Finding Of No Significant Impact
Cattle Fever Tick Eradication Program Fence Deterrent in Cameron and Willacy Counties, Texas
Supplemental Environmental Assessment
May 2025

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA APHIS), Veterinary Services (VS) prepared a supplemental environmental assessment (SEA) analyzing potential environmental consequences associated with the installation of high game fencing at specific locations in Cameron and Willacy 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 SEA, 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 efforts to eradicate cattle fever ticks in southern Texas include surveillance and patrolling for stray or smuggled tick-infested livestock, treatment of infested animals, and the vacating of affected pastures and premises. Despite these measures, the persistent increase in tick-infested premises outside the Permanent Tick Quarantine Zone - particularly in recent years - suggests that current strategies may be insufficient. The risk of tick and bovine disease (babesiosis) spread remains high, especially in areas such as Cameron and Willacy Counties.

To enhance the effectiveness of eradication efforts, installing high game fences in targeted areas - including Cameron and Willacy Counties – has been shown to help limit the movement of tick hosts such as white-tailed deer and nilgai antelope. In conjunction with existing measures, this approach may reduce reliance on chemical treatments for livestock and lower overall animal production costs. Accordingly, by funding the installation of such fences, the USDA APHIS VS Cattle Fever Tick Eradication Program (CFTEP) aims to mitigate the risk of bovine babesiosis transmission among cattle in southern Texas.

In 2024, the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) reported that drought conditions in the Laguna Madre region exposed dry corridors, enabling repeated crossings and movements of nilgai populations. To address this, USDA APHIS proposes a 0.23-mile extension of the existing high game fence on Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge Unit 4 originally approved in 2021 . This extension would help close a key gap in fencing and enhance the overall effectiveness of CFTEP efforts.

This SEA evaluates two alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action – Under this scenario, USDA APHIS would not fund the fence extension. As a result, nilgai would continue to move through the unfenced corridor between the

current fence endpoint and Laguna Madre, potentially spreading cattle fever ticks and bovine babesiosis across the region.

Alternative B: Proposed Action (preferred) – USDA APHIS would fund the extension of the high game fence on LANWR Unit 4, thereby restricting nilgai movement and improving the effectiveness of CFTEP.

USDA APHIS announced the availability of this SEA for a 30-day public comment period via local newspapers in Texas and via *Regulations.gov*. The comment period ended on May 9th, 2025. The agency received no comment on the SEA.

USDA APHIS complies with Executive Order (EO) 13045, "Protection of Children from Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks," by evaluating the potential risks and ensuring child safety in its proposed actions. The agency also adheres to EO 13166, "Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency," by taking reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access and participation in its programs and decision-making processes for individuals with limited English proficiency.

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 SEA. 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.

MARK LYONS

Digitally signed by MARK LYONS
Date: 2025.05.28 16:54:25 -04'00'

Dr. Mark Lyons
Director, Ruminant Health Center
Strategy and Policy
Veterinary Services
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Date