

APPENDIX H – AREAS OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN



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Butte Field Office, Montana

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Butte Resource Management Plan

Final Report on Importance and Relevance Criteria and Findings for Areas of Critical Environmental Concern Considerations

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

| Acronym or Abbreviation | Full Phrase |
|-------------------------|---|
| ACEC | Area of Critical Environmental Concern |
| BLM | United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management |
| FLPMA | Federal Land Policy and Management Act |
| Forest Service | United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service |
| MOU | memorandum of understanding |
| Planning Area | Butte Resource Management Plan planning area |
| RMP | resource management plan |
| US | United States |
| WSA | Wilderness Study Area |

IMPORTANCE AND RELEVANCE CRITERIA AND FINDINGS FOR AREAS OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN CONSIDERATIONS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of the land use planning process for the Butte Resource Management Plan (RMP), a US Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) interdisciplinary team reviewed ten nominations for special designation as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs). Five nominations were external (made by other agencies or the public), three were internal (made by BLM specialists), one was recommended for study in a 1979 BLM management plan (BLM 1979), and one is an existing ACEC. The team analyzed the ten areas to determine if they contain values that meet the relevance and importance criteria for consideration as potential ACECs.

Five areas were found to meet the relevance and importance criteria: Elkhorn Mountains, the existing Sleeping Giant ACEC, Spokane Creek, Ringing Rocks, and Humbug Spires. These areas are identified as potential ACECs. Various alternatives in the Draft RMP will recommend the areas for designation as ACECs (or continued designation in the case of Sleeping Giant ACEC) if special management is required to protect the relevant and important values. Areas found not to meet the relevance and importance criteria are not carried forward as potential ACECs.

2. INTRODUCTION

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and BLM policy (Manual 1613 [BLM 1988a]) require the BLM to give priority to the designation and protection of ACECs during the land use planning process. The BLM, Butte Field Office, is currently revising its older land use plans, the Headwaters RMP (BLM 1984) and the Dillon Management Framework Plan (BLM 1979). The revised RMP will provide a single, comprehensive land use plan that will guide management of public land administered by the Butte Field Office over the next 15 to 20 years. Only that public and federal mineral estate managed by BLM within the Butte Field Office boundary is the subject of this document.

The BLM Butte Field Office Planning Area is in mid-western Montana (**Figure 1**). Within the Planning Area, BLM administers about 311,000 acres of public surface land and 656,000 acres of federal mineral estate in Lewis and Clark, Jefferson, Broadwater, Deer Lodge, Beaverhead, Silver Bow, Gallatin, and Park Counties.

This analysis and the resultant findings for ACEC relevance and importance criteria has been performed pursuant to FLPMA Section 202 (43 US Code 1712[c][3]), 43 Code of Federal Regulations 1610.7-2 and BLM Manual 1613 (BLM 1988a).

2.1 What is an Area of Critical Environmental Concern?

FLPMA Section 103 (43 US Code 1702[a]) and 43 Code of Federal Regulations 1601.0-5(a) describes ACECs as “areas within the public lands where special management attention is required to protect and prevent irreparable damage to important historic, cultural, or scenic values, fish and wildlife resources or other natural systems or processes, or to protect life and safety from natural hazards.” Therefore, only BLM-administered lands are included in ACEC boundaries.

Designation of an ACEC in and of itself does not automatically prohibit or restrict other uses in the area. The one exception is that a mining plan of operation is required for any proposed mining activity within a designated ACEC. The ACEC designation is an administrative designation that is accomplished through the land use planning process. It is unique to BLM in that no other agency uses this form of designation.

The intent of Congress in mandating the designation of ACECs through FLPMA was to give priority to the designation and protection of areas containing unique and significant resource values. The BLM staff followed guidance set forth in BLM Manual 1613 for the process of identifying and evaluating potential ACECs. This report documents the first three steps in the process: compiling a list of areas recommended for ACEC designation, obtaining information on relevance and importance, and evaluating each resource or hazard to determine if it meets

both the relevance and importance criteria. The remaining two steps, public comment on proposed ACECs and ACEC designation, will be completed after publishing this draft report. Section 3 describes these steps.

