**Revised Finding of No Significant Impact**
**Cattle Fever Tick Eradication Program Fence Deterrent in Cameron and Willacy Counties, Texas**
**Supplemental Environmental Assessment**
**May 2024**

The United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA APHIS), Veterinary Services (VS) completed an environmental assessment (EA) in May 2021 (USDA APHIS 2021a) and a supplemental EA in April 2022 (USDA APHIS 2022a), analyzing the potential environmental consequences associated with the installation of high game fencing at specific locations in Cameron and Willacy Counties, Texas. The proposed fencing would prevent or limit the spread of cattle fever ticks by free-ranging wildlife hosts (such as white-tailed deer and nilgai) north of the Texas southern border, known as the Permanent Tick Quarantine Zone (PTQZ).

Ongoing cattle fever tick eradication efforts in southern Texas include surveillance and patrolling for stray or smuggled tick-infested livestock, treatment of tick-infested animals, and vacating of tick-infested pastures and premises. Despite these efforts, the number of tick-infested premises observed within and outside of the PTQZ in recent years and the potential for both the ticks and the bovine disease (babesiosis/cattle fever) to spread across the region, including Cameron and Willacy Counties, have continued to increase. Installing high game fencing, in addition to above-mentioned ongoing eradication efforts, may limit the movements of tick hosts (such as white-tailed deer and nilgai antelope) and eventually contribute to the program's effort to reducing the use of chemicals needed to treat tick-infested cattle, as well as the associated animal production costs. Therefore, by funding the installation of high game fencing, the USDA APHIS Cattle Fever Tick Eradication Program (CFTEP) expects to reduce the risk of the spread of the bovine disease babesiosis among United States (U.S.) cattle populations in southern Texas.

The 2021 EA and the 2022 supplemental EA analyzed the alternatives of (A) *no action* under which USDA APHIS would not fund the installation of high game fencing in Cameron and Willacy Counties, which could allow the continued spread of cattle fever ticks by infested wildlife ungulates in cattle ranches with the potential of increasing the likelihood of babesiosis outbreaks in U.S. cattle populations and related financial consequences; and (B) *proposed action* under which USDA APHIS would fund the installation of high game fencing at specific locations in Cameron and Willacy Counties to deter the movements of potential wildlife tick-hosts, facilitating current CFTEP efforts.

USDA APHIS VS determined that the implementation of the proposed fencing would not significantly impact the quality of the human environment and, subsequently, issued Findings of No Significant Impact (FONSIs) on July 8, 2021, and April 22, 2022 (USDA APHIS 2021b,

2022b). The 2021 EA and the 2022 supplemental EA, and their respective FONSIs, are fully incorporated by reference in this document. This revised FONSI is being prepared because the agency is proposing a change to one of the previously evaluated fencing routes and has determined that the proposed changes to the program are substantially similar geographically, with no changes to previously assessed environmental effects. The EAs and their respective FONSIs and this revised FONSI are available from:

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
Veterinary Services
2150 Centre Avenue, Bldg. B, Fort Collins, CO 80526

In the 2022 supplemental EA, an alternative fencing route was proposed to replace the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge (LANWR) Unit 4 route assessed in the 2021 EA if the CFTEP could not get agreements signed by all the private landowners along the original proposed fencing route. These 2021 and 2022 proposed fence routes are shown in Figure 1 by the blue line and yellow line, respectively. USDA APHIS VS is proposing a new fencing route, the Bonner Ranch fence route, (red line in Figure 1) to replace the previously evaluated routes.

The new proposed alternative route, the Bonner Ranch route, spans about 7.2 miles, which includes 2.75 miles along the existing Bonner Ranch property boundary with 1.5 miles running north-south and 1.25 miles along the Arroyo Colorado River. As with the LANWR Unit 4 alternative route, the fencing would be placed on private property and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) LANWR property. This new proposed route shifts some of the fencing away from the Arroyo Colorado River. The previously proposed 1.94-mile section along the Arroyo Colorado on the Dos Rios Ranch would be replaced by the 1.5-mile section of the Bonner Fence running along the western boundary of the Bonner Ranch property. The upper part of the Bonner Ranch fence running along the Arroyo Colorado and the sections extending northeast along the Arroyo Colorado remain unchanged from the 2022 alternative route and the originally proposed 2021 route. The same type of fencing described in the 2021 EA and 2022 supplemental EA would be used.

