

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (USDA) ANIMAL AND PLANT HEALTH INSPECTION SERVICE (APHIS) FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR FERAL SWINE DAMAGE MANAGEMENT IN SOUTH CAROLINA

DOE/EA- 2243

AGENCY: United States (U.S.) Department of Energy, Savannah River Operations Office (DOE-SR)

ACTION: Adoption of Environmental Assessment and Issuance of Finding of No Significant Impact

SUMMARY: The U.S. DOE-SR is adopting an Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared by the USDA-APHIS pursuant to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 C.F.R. §§ 1500 – 1508) for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (42 U.S.C. § 4321 *et seq.*). The EA, *Final Environmental Assessment Feral Swine Damage Management (FSDM) in South Carolina, DOE/EA- 2243* (Final FSDM EA), evaluated potential environmental impacts associated with alternative approaches for the APHIS Wildlife Services (WS) program to manage feral swine damage, when requested as coordinated between WS and the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR). The EA concluded that Alternative 3, WS' adaptive integrated approach utilizing non-lethal and lethal techniques to manage feral swine damage, best addressed the issues in the EA by allowing the greatest amount of flexibility toward achieving the desired feral swine level of damage or threat reduction while not adversely impacting the environment, property, human health, and public safety. As such, USDA-APHIS issued a *Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)* on December 11, 2015.

The U.S. Forest Service – Savannah River (USFS-SR) oversees natural resources management on Savannah River Site (SRS) under DOE-SR direction and proposes to enter into an agreement with USDA for WS to conduct periodic feral swine removal via aerial shooting in selected areas on SRS damaged by feral swine. After reviewing the EA prepared by USDA-APHIS, DOE has determined the scope of the proposed action is included in the EA. As such, DOE-SR adopts and incorporates the EA herein by reference pursuant to 40 C.F.R. §§ 1501.6 and 1506.3(c)

PURPOSE AND NEED: Feral swine inflict significant damage to vehicles, property, remediation infrastructure, forestry, and agriculture (crops and livestock), native ecosystems, and historic and cultural resources. They also serve as a disease vector posing a health threat to humans, wildlife, and domestic animals. Feral swine are not only a problem on SRS and in South Carolina, but across much of the nation. The SC Wild Hog Task Force estimates 130,000 feral swine in the state; approximately 5,000 feral swine reside on SRS, degrading remediation projects and creating safety concerns.

The USDA-APHIS WS program works with federal, state, and local agencies; tribes; and private individuals to address specific localized feral swine damage. Cost and complexity of damage management increase as populations increase; hence population reduction is a critical component to future savings. As part of the national FSDM program, APHIS funds and operates an aerial control program to reduce or eliminate feral swine populations, damage, and threats to human and animal health, especially in areas that may be difficult to access (e.g., wetlands, large tracks of land).

APHIS deploys a dedicated aviation program to shoot swine from helicopters over public or private land to improve hog population reduction.

While the USFS-SR actively traps feral swine (approximately 1,500/year) to reduce the population impacts on SRS, segments of the population reside in inaccessible areas, which likely serve as a source for the areas that are actively trapped. This results in an inexhaustible feral swine supply to these trapped areas, reducing the duration of trapping efficacy. A major objective of the proposed aerial control by APHIS-WS on SRS is to reduce these remote populations in an ethical and cost-effective manner, improving the duration of conventional trapping results. In addition, aerial shooting is one of the preferred methods for reducing feral swine damage, where local swine populations can be removed quickly when weather and habitat conditions are favorable.

PROPOSED ACTION: The USFS-SR proposes to enter into an agreement with USDA for WS to conduct periodic feral swine removal via aerial shooting in selected areas on SRS damaged by feral swine. The USFS-SR has identified seven (7) wildlife compartments southwest of Highway 125 including the Savannah River Swamp area on SRS as a pilot project in 2024 for removal of feral swine with aerial shooting by APHIS-WS (Figure 1). The targeted area is well-suited for the proposed method of control as over forty percent (40%) has no roads, making access relatively challenging. A well-trained two-person flight crew (pilot and shooter) will be deployed via helicopter to target and shoot feral swine spotted in these compartments. To optimize targeting and shooting of feral swine, aerial shooting will take the place late winter/early spring season (between

January and April) when tree foliage is reduced. Only firearms with 12 gauge or 0.223 nontoxic rounds will be used by the shooter. Flights will be conducted during daylight hours only and up to 10 – 15 days per season. Appropriate notifications will be provided to adjacent landowners. APHIS-WS will not retrieve any carcasses. USFS-SR may remove carcasses as deemed necessary and in accordance with its standard operating procedures. APHIS-WS will coordinate with and have approved in advance appropriate flight, operational, and emergency plans by the appropriate SRS organizations APHIS-WS will be responsible for advance coordination with SCDNR, as warranted, prior to conducting any arial shooting on SRS. Aircraft will land on SRS only in the event of an emergency. USFS-SR will assess the effectiveness of APHIS-WS’ removal efforts and determine whether recurring action is needed in the future.