3. STEPS IN THE ACEC PROCESS

This section summarizes the five main steps in the identification and evaluation of ACECs.

3.1 Nomination

BLM staff, other agencies, or members of the public may nominate ACECs at any time, but they are only designated during the BLM land use planning process. External nominations from agencies and the public generally are solicited during an RMP's scoping process. In addition, BLM regulations require reconsideration of existing ACECs during RMP revision (BLM 1988a).

3.2 Evaluation of Nominations for Relevance and Importance

Each nominated area is evaluated to determine if it meets the relevance and importance criteria listed in BLM Manual 1613. A nomination must meet one or more of the relevance criteria *and* the importance criteria to be considered a potential ACEC.

Relevance Criteria

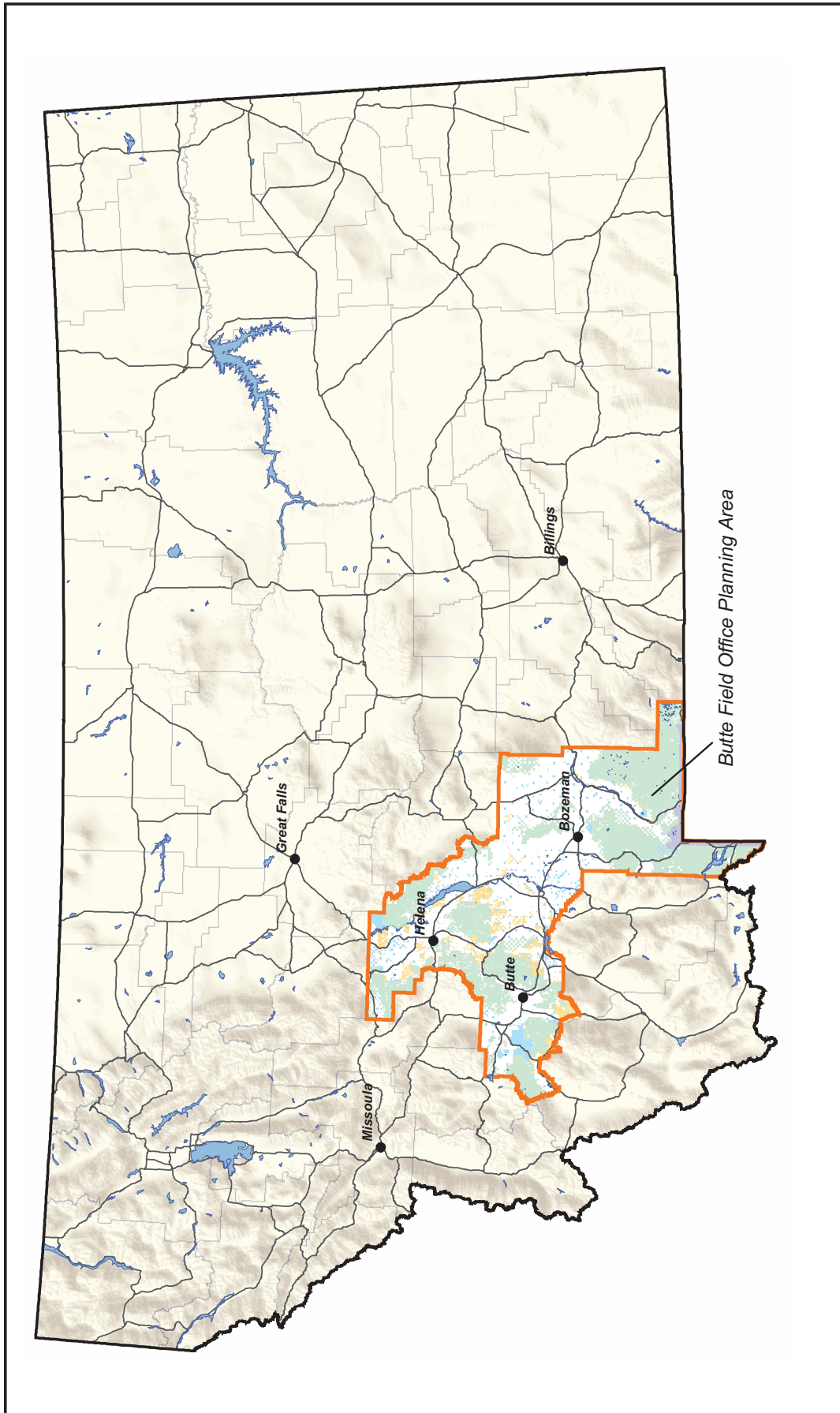
Does the area contain one or more of the following values?

