Appendix D –
Finding of No Significant Impact and Environmental Assessment

Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment

Merced National Wildlife Refuge
San Luis National Wildlife Refuge
Grasslands Wildlife Management Area

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Appendix D – Finding of No Significant Impact and Decision to Implement

San Luis National Wildlife Refuge, Merced National Wildlife Refuge, and Grasslands Wildlife Management Area Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan/Environmental Assessment

Merced County, CA

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has completed the Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and the Environmental Assessment (EA) for **San Luis National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Merced NWR, and Grasslands Wildlife Management Area (WMA)**, which are part of the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge Complex. The CCP will guide the management of the NWRs and WMA for the next 15 years. The CCP/EA, herein incorporated by reference, describes the Service's proposals for managing the NWRs and WMA and their associated effects on the human environment under three alternatives, including the no action alternative.

Selected Action

Alternative C (Proposed Action) was selected over the other alternatives because:

Following comprehensive review and analysis, the Service selected Alternative C (below) for implementation because it is the alternative that best meets the following criteria:

- achieves the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System);
- achieves the purposes of San Luis NWR, Merced NWR, and Grasslands WMA;
- supports the Service's vision and goals for the NWRs and WMA;
- addresses the key issues identified during the scoping process;
- is consistent with the scientific principles of sound fish and wildlife management and endangered species recovery; and
- facilitates priority public uses, which are compatible with the NWRs' and WMA's purposes and the Refuge System mission.

Other Alternatives Considered and Analyzed

Alternative A—[No Action Alternative]

Under Alternative A, the Service would continue to manage the San Luis and Merced NWRs and Grasslands WMA as they have been managed in the recent past. Existing staffing and funding levels would remain approximately the same. In addition to the actions described in the *Features Common to all Alternatives section*, Alternative A would ensure robust management of Complex wetlands, grasslands and croplands with a focus on autumn through spring use. The Service would continue to coordinate habitat and wildlife management activities at the Complex with other land management agencies and entities.

This alternative was not selected, because: While Alternative A features much of the common foundation shared between all three Alternatives, there were greater net positive impacts to Complex land ecological integrity, socioeconomic benefits and improved refuge visitor opportunities by choosing Alternative C.

Alternative B—[Wetland and Waterbird Focus]

Alternative B would be similar to Alternative A except the Service would direct more focus towards restoring wetlands, acquiring additional water, and managing for wetland-dependent wildlife. Existing staffing and funding levels would remain approximately the same, with an emphasis on adding another private lands biologist for greater easement lands management capacity. The Service would continue to coordinate habitat and wildlife management activities at the Complex with other land management agencies and entities.

This alternative was not selected, because: Alternative C included many of Alternative B's suggestions for increased wetland habitat restoration and water management. However, long-term benefits to habitat quality and diversity would be more distributed between wetlands, grasslands and riparian habitats in Alternative C as compared to Alternative B, which emphasizes wetland-oriented enhancement projects.

Alternative C—Proposed Action Alternative:

Wetland, Waterfowl and Waterbird Management

The Service would continue to manage over 5,500 acres in more than 110 units as seasonal wetlands for migratory birds with an emphasis on waterfowl and shorebirds. Moist soil units would be managed with an 8-year disturbance cycle to produce desirable wetland plants. In addition, the Service would manage approximately 860 acres of permanent, semi-permanent and reverse cycle wetlands to support waterbirds year-round and serve as breeding and brood-rearing sites. In addition, over 3,000 acres of unmanaged wetlands and additional aquatic habitat would be protected from artificial disturbances to benefit wildlife. The Service would continue to manage approximately 700 acres of croplands (corn, alfalfa, winter wheat and irrigated pasture) at the Merced NWR for cranes, geese and other wildlife.

The Service would continue to provide 60 percent of the refuges' land base as disturbance-free sanctuary areas for migratory waterfowl. In addition, the Service would continue to aid in the recovery and protection of wetland-dependent threatened and endangered species including the giant garter snake. The Service would restore 600 acres of additional seasonal wetland basins in the Snobird and East Bear Creek units.

Water Quantity and Quality Management

The Service would continue to use the 74,415 acre-feet of water through the Central Valley Project Improvement Act (CVPIA) for the benefit of migratory birds. The Service would seek acquisition of 10,000 acre-feet of additional water and/or operating funds for water for the

Snobird unit and Arena Plains units and 18,000 acre-feet of additional water for the Merced unit, San Luis unit and West Bear Creek units.