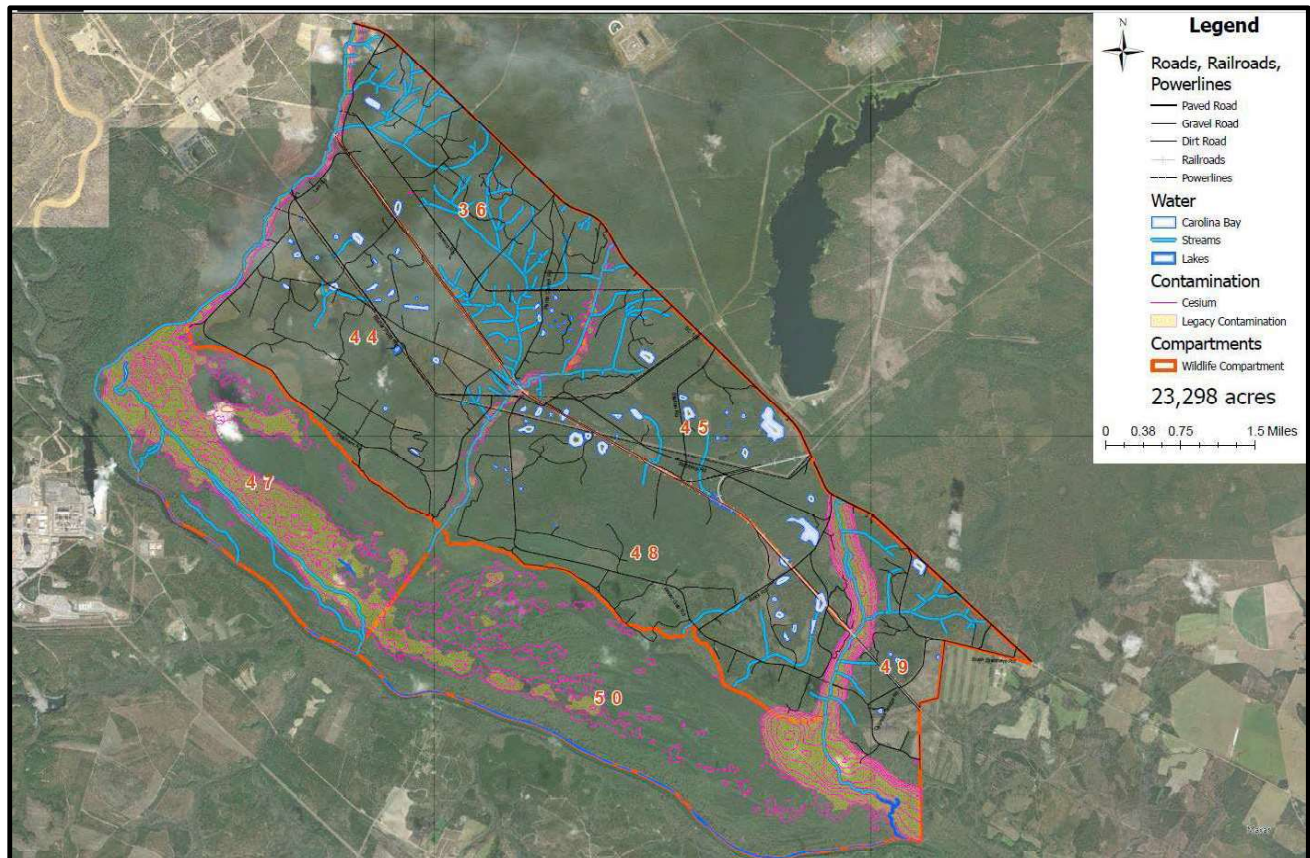


Figure 1 - Proposed SRS Wildlife Compartments Targeted for Feral Swan Removal by USDA APHIS WS

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: Considering the analysis documented in the EA, USDA-APHIS has concluded that completing the proposed project as described in the EA would not result in significant adverse impacts to the human environment, including soils, geology,

minerals, water quality/quantity, floodplains, wetlands, critical habitats [areas listed in the threatened and endangered (T&E) species recovery plans], visual resources, air quality, prime and unique farmlands, aquatic resources, timber and range, and would have negligible effect atmospheric conditions including the global climate. Meaningful direct or indirect emissions of greenhouse gases would not occur because of the proposed action. USDA-APHIS has concluded that no significant adverse cumulative impacts would result from past, present, and future activities associated with the proposed project.