1. A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value (including but not limited to rare or sensitive archeological resources and religious or cultural resources important to native Americans);
2. A fish or wildlife resource (including but not limited to habitat for endangered, sensitive, or threatened species, or habitat essential for maintaining species diversity);
3. A natural process or system (including but not limited to endangered, sensitive, or threatened plant species; rare, endemic, or relict plants or plant communities that are terrestrial, aquatic, or riparian; or rare geological features); and/or
4. A natural hazard (including but not limited to areas of avalanche, dangerous flooding, landslides, unstable soils, seismic activity, or dangerous cliffs). A hazard caused by human action may meet the relevance criteria if it is determined through the RMP process that it has become part of a natural process.

Importance Criteria

Does the value, resource, system, process, or hazard have substantial significance or value?
Does it meet one or more of the following criteria?

1. Does it have more than locally significant qualities that give it special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern, especially compared to any similar resource?
2. Does it have qualities or circumstances that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, unique, endangered, threatened, or vulnerable to adverse change?
3. Has it been recognized as warranting protection in order to satisfy national priority concerns or to carry out the mandates of FLPMA?
4. Does it have qualities that warrant highlighting in order to satisfy public or management concerns about safety and public welfare?
5. Does it pose a significant threat to human life and safety or property?



0 Miles 60

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FIGURE 1

Butte RMP Planning Area, Montana
BLM, Butte Field Office
Butte RMP and EIS

3.3 Consideration of Potential ACECs

Potential ACECs (those meeting the relevance and importance criteria) are considered as RMP alternatives are developed. Each potential ACEC is proposed for designation in at least one of the management alternatives in the Draft RMP. The need for special management and the resulting effects from applying such management are assessed in the associated draft environmental impact statement.

3.4 Comment on Proposed ACECs

Public feedback will be sought on the designation recommendations included in this draft report, and the public may comment on any aspect of the ACEC analysis. The comments are considered during preparation of the Proposed RMP and Final Environmental Impact Statement. After a 30-day protest period on the Proposed RMP, the BLM prepares a record of decision and approves the RMP.

3.5 Designation

A potential ACEC is proposed for designation if it requires special management to protect the important and relevant values. Special management is defined as management outside of standard or routine practices. Special management refers to management prescriptions developed expressly to protect the important and relevant values of the area from the potential effects of actions permitted by the RMP. They usually include more detail than other management prescriptions contained in the RMP. Special management is typically needed when one of the following conditions is met:

- Current management or management activities proposed in the alternative are not sufficient to protect the relevant and important resource values;
- The needed management action is considered unusual or outside of the normal range of management practices typically used; or
- The change in management is difficult to implement without ACEC designation.

Only if analysis determines that special management is required, the potential ACEC is recommended for designation. Designation of ACECs occurs when the record of decision is signed and the RMP is approved.