A review of the proposed change to the fencing route indicates that installation of the Bonner Ranch fence would result in impacts no greater than those described in the 2021 EA and 2022 supplemental EA. Therefore, the preparation of a new EA is not required, and USDA APHIS is issuing a revised FONSI for this action. By virtue of its shorter total length and distance running along the Arroyo Colorado River, the proposed Bonner Ranch fence route decreases some of the potential environmental impacts associated with the previously evaluated fencing routes. The shorter length of the Bonner Ranch fence would mean less soil is disturbed during fence installation and require fewer resources (i.e., equipment, vehicles, materials), decreasing the

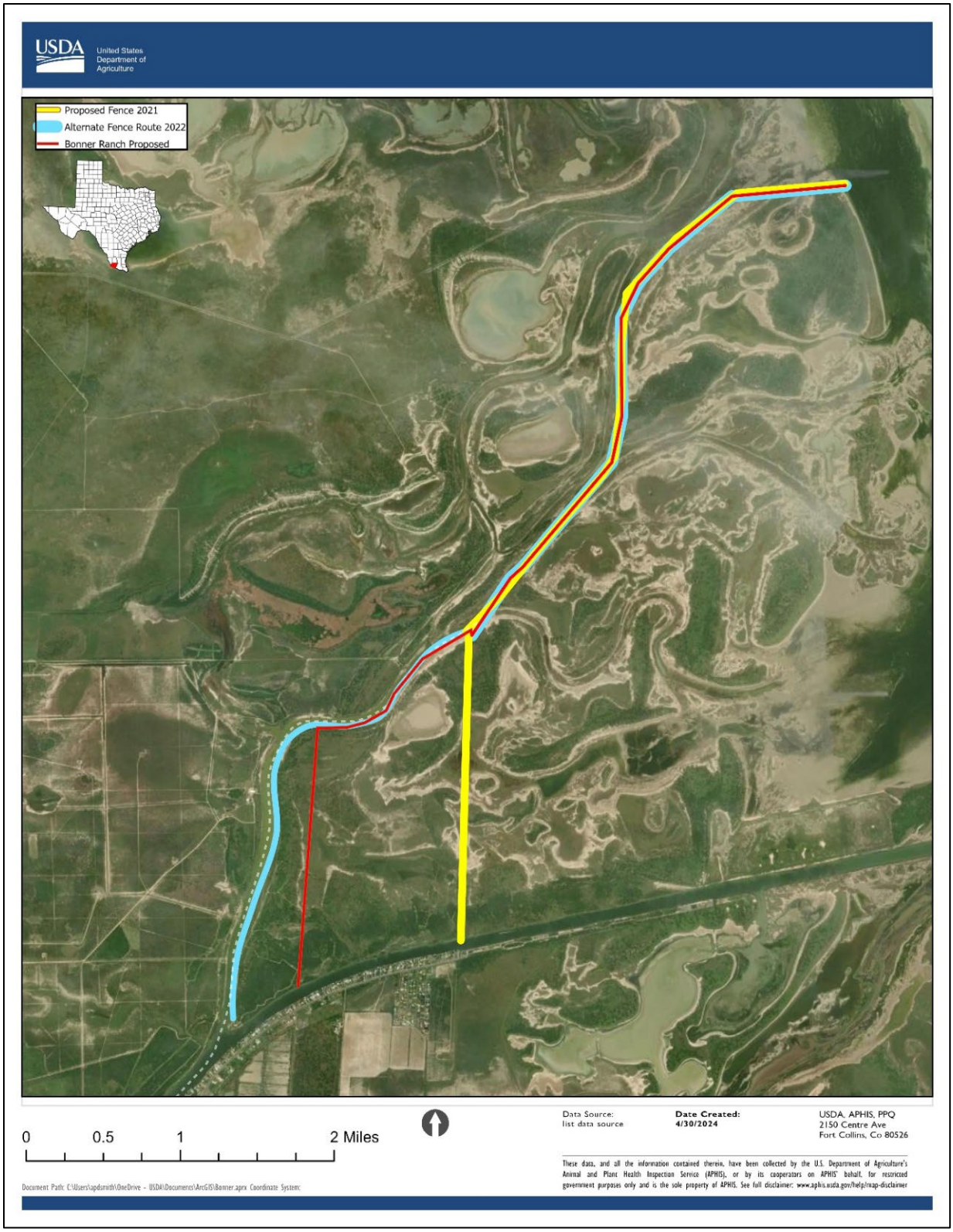


**Figure 1. Map of CFTEP proposed fencing routes in Cameron County: 2021 proposed LANWR Unit 4 route (yellow line), 2022 proposed alternative route (blue line), and proposed Bonner Ranch route (red line).**