Grassland Management

The Service would continue to manage over 24,000 acres of grassland habitats using grazing, prescribed burning, mowing, seeding, planting and chemical control to provide both short and long structured grasslands to provide nesting habitat and winter foraging habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife. In addition, the Service would continue to aid in the recovery and protection of grassland-dependent threatened and endangered species.

Additionally, the Service would reconfigure tall grassland management units to maximize nesting habitats around suitable waterfowl brood wetland units and short grassland management units for geese, cranes and curlews by increasing grazing intensity and decreasing prescribed fire return intervals.

Riparian Woodland Management

The Service would continue to maintain 300 acres of existing riparian woodland habitats for wildlife. In addition, the Service would continue to aid in the recovery and protection of riparian woodland-dependent threatened and endangered species.

Additionally, the Service would restore 100 acres of additional riparian woodland habitats along suitable waterways by planting native understory and overstory vegetation along riparian corridors, removing invasive plant species and enhancing floodplain connectivity.

Land Acquisition

The Service would seek to acquire up to 37,905 acres of conservation easements within the Grasslands WMA from willing sellers within the approved acquisition boundary. Easement acquisition would be prioritized by parcel characteristics including the presence of wetlands, native uplands and trust wildlife resource values.

There would be a prioritization weighted for increased habitat connectivity between existing conserved lands to benefit wildlife species rather than equal consideration of all willing sellers regardless of connectivity to adjacent lands already in conservation protection, easement or fee title. Of the 37,905 acquisition acres remaining within the Grasslands WMA, up to 7,580 acres (20%) would be shifted to allow fee-title acquisition. Weighted prioritization would occur for willing seller acquisition of properties with wetlands within 1 mile of existing Service-owned fee-title lands, or properties with vernal pools anywhere within the acquisition boundary.

Other Wildlife Management

The Service would continue to monitor tule elk abundance and work with the State to manage population numbers per the agreement. In addition, the Service would continue the cooperative program with the State to support the black-tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) population at the

Complex. In addition, the Service would continue to protect and enhance populations of State-listed, rare and other special status species on the Complex.

Additionally, the Service would also examine the potential for expanding the range of tule elk and other native ungulates at the Complex. In addition, the Service would actively manage to maintain and/or restore habitat for selected special status species. The Service would examine the possibility of opening a portion of Merced NWR's Snobird unit to hunting.

Fisheries Management

The Service would continue to protect waterways from artificial disturbance and maintain riparian vegetation along all waterways. All permanent waterways would continue to be maintained. In addition, the Service would work with partners to inventory and monitor fish communities on the Complex. The Service would also aid in the recovery and protection of threatened and endangered fish, including Chinook salmon and steelhead trout. The Service would also continue to support the salmonid restoration efforts for the San Joaquin River and the removal of non-native fish.

Fire Management

The Service would continue to implement annual prescribed burns on 2,500 to 7,500 acres of grassland, wetland and vernal pool habitat to control invasive species, promote native species, enhance nutrient cycling and reduce hazardous fuel levels. Mechanical fuels treatment projects would complement prescribed burns and reduce fuel hazards on an additional approximately 840 acres each year.

The Service would work with partner agencies to coordinate wildfire suppression efforts on wildlands within the San Joaquin Valley and surrounding foothills region. The Complex would maintain at least one staffed wildland fire engine for suppression of local wildfires during all times of the year.

Invasive Plant Species Management

An integrated pest management (IPM) approach would be utilized to eradicate, control or contain pest and invasive species where practicable on the refuges. Pesticides may be used where physical, cultural and biological methods or combinations thereof, are impractical or incapable of providing adequate control, eradication or containment.

Throughout the life of the CCP, proposed pesticide uses on the refuges would be evaluated for potential effects to refuge biological resources and environmental quality. These potential effects would be documented under Chemical Profiles, to be included in the IPM Plan. Pesticide uses with appropriate and practical BMPs for habitat management as well as cropland/facilities maintenance would be approved for use on the refuge. Pesticides may be used on a refuge where substantial effects to species and the environment are possible (exceed threshold values) to protect human health and safety (e.g., mosquito- borne disease).