4. NOMINATIONS

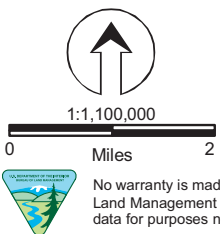
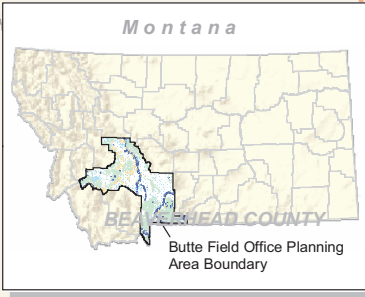
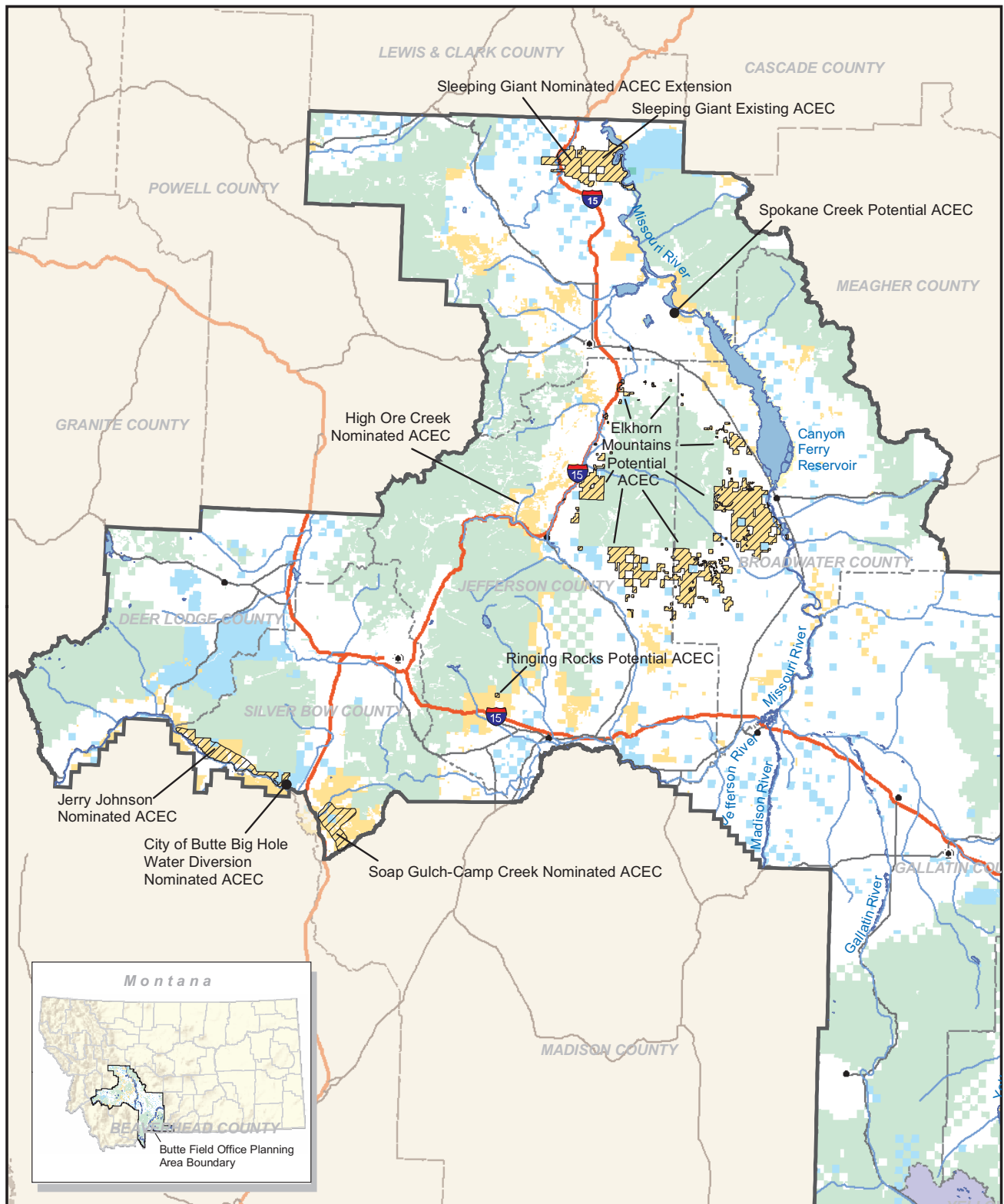
For the Butte RMP process, the notice of intent to prepare the RMP (December 2003) included the following request for nominations:

“The BLM is ... requesting public input for nominations considered worthy of ACEC designation. To be considered as a potential ACEC, an area must meet the criteria of relevance and importance as established and defined in 43 CFR 1610.7-2. Nominations must include descriptive materials, detailed maps, and evidence supporting the ‘relevance’ and ‘importance’ of the resource or area. ... All ACEC nominations within the planning area will be evaluated during development of the RMP” (Federal Register 2003).

