmon fisheries are expected to be opened in at least the Walla Walla river during the next three to five years because of reintroduction efforts by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR).

#### **3.1.2 Environmental Consequences**

##### **3.1.2.1 Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative)**

The Optimizing Hunting on CRP initiative would improve habitat for many game species. No negative effects on game or wildlife species are anticipated.

The Private Forest Land Access initiative would improve public access for hunting. The Feel Free to Fish initiative would improve public access for fishing. Overall, biological impacts as a result of increased access for hunting and fishing are expected to be neutral or somewhat

positive. Allowing hunters or anglers access to private farm or forest land is not likely to change existing habitat. Some improvements to habitat for fish and wildlife species may occur through the “Optimizing Hunting” initiative and through the technical assistance that many of the private landowners who are part of the private lands access program receive from WDFW staff to help improve fish and wildlife habitat on their lands. When specific parcels are identified for inclusion in one of these initiatives, when appropriate, they will go through their own SEPA process.

As with the original VPA-HIP program, improved access to hunting and fishing is not expected to have negative effects at the population level, because of WDFW’s active management of hunting and fishing. The presence of vulnerable species that could be disturbed by increased access is one factor that could be considered to determine if a particular site is appropriate to include in an access initiative. Terrestrial species may benefit from the habitat improvements that would result from the Optimizing Hunting initiative. ESA listed fish species (bull trout and summer steelhead) may have some additional disturbance, hooking and release because of increased fishing access and fishing pressure. However, the ESA impacts are considered when fisheries are established and through consultation with fishery co-managers (i.e. Umatilla Tribe, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and Nation Marine Fisheries Service).

#### **3.1.2.2 No Action Alternative**

The current VPA-HIP program would continue; however, the additional benefits associated with expanding in the program acreage and developing interseeding protocols for Washington would not occur.

## **3.2 Cultural Resources**

### **3.2.1 Affected Environment**

The Washington State Inventory of Cultural Resources (DAHP 2010) documents cultural resources in the following categories: buildings, structures, sites, districts, and objects. Washington has a cultural history going back at least 9,000 years. Because of this long history, it is possible that hunters, anglers, or farmers may encounter cultural resource sites (such as campsites) or objects (such as arrowheads) while engaging in hunting, fishing, farming or habitat-improvement activities.

### **3.2.2 Environmental Consequences**

#### **3.2.2.1 Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative)**

The Optimizing Hunting on CRP initiative is unlikely to have additional impact on cultural resources beyond what is already disturbed from agricultural plowing.

Initiatives to provide increased access for hunting and fishing could increase the frequency and enlarge the area where hunters and anglers encounter cultural resources, but increased access alone is not anticipated to result in impacts to cultural resources.

#### **3.2.2.2 No Action Alternative**

The current VPA-HIP program would continue, with no change. Any current impacts to cultural resources would continue as such.

### **3.3 Socioeconomics**

#### **3.3.1 Affected Environment**

Including five interseeding demonstration plots (one each in Columbia, Garfield, Lincoln, Walla Walla and Whitman Counties) in the first year of the program Optimizing Hunting on CRP program, and subsequently securing commitments for 15 implementation projects (three in each county) is unlikely to have any impact on land use or ownership.

Establishing public access on at least 20,000 acres of privately-owned forest land, and along 27 miles of privately owned river waterfront, is similarly unlikely to have any impacts on land use or ownership.

#### **3.3.2 Environmental Consequences**

##### **3.3.2.1 Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative)**

Increased access and habitat improvements associated with these initiatives may result in more participation in hunting and fishing. If participation increases, spending on license fees, trip expenses, and equipment is likely to increase, with related benefits to local economies.

Incentive payments will provide an economic benefit to the landowners.

##### **3.3.2.2 No Action Alternative**

The current VPA-HIP program would continue, with no change. No negative socioeconomic impacts would occur. However, the slight beneficial impacts from the Proposed Action would not be realized.

### **3.4 Recreation**

#### **3.4.1 Affected Environment**

Under this Amendment, the effects from recreation are the same as described in the PEA for the current VPA-HIP program (USDA, June 2011).

#### **3.4.2 Environmental Consequences**

##### **3.4.2.1 Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative)**

The proposed action has the potential to provide benefits to wildlife-based recreation in Washington, by increasing the areas on private property that are accessible to the general public for hunting and fishing. Specifically,

- The Private Forest Land Access initiative will establish public hunting access on at least 20,000 additional acres of private forest land.
- The Feel Free to Fish initiative will establish public fishing access on 27 miles of both sides of the Walla Walla and/or Touchet rivers.

##### **3.4.2.2 No Action Alternative**

The current VPA-HIP program would continue, with no change. No impacts to recreational resources would occur. However, beneficial impacts from expanded recreational opportunities from the Proposed Action would not occur.

## **3.5 Tribal Resources**

### **3.5.1 Affected Environment**

There are twenty-six federally recognized tribes in the state of Washington. Each tribe has usual and accustomed areas in which they hunt and fish. In the comment period for the current VPA-HIP program, one tribe pointed out that increased access for hunting and fishing on private lands could affect tribal hunting and fishing in those usual and accustomed areas. In addition, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) are reintroducing spring Chinook salmon in the Walla Walla River; increased public fishing access could affect this tribal resource. WDFW and tribes cooperatively regulate hunting and fishing to maintain harvestable populations of animals. The tribes and states coordinate fishing seasons for salmon and steelhead in the Columbia Basin (and specifically the Walla Walla Basin) to ensure that each party receives access to their court mandated share, consistent with US v OR coordination and consultation process.

### **3.5.2 Environmental Consequences**

#### **3.5.2.1 Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative)**

Increased public access for hunting and fishing, and changes to habitat through the Optimizing Hunting program may result in minimal changes to populations of target animals that are available to both tribal and non-tribal hunters and anglers.

#### **3.1.1.1 No Action Alternative**

The current VPA-HIP program would continue, with no change. No impacts, negative or beneficial, to tribal resources would occur.

## **Chapter 4.0 Cumulative Effects**

Cumulative effects were discussed in general in the PEA for the current VPA-HIP program. Cumulative effects due to actions taken under this Amendment are discussed below.

### **4.1 Cumulative Impacts**

In this PEA, the affected environment for cumulative impacts includes the geographic areas covered by one of the initiatives: the Private Forest Land Access Project Area in part or all of six eastern Washington counties, the Optimizing Hunting initiative in part or all of five eastern Washington counties, and the Feel Free to Fish initiative in Walla Walla and Columbia Counties. The effect of these initiatives, in combination with the current VPA-HIP program and other federal, state and private initiatives that focus on conservation, increased public awareness of important game and fish species, and landowners' awareness of activities that they can do to improve habitat are expected to be beneficial to the natural environment.

### **4.2 Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment Of Resources**

Under the Proposed Action, beneficial impacts are expected to recreation and socioeconomic conditions, wildlife populations and their habitats. There would be no irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources under either the Proposed Alternative or the No Action alternative.

## **Chapter 5.0 List of Preparers and Agencies Contacted**

### Preparers:

Carol Piening, Environmental Planner, WDFW

### Agencies Contacted:

US Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency. Agency contacts: Matthew Ponish, Amy Braun.

## **Chapter 6.0 References**

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Appendix 2

