

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT AND DECISION TO ADOPT THE
HAKALAU NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
2021 STATION MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**HAKALAU FOREST NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
*Pacific Region***

Summary

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announces its environmental findings on the 2021 Station Master Plan (SMP). The Service's Proposed Action is to adopt and implement the 2021 Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) SMP in accordance with the Refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP), adopted in 2010 (76 FR 29782). The suite of individual projects described therein would be implemented in phases, as budget allows. Both the SMP and the CCP (USFWS 2010) are incorporated here by reference to provide additional detail regarding the Proposed Action Alternative.

The Service has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) evaluating the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative. Based on the analysis in the EA, the Service has determined that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, within the meaning of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (42 United States Code [USC] 4321 et seq.). The Proposed Action is not the type of action that normally requires preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) and is not without precedent. Therefore, the preparation of an EIS is not required and the Service is issuing this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Proposed Action.

The comments received on the Draft EA and the Service's responses to the comments are included in the Final EA.

Selected Action

Alternative A—Proposed Action Alternative: USFWS adopts the SMP

Under the Proposed Action Alternative, the SMP would be adopted by the Service and individual projects described therein would be implemented in phases, as budget allows. The Refuge has prepared the SMP in accordance with the CCP (USFWS 2010); both are incorporated here by reference to provide additional detail regarding the Proposed Action Alternative.

By adopting the SMP and implementing the individual projects, the Refuge can assess current facilities and infrastructure, implement a new site plan identifying recommended facilities and infrastructure, and design an operations yard that consolidates facilities to streamline maintenance and operations. Adoption of the SMP would allow the assessment of costs of proposed improvements and provide a consistent facility naming convention. Recommended phasing is included in the SMP to provide sequencing and prioritization of improvements. Adoption of the SMP would also ensure that the Hakalau Field Station (Station) provides

adequate housing and workspace for the staff and volunteers that carry out the Service's mission now, and into the future. The Proposed Action would include the following work elements:

- Demolition and removal of existing buildings, outbuildings, and associated infrastructure
- Construction of new buildings and outbuildings
- Realignment and reconstruction of entrance road
- Construction of new roadways, walkways, and parking areas
- Replacement of septic system
- Replace and/or upgrade existing water treatment system and extend to new buildings/infrastructure
- Upgrade and extend electrical systems to new buildings/infrastructure
- Installation of new rooftop- and/or ground-based solar panels
- Removal of vegetation
- Revegetation of areas disturbed by construction activities
- Implementation of Mitigation Measures (see Table 3 of the EA for more information)

For the Proposed Action Alternative, the action area was defined as a contiguous area that includes the footprints of all planned SMP features and at least 10 meters of buffer around those features. In total, the action area comprises approximately 9 acres of previously disturbed, developed, or revegetated land.

This alternative was selected over the other alternative because it best addresses the issues identified during the station master planning process, and best meets the purpose and need for action as identified in the Draft EA, which is incorporated here by reference.

Other Alternatives Considered and Analyzed

Alternative B—No Action Alternative

Under Alternative B (No Action Alternative), the USFWS would take no action, which means the SMP would not be adopted to improve the Station's ability to service the Refuge and meet the goals stated in the CCP, and projects described in the SMP would not be implemented. Evaluation of future improvements and repairs to facilities and infrastructure would continue to be made incrementally, on a project-specific basis, and with no cohesive plan to guide long-range planning and implementation. The Station would continue to rely on existing facilities and infrastructure at or near the end of their serviceable life with varying degrees of suitability for their current use. Station housing availability would continue to be insufficient for current and future levels of staff and volunteer utilization. Facilities would not operate collectively within fully integrated systems. Implementation of the No Action Alternative would limit the Station's ability to service the Refuge and meet the goals stated in the CCP and would not meet the purpose and need for this project. Plans and proposals would continue to be reviewed and implemented on an inefficient, piecemeal basis. NEPA coverage would continue to require case-by-case analyses without the benefit of tiering to, adopting, incorporating by reference, or otherwise benefitting from the efficiencies of the environmental analysis completed for the Proposed Action Alternative.

This alternative was not selected because the Service would remain unable to effectively implement objectives and strategies to meet statutory obligations, CCP goals, and the purposes for which the Refuge was established.

Summary of Effects of the Selected Action

An 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. To determine whether the Proposed Action Alternative and the No Action Alternative have the potential to cause significant environmental effects, the potential impacts of both alternatives on human and natural resources were evaluated and presented in Table 6 - 10 of the EA, and are incorporated as part of this finding.

Implementing Alternative A would not affect public health or safety; would not result in disproportionately high or adverse human health or environmental effects on minorities and low-income populations and communities; would not result in effects that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks; would not negatively impact cultural resources or species listed under the ESA; would not cause the destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources; and would not violate federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Endangered Species Act

The Service prepared a Biological Assessment and initiated formal ESA Section 7 consultation on December 8, 2023 to address the potential impacts to listed species and critical habitat occurring within, or in vicinity of the action area of the SMP. Implementation of the Preferred Action Alternative is anticipated to result in a “Not Likely to Adversely Affect” finding. Any measures identified during ESA consultation with USFWS to avoid or minimize impacts on habitat would be implemented as part of the Proposed Action Alternative. As individual projects identified in the SMP are implemented, the Service would address Section 7 compliance requirements as site-specific restoration and management activities are planned and implemented.

National Historic Preservation Act

Federal agencies’ responsibility for protecting historic properties is defined primarily by Section 106 of the NHPA. Section 106 requires federal agencies to consider the effects of their undertakings on historic properties. To this end, the Service initiated Section 106 consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office and consulting parties, including Native Hawaiian Organizations, on May 17, 2023. The Service made a determination that no historic properties would be affected by the Proposed Action in letters dated July 16, 2023, and August 28, 2023.

Public Review

The proposal has been thoroughly coordinated with all interested and/or affected parties. The Service conducted early engagement with the State Historic Preservation Office, the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, Native Hawaiian Organizations, Private Conservation Organizations, and other interested or affected community organizations and individuals. The complete list of sources, agencies, and persons consulted is included in the Draft EA and is incorporated as part of this finding.

The official public comment period was from December 8, 2023 to January 6, 2024. Comments were solicited by letter, email, comment form, and on the Refuge's website <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/hakalau-forest>. The Service received a total of one comment, which was from an organization with an interest in the project. No comments were received from regulatory agencies. The comment received and the Service's response may be viewed in the Final EA.

Public Availability

The FONSI will be mailed directly to individuals who previously requested it, a notification of availability will be mailed to potentially affected parties, and the Final EA and FONSI will be posted on the Refuge's website <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/hakalau-forest>.

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 adopt and implement the 2021 Hakalau Forest NWR SMP 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 adopt and implement the 2021 Hakalau Forest NWR SMP.

This action is compatible with the purpose of the refuge and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS).

The action is consistent with applicable laws and policies.

Assistant Regional Director, NWRS, Pacific Region 1

Date