Service-approved herbicides would continue to be used for controlling invasive plants. When chemicals are used, the Service would follow standard BMPs, including adherence to all U.S. EPA and California EPA warning labels and application requirements, as well as the Service's Pesticide Use Proposal process regulations. The Service would develop a baseline monitoring program for invasive plant species and a rapid assessment and control program for new invasive species.

Invasive Nutria Management

Invasive nutria would be monitored on the Complex via camera trapping and removed via live trapping and dispatchment in conjunction with CDFW. Captured nutria would be dispatched and would be necropsied by USFWS staff following CDFW protocol. All data would be entered into the State's online database and the information could be downloaded by request from the CDFW GIS Coordinator for refuge records.

Mosquito-Borne Disease Management

The Service would continue to work with local and state mosquito control agencies in accordance with USFWS policy to address refuge mosquito-borne disease issues. The Complex is situated within one mosquito control agency (Merced Mosquito Abatement District). This district would continue to conduct mosquito monitoring programs (both larvae and adults), as well as disease monitoring programs (i.e., encephalitis, malaria and West Nile Fever) at the Grasslands.

Easement Management

The Service would continue to monitor all easement lands annually for easement compliance and maintain easement databases. The Service would also provide technical assistance to private landowners on easement and natural resource issues. In addition, the Service would continue to work with willing landowners to implement Partners for Fish and Wildlife and other programs to restore and enhance habitat on easement lands. The Complex fire program would continue to support local fire resources in suppressing wildfires on easement lands. Refuge law enforcement officers would support the CDFW to protect public safety and enforce natural resource laws on easement lands.

The Service would promote landowner workshops on wetland management, waterfowl management, water conservation and grassland management. In addition, a second private lands biologist would be added to expand this programs capacity.

Inventory, Monitoring, and Research

The Service would continue to conduct the following monitoring on the refuges in coordination with other agencies and partners: waterbird use of seasonal wetlands; vegetation of seasonal wetlands; the tule elk population; sandhill cranes; non-passerine use of grasslands; goose use of croplands; colonial waterbird nesting; tricolored blackbird nesting; water monitoring; annual one-hour fuel production; weather; invasive plant occurrence on the Lonetree unit and tule elk enclosure; and habitat management activities. Other monitoring would be conducted on an as-needed basis. The Service would also continue to assess potential trends and impacts to Complex natural resources from climate change. In addition, the Service would partner with and

encourage university, agency and independent investigators to use the Complex for natural resource research projects. Finally, the Service would monitor and track the six priority wildlife-dependent public uses occurring on refuge lands (hunting, fishing, wildlife photography, wildlife observation, environmental education and interpretation). The following would be new inventories and monitoring:

- Research and/or monitor migratory bird use of the variety of upland habitats at the Complex.
- Detailed vegetation, including grasslands.
- Vernal pools and associated vegetative communities.
- Permanent breeding bird survey routes.
- Black-tailed deer abundance.
- Permanent grassland monitoring plots.
- Periodic monitoring of small mammals, mid-sized mammals and other wildlife.

Cultural Resource Management

The Service would continue to manage and conserve cultural resources at the San Luis and Merced NWRs and Grasslands WMA and comply with section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA), as amended, including consultation with the state historic preservation officer (SHPO), as well as consultation and coordination with Indian Tribal Governments pursuant to Executive Order 13175 (November 6, 2000), in order to avoid, eliminate or minimize adverse effects. Prior to ground-disturbing activities, surveys would be conducted and other requirements would be followed to minimize the potential for adverse effects to cultural resource sites that have yet to be discovered in accordance with applicable regulations and guidance.

Visitor Services

Under the Proposed Action, the Service would also significantly increase the number of events and utilize different media types for public outreach. The Service would continue to provide opportunities for wildlife observation and nature photography. Public outreach efforts would continue to focus on the Complex refuges, natural resources in the ecoregion and the NWRS. Efforts to provide bilingual informational signs, kiosks and educational programs would continue. In addition to hosting special events at the Complex, refuge staff would participate in off-Complex events.

The Service would also continue to provide waterfowl hunting opportunities for hunters by offering free roam, exclusive free roam, hunt blinds, goose pits, boat hunting and blinds that are more accessible for those with mobility impairments. The hunting program would continue to be cooperatively administered with CDFW. The Service would continue to provide fishing opportunities to the public at six designated fishing sites.

