

U.S. Department of the Interior
Fish and Wildlife Service
Region 7, Alaska

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Proposed Removal of Invasive Northern Pike *Esox lucius* from the Soldotna Creek Drainage,
Soldotna, Alaska

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), Sport Fish Division, proposes using the pesticide rotenone to remove an illegally introduced northern pike population in the Soldotna Creek drainage, Soldotna, Alaska. Planned activities include using a multiphased treatment regime spread over three years to eradicate northern pike from the Soldotna Creek drainage and restocking with native fish rescued from the drainage. The population in the Soldotna Creek drainage is the highest priority concern the ADF&G has for invasive northern pike on the Kenai Peninsula. Northern pike in the Soldotna Creek drainage have eliminated all native fish populations from the western branch of the drainage, have impacted native fish populations in the remainder of the drainage, and serve as a source population for northern pike to spread into other vulnerable habitats within the Kenai River drainage such as the Moose River. It is anticipated the removal of northern pike from the Soldotna Creek drainage will reduce the risk that the population will expand through illegal introduction into adjacent waterbodies, including critically important systems like the Kenai River. The proposed actions will also restore numerous quality angling opportunities for the public in the area. The proposed project will be implemented using Federal funds administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program. Other support for project planning includes funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Aquatic Invasive Species Program and the Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund (Pacific Coast Salmon Recovery Fund).

Alternatives Considered

Four alternatives were evaluated in the Environmental Assessment (EA) including: 1) no action, 2) installing fish barriers, 3) control netting, and 4) treatment with rotenone. The "no action" alternative was rejected since there would be continued risk that northern pike could emigrate from and be transported from the Soldotna Creek drainage to other drainages and thereby impact other wild fisheries. The fish barrier alternative was rejected because a passage barrier capable of containing northern pike to the Soldotna Creek drainage would potentially cost millions of dollars to construct, would incur ongoing maintenance costs, and would not remove the threat of transporting pike from the Soldotna Creek drainage to other drainages. The control netting alternative was also rejected because previous efforts using gillnets to remove northern pike from lakes in the Soldotna Creek drainage were unsuccessful; the effectiveness of removing pike from flowing waters in the drainage (high debris loads, shallow water, and untenable logistics) seemed even less likely. Also, there was a high potential for unintentional take of migratory birds and other aquatic animals during an extensive and long-term gillnetting operation. The preferred alternative involves using rotenone to remove all invasive northern pike from the Soldotna Creek

drainage. The treatment design will include rescuing representative native fish from the drainage so they can be used to recolonize the drainage and help restore its native fish assemblage following treatment.

Public Review

Three public scoping meetings were held in March 2012 at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge's Environmental Education Center in Soldotna, a location easily accessible to Soldotna Creek property owners and interested citizens and organizations. An effort was made to encourage broad participation by hosting three separate meetings at different times of the day. Scoping meeting outreach and advertisements included phone contact and/or email to 465 individuals and organizations, a press release, newspaper advertisements, and the posting of flyers in key locations. Thirty-four individuals attended the series of meetings which included an explanation of the scoping process, an informative presentation by the ADF&G, and a facilitated open house where participants could ask direct questions of the ADF&G staff and the facilitator. Nine individuals and one regional organization provided written comments on the proposed treatment. In addition to the public scoping meetings, the ADF&G issued a press release on April 20, 2014, announcing this project. Both documents were available via the internet or by request. Two individuals provided responses during this public comment period (April 20 through May 21, 2014).

Input gathered during the public scoping process and comments received on the Draft EA represented a broad spectrum of public views and concerns. The majority of comments received were in support of the preferred alternative which would use rotenone to remove invasive northern pike and restore native fish species to the Soldotna Creek drainage. Those comments received in opposition to the preferred alternative cited various reasons including concern about the potential of rotenone to affect non-target organisms and human health, potential of rotenone to impact potable water sources including nearby wells, potential for impacts during swimming and other contact recreation, potential for fish kills outside the treatment area, the timing of treatment because of rotenone's persistence in cold water and potential impacts to migratory birds. All of these concerns have been addressed in the EA.

Decision and Rationale

The EA provides a compelling case for the need and purpose of this action, including the restoration of a native sport fishery in the Soldotna Creek drainage that was virtually eliminated by the introduction of northern pike. This project will remove the sole source population of invasive northern pike on the Kenai Peninsula; one that threatens productive coho salmon nursery habitats in the Moose River drainage, and potentially the regionally important and world renowned fisheries in the Kenai River drainage.

The analysis in the EA indicates that there will not be a significant impact, individually or cumulatively, on the quality of the human environment as a result of the proposed action.

I find that all reasonable alternatives were considered in the evaluation of this project. I also find that this project complies with the meaning of Executive Order 11990 and 11988. Therefore, based on a review and evaluation of the enclosed EA, I have determined the proposed removal of

invasive northern pike as described in the project entitled, "Soldotna Creek Drainage Restoration Project" is not a major federal action which would significantly affect the quality of the human environment within the meaning of Section 102 (2) (c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Accordingly, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement on the proposed action is not required.

The Environmental Assessment, prepared by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game has been adopted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service according to rules contained in 40 CFR 1506.3. Copies of the EA are available upon request from the Kenai Fish and Wildlife Field Office, 43655 Kalifornsky Beach Road, Soldotna, Alaska 99669, or at the ADF&G website at: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=rotenone.currentprojects>.



Regional Director
U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 7

8/27/14

Date