During the effort to complete the EA, USDA-APHIS coordinated and consulted with relevant federal, state, and local agencies about the proposed project. These agencies provided feedback and assistance regarding compliance with applicable laws and regulations, permits and authorizations, actions to mitigate impacts, and other project specifics. USDA-APHIS provided appropriate opportunities for public involvement.

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE: Under the no action alternative, USFS-SR would not enter into an agreement with USDA for WS to conduct aerial shooting on SRS to control and reduce feral swine populations in areas where USFS-SR has identified that conventional trapping has not proven to be effective. Any potential beneficial or adverse impacts to resources, including those of an ecological, historical, cultural, and socioeconomic nature, would not occur.

DETERMINATION: DOE has independently reviewed the USDA-APHIS EA (*The EA, Final Environmental Assessment Feral Swine Damage Management in South Carolina*) and determined that the analysis meets the standards for an adequate assessment under the CEQ and DOE NEPA regulations and adequately assesses and discloses the environmental impacts of the proposed action and no action alternative. As part of its independent evaluation, DOE-SR evaluated the potential beneficial or adverse impacts to the following site-specific resource areas:

- **Biological Resources:** No T&E species have been documented in any of the seven (7) wildlife management compartments on SRS targeted for aerial shooting. WS has discussed with DOE-SR the standard operating procedures that APHIS-WS personnel will follow to prevent and reduce any potential adverse effects on non-target animals (i.e., non-feral swine).
- **Water Resources:** The potential impacts from nontoxic ammunitions proposed to be used for feral swine removal on SRS to site water resources would be far less than those evaluated in the EA for the lead ammunitions. Impacts from accidental fuel/oil spills from helicopters being deployed for aerial shooting is anticipated be small and insignificant with respect to the potential for environmental damage (volume of fuel/oil potentially released, etc.). The risk to drinking water is expected to be exceedingly low to

nonexistent as the seven (7) targeted wildlife management compartments are in a remote area on SRS and not in the vicinity of any known drinking water supplies.

- Floodplain/wetland: No jurisdictional waters were determined to be present in the seven (7) targeted SRS wildlife management compartments, thereby eliminating jurisdictional water impacts.
- Air Quality and Climate Change: Given the scale and duration of the proposed action on SRS, the potential impacts on atmospheric conditions including the global climate would be less than the negligible effect evaluated in the EA. Direct and indirect emissions of greenhouse gases would be *de minimis*.
- Waste Generation: No waste is anticipated to be generated from the proposed action. Any accidental fuel/oil spills will be managed in accordance with SRS and APHIS-WS standard operating procedures.
- Cultural Resources: The Savannah River Archaeological Research Program has completed archaeological surveys of the seven (7) targeted SRS wildlife management compartments, and no archaeological resources were found.
- Socioeconomic Resources: No impact on SRS workforce as the proposed action will be conducted by APHIS-WS personnel. The proposed action will not result on off-site impacts, therefore there would be no disproportionate and adverse effects on communities with environmental justice concerns.
- Cumulative Impacts: The potential negligible effects on biological resources (non-target animals) water resources, and air quality and climate change from the proposed action will have no significant cumulative impacts on SRS natural resources management practices and poses a potential positive cumulative impact inasmuch as environmental and property damage will likely be greatly minimized with improved management of feral swine on SRS.

Based on the analysis presented in the USDA-APHIS EA, DOE-SR has determined there would be no significant impact from proceeding with the proposed action. The basis of this determination is that there are no adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative environmental effects that would likely result from the proposed action based on the analysis of relevant issues of environmental concern in the EA. Based on the analysis in the USDA-APHIS EA, DOE-SR has determined that the proposed action does not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA. This finding and decision is based on the consideration of DOE and CEQ NEPA implementing regulations. Accordingly, the proposed action does not require the preparation of an environmental impact statement.

The DOE-SR has not identified any new circumstances that have arisen or that any new information exists that was not previously analyzed in the USDA-APHIS EA. Based on

DOE-SR's independent evaluation, the USDA-APHIS EA is hereby adopted.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: For questions about the adoption of the USDA-APHIS EA (*Final Environmental Assessment Feral Swine Damage Management in South Carolina, DOE/EA- 2243*), or this FONSI, contact Tracy Williams, NEPA Document Manager/ NEPA Compliance Officer, U.S. Department of Energy, Savannah River Operations Office, P. O. Box A (Building 730-B), Aiken, SC 29801, or via email at NEPA-SRS-EM@srs.gov.

For further information on the DOE NEPA process contact the Office of NEPA Policy and Compliance (GC-54), U.S. Department of Energy, 1000 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington DC 20585; <http://energy.gov/nepa/office-nepa-policy-and-compliance>.

Issued in Aiken, South Carolina, this 11th day of January 2024:

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