In addition, the Service would develop the following:

- Construct an approximately one-half-mile Riparian Woodland nature trail at the visitor center.
- Add additional boardwalk section of approximately 400 feet to the wetland nature trail at the San Luis NWR.
- Add a children's nature exploration area near the picnic pavilion outside the visitor center.
- Hold wildlife identification and nature photography workshops at the Visitor Center.
- Add a water level observation blind to a seasonal wetland at the San Luis NWR.
- Add more easily accessible observation/photo blinds at the San Luis and Merced NWRs.
- Implement a program of weekend guided nature walks.
- Develop an evening lecture program at the visitor center.
- Develop a cadre of volunteers or docents to assist with nature interpretation programs and other activities.
- Develop a waterfowl identification brochure and a waterfowl hunting brochure.
- Develop teacher resource packets and guides.
- Continue to develop and incorporate Spanish language informational signage and educational programs.
- Partner with local colleges and universities to provide students environmental education opportunities.

Soils

The Proposed Action would have overall short-term minor adverse effects and long-term positive effects on soils due to habitat management activities. There would be no adverse effects on geologic resources. Restoration, reconfiguration and maintenance efforts from equipment and vehicular access would result in temporary and localized exposure of erodible soils to water and wind erosion, localized compaction of soils, and potential for small releases of oils grease and petroleum products. In the long-term, however, these efforts produce an overall net positive effect as soil processes within the areas would be restored.

Hydrology, Water Quality and Contaminants

Short-term minor adverse and long-term positive effects to water quality and hydrology would occur from implementing the Proposed Action. Additional construction activities would increase the potential for erosion and turbidity concerns, but impacts would be minimal and temporary given implementation of management practices and given the small size of the construction footprint (collectively less than two acres). The Complex's use of pesticides would have a minor adverse impact on water quality.

Air Quality

The Proposed Action would result in minor adverse effects to air quality relative to current management activities. The Complex proposes to construct a nature trail, use photo blinds and develop additional programs for visitors. If the projects are successful, the number of visitors may increase, thus generating increased emissions from vehicles. However, these impacts would be offset with the Complex seeking to convert older gas-powered vehicles, heavy machinery and equipment to electric or more fuel/emissions efficient models.

Noise

Increased management and visitor activities would result in increases in local traffic, which would result in negligible increases in noise levels during certain periods for a short duration for receptors residing near access roads to the Complex. In any event, these changes would be negligible given the limited volume of traffic associated with Complex activity and visitor access.

Vegetation

Overall, the net effect of all management activities in the Proposed Action would result in moderate positive impacts to native plant species and vegetation communities relative to current management. In general, the Proposed Action would improve invasive species management, increase habitat restoration and enhancement, and may increase the acreage and habitat connectivity of the Grasslands WMA.

Implementation of the Proposed Action may improve the long-term ecological integrity of the Complex on a landscape scale within the larger Pacific Flyway. The Complex would seek additional funding for fee-title and easement acquisitions within the Grasslands WMA and prioritize future acquisitions from willing sellers based on wildlife habitat connectivity. Additional easements and fee-title land acquisitions may reduce edge effects associated with future urbanization and habitat fragmentation within the region. The Proposed Action would also add an additional biologist for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and seek additional funding to increase the total number of habitat restoration and enhancement projects on easement lands.

Wildlife Resources

Implementation of the Proposed Action would have a long-term, moderate positive impact on wildlife resources. Although some actions could have temporary minor adverse impacts on certain species, implementation is expected to provide an overall net benefit to wildlife. Wildlife would experience benefits from the acquisition of additional water supplies, restoration of seasonal wetlands and riparian habitats and reconfiguration of grassland units. Inventory of wildlife species will improve long-term adaptive management to maximize benefits to wildlife species. Expanded nature interpretation, wildlife observation, education and outreach, and volunteer opportunities would increase visitation and result in minor adverse impacts to wildlife species. Potential adverse impacts are expected to be minor, short-term and localized provided the low level of visitation and access restrictions.

Pursuing additional funding for and prioritizing land and easement acquisitions programs based on habitat connectivity would provide a long-term positive impact on wildlife by enhancing movement corridors, reducing future habitat fragmentation and associated edge effects and improving the ecological function of the Complex on a landscape-scale within the region. Additional landowner workshops on wetland, waterfowl and grassland management could also improve private land stewardship and provide a long-term benefit to wildlife.