The BLM received five external nominations from four different sources. Each nomination included a varying degree of descriptive materials, maps, and evidence supporting the relevance and importance of each area. In addition, the BLM interdisciplinary team evaluated three internal nominations, one existing ACEC (Sleeping Giant), and one area recommended for study in the Dillon Management Framework Plan (BLM 1979). **Figure 2** depicts the locations of the ten areas. Evaluations of each area are provided below.

5. IMPORTANCE AND RELEVANCE EVALUATIONS

The following information describes each area and whether or not it meets the relevance and importance criteria.



- Potential Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)
- Butte Field Office Planning Area Boundary
- Rivers and Streams
- Interstates
- Roads
- County Boundaries
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Lands
- Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) Lands
- Private Lands
- State of Montana Lands
- USDA Forest Service Lands
- USDI Fish and Wildlife Service Lands

FIGURE 2

Nominated Areas of Critical Environmental Concern Considered BLM, Butte Field Office Butte RMP and EIS

5.1 Elkhorn Mountains

This external nomination was made during the public scoping process for the Butte RMP. The nominated area is shown in **Figure 3**.

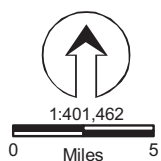
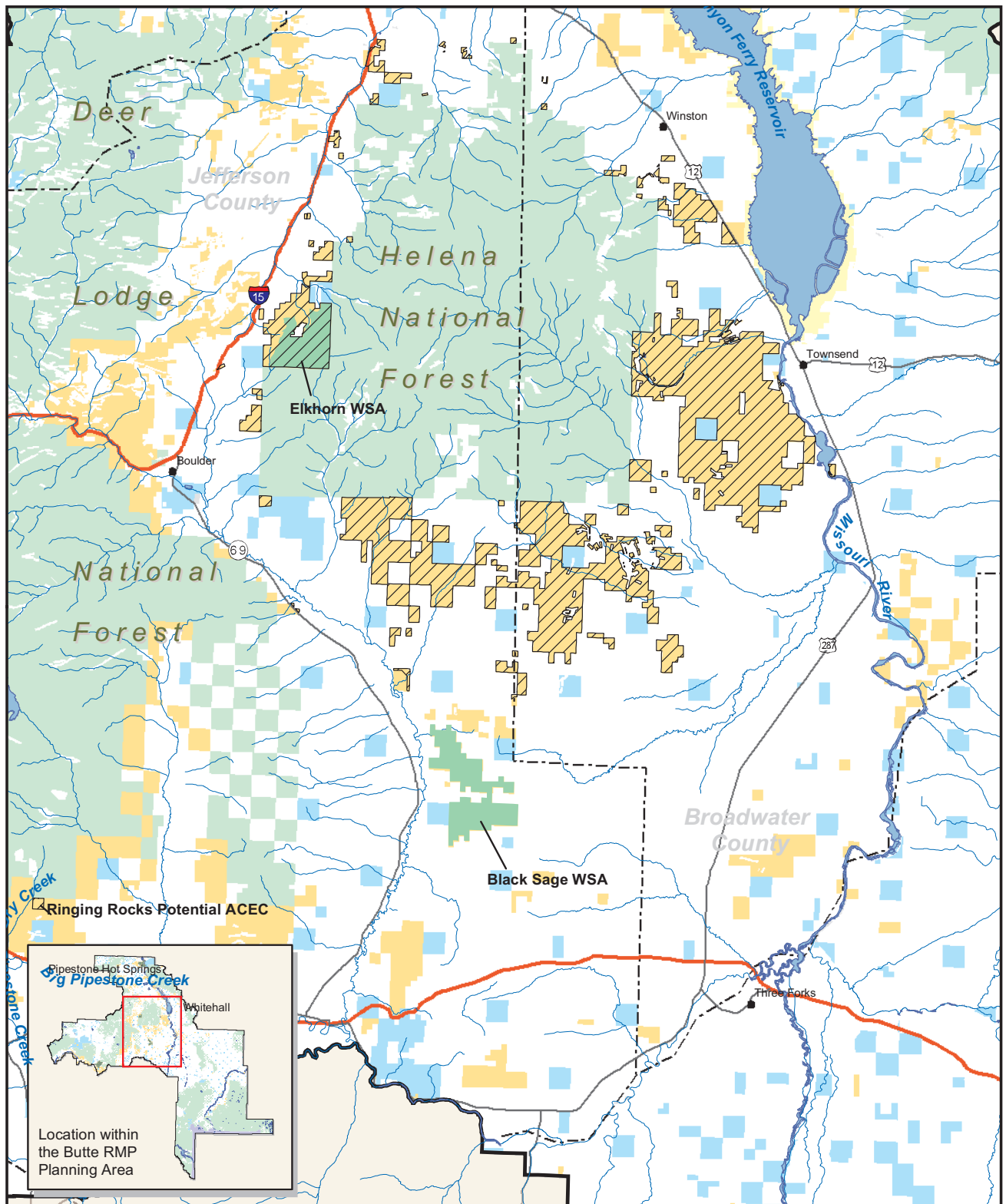
Description of Area/Nomination

