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Environmental Analysis of Wildlife Hazard Management Programs: Application of NEPA and Possible Consequences for Implementing New Plans (Poster)

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The operating certificate required for airports that accommodate commercial-service air carriers stipulates that the airports be able to conduct safe operations, pursuant to the Federal Aviation Act of 1958. Under Federal Aviation Regulation Part 139, most airports must prepare and implement a wildlife hazard management plan (WHMP) as part of the certification process. Required components of the WHMP include the *priorities for needed habitat modification and changes in land use* as a result of those modifications. Because habitat modification is often a relatively permanent procedure to reduce wildlife use of airports, it is a preferred method by airport operators for hazard abatement. There are likely to be federal and state permits associated with habitat modifications, such as those needed for wildlife removal, discharges to surface water, or dredging and filling activities in wetlands. However, proposed activities to reduce or eliminate habitat at Part 139-certified airports are also subject to review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Virtually all activities involving federal funding or approval at these airports require some level of analysis for compliance with NEPA; most of these activities are either specifically categorically excluded from a formal environmental assessment, or need at most an environmental assessment to document the lack of significant environmental impacts. In contrast, modifications to most “natural” wildlife habitats, even those undertaken to increase aviation safety, are not categorically excluded from environmental assessment. It is reasonable to assume that habitat modifications would in most instances require preparation of an environmental impact statement, either because of the potential to result in significant effects on the environment or the highly controversial nature of the activity. The reasoned, procedural nature of NEPA and the often-lengthy EIS process may appear to conflict with the urgency associated with wildlife hazard reduction at airports. A case study in southeast Alaska is used to illustrate the influence of NEPA on wildlife hazard management, in particular habitat modification actions.