Fisheries Resources

Implementation of the selected alternative would have minor beneficial effects to fisheries resources. The selected alternative will improve conditions for migratory waterfowl and other wetland-dependent species, and in the long-term, may indirectly improve Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) conditions in rivers within the San Joaquin River Basin of the Central Valley. EFH is defined as waters and substrate necessary to fish for spawning, breeding, feeding and growth to maturity.

Special Status Species

In general, the Proposed Action would provide a moderate positive impact to special status species recovery. Although there would be an increase in wildlife-dependent recreation, impacts to special status species are expected to be negligible; the Service would actively manage access to sensitive habitat with special status species to include closing areas and providing sufficient buffer habitat to mitigate adverse effects associated with recreational use of the Complex.

Prioritizing future land and easement acquisitions programs based on habitat connectivity, as opposed to willing sellers, may provide long-term benefits to special status species recovery by enhancing movement corridors, facilitating recolonization, improving gene flow, reducing habitat fragmentation and associated edge effects and improving the ecological function of the Complex on a landscape-scale within the region. Additional landowner workshops on wetland management and grassland management may increase habitat quality and diversity for special status species within the Grasslands WMA. Additional staff resources to support Partners for Fish and Wildlife program habitat enhancement and restoration projects may also benefit special status species recovery within the Grasslands WMA.

NMFS Jurisdictional Species

Water management activities to maintain and enhance wetland habitats that benefit wetland-dependent fish, wildlife, and plant species could result in minor temporary adverse effects to aquatic species occupying irrigation canals and drains through operation and maintenance of water management infrastructure throughout the Complex. The Service would continue to protect waterways from artificial disturbance and maintain riparian vegetation along all waterways. All permanent waterways would continue to be maintained. In addition, the Service would work with partners to inventory and monitor fish communities on the Complex. The Service would also aid in the recovery and protection of threatened and endangered fish, including Chinook salmon and steelhead trout. The Service would also continue to support the

salmonid restoration efforts for the San Joaquin River and the removal of non-native fish. The Complex collaborates with NOAA Fisheries and the USFWS Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Field Office for the Section 7 consultation process.

Summary of Effects of Proposed Action

An Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to provide decision-making framework that 1) explored a reasonable range of alternatives to meet project objectives, 2) evaluated potential issues and impacts to the refuge, resources and values, and 3) identified mitigation measures to lessen the degree or extent of these impacts. As analyzed in the Final EA and incorporated as part of this finding, implementation of the selected alternative is not expected to have significant effects.

Measures to avoid and minimize adverse effects have been incorporated into the selected alternative. On Service-owned lands, these measures include Best Management Practices (BMPs), pesticide restrictions in accordance with the Service's Pesticide Use Proposal program and an integrated pest management approach. In addition, the Service will support recovery measures for listed species pursuant to the Endangered Species Act (ESA). For CCP actions on Service-owned lands, BMPs, recovery measures, and conditions resulting from federal ESA consultations will be implemented in compliance with the ESA. ESA compliance documentation is provided in Appendix K to the Final CCP.

While refuges, by their nature, are unique areas protected for conservation of fish, wildlife and habitat, the proposed action will not have a significant impact on refuge resources and uses for additional reasons:

- The action will result in beneficial impacts to the human environment, including the biodiversity and ecological integrity of the refuge, as well as the wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities and socioeconomics of the local economy, with only negligible adverse impacts to the human environment as discussed above.

- The adverse direct and indirect effects of the proposed action on air, water, soil, habitat, wildlife, aesthetic/visual resources, and wilderness values are expected to be minor and short-term. The benefits to long-term ecosystem health that these efforts will accomplish outweigh any of the short-term adverse impacts discussed in this document.

- The NWRS uses an adaptive management approach to all wildlife management on refuges, monitoring and re-evaluating the hunting and fishing opportunities on the refuge on an annual basis to ensure that the hunting and fishing programs continue to contribute to the biodiversity and ecosystem health of the refuge and these opportunities do not contribute to any cumulative impacts to habitat or wildlife from climate change, population growth and development, or local, State, or regional wildlife management.

- The action will not impact any wilderness areas.