The Elkhorn Mountains are an island mountain range in southwest Montana, near the capital city of Helena. The communities of Townsend, Boulder, Three Forks, and Winston also border the range. The nominated Elkhorn Mountains ACEC is about 67,500 acres of BLM-administered lands in Jefferson and Broadwater Counties. The nominated ACEC encompasses the BLM-administered 3,575-acre Elkhorn Wilderness Study Area (WSA) on the west side of the Elkhorn Mountains; this WSA has not been studied for wilderness suitability. The BLM-administered lands in the nominated ACEC encircle (but do not include) about 160,000 acres managed by the US Department of Agriculture, National Forest Service (Forest Service); these lands comprise the only Wildlife Management Unit in the National Forest System. Included in these Forest Service lands, and adjacent to the BLM-administered Elkhorn WSA, is the 64,522-acre Elkhorn WSA that is administered by the US Forest Service.

The wildlife emphasis resulted from the decision on the Elkhorns Wilderness Study EIS done in the late 1970s. The study was controversial, and the public response was both vocal and conflicting. Throughout the debate, consensus emerged: the wealth of natural diversity in wildlife and habitats and the associated recreation values of the Elkhorn Mountains should be recognized and retained. In 1992, the BLM, Helena and Deerlodge National Forests, and Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreeing to work together to manage the Elkhorns as a mountain range. The MOU established the Elkhorn Cooperative Management Area as a unique, cooperatively administered geographic area. However, the BLM-managed lands have remained under full multiple use, whereas the Forest Service lands emphasize wildlife and recreation values.

Relevance Criteria

This area meets Relevance Criteria 1 and 2. There are significant Native American cultural sites on BLM-managed lands in the Elkhorn Mountains, as well as historic mining and ranching localities (Relevance Criteria 1). The Elkhorn Mountains' highlight is its wealth of natural diversity in wildlife and habitats (Relevance Criteria 2). The ecosystem includes everything from prairie to alpine, and from mayflies (*Ameletus bellulus*) to mountain goat (*Oreamnos americanus*). Together, the Forest Service and BLM lands in the Elkhorn Mountains provide diverse, productive wildlife habitat essential for maintaining species diversity. The Elkhorn Mountains also provide expansive big game winter range on public land. The mountain range is also an important wildlife corridor between the Big Belt Mountains and the Continental Divide. The lower-elevation portion of the ecosystem includes BLM-managed lands that provide critical winter range for mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana*), and elk (*Cervus elaphus*). The BLM-managed lands also provide habitat for mountain plover (*Charadrius montanus*) and for several sensitive species including westslope cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki lewisi*), golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), northern goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*), long-billed curlew (*Numenius americanus*), black-backed woodpecker (*Picoides arcticus*), American three-toed woodpecker (*Picoides dorsalis*), and Brewer's sparrow (*Spizella breweri*). These fish and wildlife values are recognized by the MOU between the BLM, Helena and Deerlodge National Forests, and Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks that establishes the Elkhorn Cooperative Management Area.