potential short-term impacts to soil and air quality. Less vegetation would need to be disturbed, further minimizing any potential impacts on local habitats and wildlife. Because the new proposed route eliminates a 1.94-mile segment of fencing along the Arroyo Colorado, there is less potential for short-term impacts to the river water quality during the construction phase. Additionally, moving part of the fence away from the banks of the Arroyo Colorado eliminates some of the potential impacts that may be experienced by humans engaged in recreational activities on the river (e.g., boating, fishing) and wildlife in the area because of dust and noise associated with fence installation. As the fencing would be placed as close to the Arroyo Colorado as possible, the Bonner Ranch route with its overall shorter length along the river, would be more appealing as far as visual aesthetics to humans using the river for recreational activities. Overall, the potential impacts from installation of the proposed Bonner Ranch fencing route are not expected to significantly impact the quality of the human and natural environment and are expected to be less than those of the fencing routes previously evaluated.

Under the Endangered Species Act, USDA APHIS determined in the 2022 supplemental EA that the preferred alternative would not affect certain federally listed species or their critical habitats and may affect but is not likely to adversely affect the Gulf Coast jaguarundi and ocelot with the use of rectangular openings at ground level in the fence to allow the passage of these species, and for the northern aplomado falcon with use of Best Management Practices for Fence Construction Near Northern Aplomado Falcon Areas. Concurrence with these determinations was received from the USFWS following a consultation detailed in the 2021 Final EA ((USDA APHIS 2021a) and subsequent biological assessments (USDA APHIS 2022c). The proposed Bonner Ranch fence route is essentially the same as the previously proposed routes and thus, the concurrences would still apply.

USDA APHIS determined that there are no disproportionate adverse effects associated with the preferred action alternative to children, minority populations, low-income populations, Tribes, nor disabled populations over those effects to the general populations, in accordance with Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations; and Executive Order 13045, Protection of Children from Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks.

This revised FONSI was prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for Implementing NEPA, as amended, 40 CFR 1500-1508, and USDA APHIS Regulations 7 CFR 372. USDA APHIS is announcing the availability of this revised FONSI via local newspapers in Cameron County, Texas, and via *Regulations.gov*. The revised FONSI is available from USDA APHIS at the address, provided above, and at the website Pest Alert: Cattle Fever Ticks (usda.gov).

I have determined that the implementation of the proposed action will not result in a significant impact to the quality of the human environment based upon my review of the available information. 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.

JENNIFER SIEMBIEDA

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Date: 2024.05.13 13:41:31 -05'00'

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**Dr. Jennifer Siembieda** **Date**
**Acting Director, Ruminant Health Center**
**Strategy and Policy**
**Veterinary Services**
**Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service**

**References**

USDA APHIS. 2021a. *Cattle Fever Tick Eradication Program Fence Deterrent in Cameron and Starr Counties, Texas, Final Environmental Assessment*. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. Accessed April 29, 2024 from https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/animal_diseases/tick/downloads/cattle-fever-tick-fence-cameron-willacy-tx-final-assess.pdf.

USDA APHIS. 2021b. *Finding of No Significant Impact, Cattle Fever Tick Eradication Program Fence Deterrent in Cameron and Willacy Counties, Texas, Environmental Assessment*, July 2021. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. Accessed May 1, 2024, from Finding of No Significant Impact - Cattle Fever Tick Eradication Program Fence Deterrent in Cameron and Willacy Counties, Texas - Environmental Assessment, July 2021 (usda.gov).

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USDA APHIS. 2022c. *Game and Cattle Fencing for the Cattle Fever Tick Eradication Program in Cameron County, Texas, Revised Biological Assessment*. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.