Economic Effects

Overall the Complex would continue to have a long-term positive impact on the surrounding economies through expenditures, local employment and other wildlife-related activities. The Complex would experience increased employment and spending in the local area for materials, construction, and services. Economic benefits would be generated by offering hunting on the refuges. Payment for water rights under this alternative would also benefit the regional economy. Lands acquired through fee title purchases would be managed by the Service and would be removed from county tax rolls. Reductions in county taxes would be partially replaced by Refuge Revenue Sharing payments.

Public Use

The Complex would continue to be open to wildlife-dependent recreation (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation). Furthermore, areas of exclusive use for non-hunting wildlife-dependent recreation uses would be provided.

The Proposed Action would result in long-term moderate positive benefits to public use from offering increased non-consumptive, wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities. Non-consumptive activities are expanded to meet the objective of providing more opportunities for compatible, wildlife-dependent recreation and to enhance understanding and appreciation of natural resources on Complex lands.

The Proposed Action would produce a moderate positive impact for the public by creating several major physical additions for public use. The Complex would add an approximately one-half-mile long riparian woodland nature trail near the visitor center; a children's nature exploration area outside the visitor center; and an approximately 400-foot mile boardwalk section to the wetland nature trail at the San Luis NWR. Other physical improvements accessible to the public include a water level observation blind to a seasonal wetland at the San Luis NWR, and photo blinds at both San Luis and Merced NWRs. These changes would bolster the number of wildlife observers, photographers and general public visitors alike. All improvements would result in increased public use and in the long-term moderate positive benefits to visitors.

Cultural Resources

Implementing the Proposed Action has the potential to result in minor adverse effects to cultural resources due to an increase in human activity and visitation to the Complex. Outside of normal maintenance and project actions, habitat management actions that may disturb and expose soils would have the potential to physically disturb an unknown site, alter its setting or introduce elements out of character with the site, which would result in adverse effects. All ground disturbing projects outside of normal maintenance and management practices are cleared with USFWS Cultural Resources in advance through a Section 106 evaluation. The Service would continue to manage and conserve cultural resources at the Complex and comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), including consultation

with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and pertinent Tribes, in order to eliminate or minimize adverse effects.

Impacts to cultural resources from hunting activities on the refuges, if any, would be minimal. No significant effects to cultural resources are anticipated as a result of continuing the current hunting program within the project area.

Environmental Justice

Due to the nature of the action, the Service has concluded that the proposed action would not result in disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects to any of the communities around the Complex. The Complex's management actions would benefit all members of the community, from access to recreational activities to improved health benefits from the natural environment.

The Service has concluded that no minority and low-income populations or communities would be disproportionately affected by any of the alternatives. Benefits to nearby communities would be proximity to the Complex for wildlife dependent recreational uses and conserved lands.

Public Review, State and Tribal Coordination

Public outreach included planning updates (newsletters) and public meetings during the public scoping and the public review period. In July and August of 2023, state partners and tribes were notified of draft versions of the CCP and EA being available for their advanced review before the Notice of Availability was published in the Federal Register. No comment letters from state or tribal partners were received from that outreach effort. A public meeting for receiving public comments and feedback about the drafts was held in the Community Center of Los Banos on September 27, 2023. The Draft CCP/EA and its appendices were available for public comment for a period of 45 days from September 11, 2023 to October 26, 2023. The document was distributed to federal, state, and local agencies; tribes; potentially affected landowners; congressional interests; private groups, and individuals. The Service received a total of 14 letters from state and local agencies, tribes, organizations, and individuals. The Final CCP/EA has been modified to address substantive concerns that were raised. The Service's responses to specific comments received are in Appendix L to the Final CCP. The Final CCP/EA and FONSI are available to the public and can be found on the San Luis NWR website at: https://www.fws.gov/refuge/san-luis

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based upon a review and evaluation of the information contained in the EA as well as other documents and actions of record affiliated with this proposal, the Service has determined that the proposal to implement the CCP on the San Luis NWR, Merced NWR and Grasslands WMA does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment under the meaning of section 102 (2) (c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (as amended). As such, an environmental impact statement is not required.

Decision

The Service has decided to implement the actions described in the Final CCP, subject to availability of funding and other resources. The Service will distribute a final planning update to interested parties notifying them of this decision.

This action is compatible with the purposes of the WMAs and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System. See Compatibility Determinations (Appendix C to the Final CCP).

The action is consistent with applicable laws and policies.

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Regional Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
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Date