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- Wilderness Study Area (WSA)
- Potential Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)
- Butte Field Office Planning Area Boundary
- Rivers and Streams
- Interstates
- Roads
- County Boundaries
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Lands
- Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) Lands
- Private Lands
- State of Montana Lands
- USDA Forest Service Lands
- USDI Fish and Wildlife Service Lands

FIGURE 3

Location of Potential Area of Critical Environmental Concern
Elkhorn Mountains
BLM, Butte Field Office
Butte RMP and EIS

Importance Criteria

This area's fish and wildlife values, as recognized by the MOU, meet Importance Criteria 1, 2, and 3. The wildlife management unit, the Elkhorn Cooperative Management Area, has more than locally significant qualities that give it special worth and distinctiveness (Importance Criteria 1). The unique management of the Elkhorn Mountains across administrative boundaries has been nationally recognized as a model of collaborative management. The public has come to expect this seamless management of the Elkhorn Mountains and generally expects that management across the ecosystem favors wildlife. The public generally does not realize that the BLM, Butte Field Office, has a separate multiple-use plan for the Elkhorn Mountains. The relevant fish and wildlife values, as recognized by the MOU, also represent a unique wildlife management unit of national priority (Importance Criteria 3).

The Elkhorn Mountains' expansive big game winter range on public land is unique. The pure native westslope cutthroat trout also are unique, fragile, sensitive, rare, threatened, and vulnerable (Importance Criteria 2). Muskrat and Dutchman Creeks are unique because of these pure native westslope cutthroat trout. Pure strains of westslope cutthroat trout are found in only four streams of the Elkhorn Mountains, and two of these streams occur on BLM lands. Streams with westslope cutthroat trout are rare in the Elkhorn Mountains and are threatened by nonnative species and habitat degradation.

Findings

This area meets both the relevance and importance criteria and will be carried forward as a potential ACEC.

5.2 Jerry Johnson Creek

This area was formerly located within the BLM Dillon Field Office. The Dillon Management Framework Plan (BLM 1979) recommended that 15 areas, including Jerry Johnson Creek, be considered further for ACEC designation once guidance was available to conduct the evaluations. The BLM guidance finalized the process for identification and evaluation of ACECs in the 1980s, but a Dillon Management Framework Plan amendment was never completed for the 15 nominations. Because the area is now within the Butte Field Office boundary, it is being evaluated during the Butte RMP process. The nominated area is shown in **Figure 2**.

Description of Area/Nomination

This approximate 12,100-acre area in Silver Bow County includes BLM-administered lands adjacent to the north side of the Big Hole River from the town of Divide west about 2.5 miles to the Silver Bow-Deerlodge County line. Approximately 200 elk and 300 deer use the area for winter range.

Relevance Criteria

This nomination meets Relevance Criteria 2 for a fish and wildlife resource, because the winter range is necessary to maintain existing populations of deer and elk, and there is habitat for threatened and endangered species, including:

- Federally listed as threatened Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*);
- Federally listed as threatened grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*); and
- Federally listed as endangered and experimental population gray wolf (*Canis lupus*).

Importance Criteria

The small area does not meet the importance criteria for a fish and wildlife resource. Though it contains threatened and endangered species habitat, there is nothing more than locally significant about this area, as these species occur elsewhere in Montana.

Findings

This nomination meets the relevance criteria for a fish and wildlife resource but does not meet importance criteria. As such, it will not be carried forward as a potential ACEC.

5.3 City of Butte Big Hole River Diversion

This external nomination was made during the public scoping process for the Dillon RMP in 2001. Because it is located in the Butte Field Office, it was not considered in the Dillon ACEC evaluation. The nominated area is shown in **Figure 2**.

Description of Area/Nomination

The City of Butte Big Hole River Diversion is on the Big Hole River one mile west of the town of Divide, in Silver Bow County. This nomination stated that all municipal watersheds should be considered as ACECs because they have immediate and important effects to humans. The description of this nomination was not adequate to determine exact locations or total acres of public lands. The nominator did not participate in the Butte RMP scoping process, so additional information was not solicited.

Relevance Criteria

This nomination does not meet any of the four relevance criteria. The municipal watershed does not have significant historic or cultural value (Relevance Criteria 1).

Importance Criteria

The importance criteria were not reviewed because the relevance criteria were not met.

Findings

This nomination does not meet any relevance criteria and will not be carried forward as a potential ACEC.

5.4 Soap Gulch-Camp Creek

This external nomination was made during the public scoping process for the Dillon RMP in 2001. The area is split between the Butte and Dillon Field Offices. The Dillon ACEC evaluation considered portions on Dillon Field Office lands. The nominated area is shown in **Figure 2**.

Description of Area/Nomination

This habitat area is split between the Butte and Dillon Field Offices and is north/northeast of the town of Melrose in Silver Bow County. The nominated area in the Butte Field Office totals about 9,300 acres. Bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*) were reintroduced into historic habitat around Camp Creek in the mid-1960s and served as the basis for the Soap Gulch ACEC nomination in the 1979 Dillon Management Framework Plan (BLM 1979). The bighorn sheep population has expanded to occupy suitable habitat around this core area, including lands west of the Big Hole River (Melrose-Maiden Rock ACEC nomination in the Dillon RMP).

Wildlife viewing is a major regional interest with bighorn sheep seasonally present along Interstate 15 and the Big Hole River. A major die-off decimated this herd in 1995, but small bands of bighorn sheep have persisted throughout the previously occupied habitat, and a supplemental reintroduction was made in 2001. Current distribution of bighorn sheep exceeds the original core habitat area. No overall habitat management plan is in place.

Relevance Criteria

This nomination meets the Relevance Criteria 2 for a fish and wildlife resource. Bighorn sheep is a priority species for the BLM and occur in these areas.

Importance Criteria

This habitat area does not meet the importance criteria for a fish and wildlife resource. It does not have more than locally significant qualities or circumstances, as there are over 40 herds of bighorn sheep in Montana and many others in the western US. The nominated areas are not more or less important than other bighorn sheep areas in Montana or the Intermountain West. Bighorn sheep are susceptible to adverse change, but the habitats in the nominated area are not susceptible to these changes. The area is not considered fragile, nor has it been recognized as warranting special protection under the importance criteria.

Findings

This nomination meets the relevance criteria for a fish and wildlife resource but does not meet the importance criteria. Therefore, this nomination will not be carried forward as a potential ACEC.

5.5 High Ore Creek

This external nomination was made during the Butte RMP public scoping process in 2004. High Ore Creek is shown in **Figure 2**.

Description of Area/Nomination

The nomination stated that this area on High Ore Creek, west of the Boulder River in Jefferson County, should be considered for ACEC designation based on post-placer mining restoration that has significantly enhanced the water quality, aquatic integrity, and conservation value of this tributary. The potential to restore the High Ore Creek's native fishery provides another reason to consider ACEC protection. The exact location and size of the nominated area was not included in the nomination so is not known.

Relevance Criteria

This nomination does not meet any of the four relevance criteria. This is a mining reclamation area that is not part of the natural process (Relevance Criteria 3). While the condition of many of the historic properties is exceptional (Relevance Criteria 1), those resources are located on private land, and ACECs may only be considered on BLM-managed lands. The historic mining features on BLM-managed land are abandoned mine openings and ditches, and those site types are very common in the area. As such, the BLM-managed lands do not meet any relevance criteria.

Importance Criteria

The importance criteria were not reviewed because the relevance criteria were not met.

Findings

This nomination does not meet any relevance criteria and will not be carried forward as a potential ACEC.

5.6 Sleeping Giant ACEC (Existing Designation)

The Sleeping Giant ACEC (**Figure 4**) was designated an ACEC in the Headwaters RMP Record of Decision in 1984 (BLM 1984). The Sleeping Giant ACEC Management Plan (BLM 1988b) directs that the area is managed for the values for which it was designated. It is being reevaluated now because BLM regulations require reconsideration of existing ACECs during the RMP revision process (BLM 1988a).

Description of Area/Nomination

The 11,609-acre Sleeping Giant ACEC is adjacent to the Holter Lake Recreation Area complex, about 30 miles north of Helena in Lewis and Clark County. The ACEC is mostly comprised of the Sleeping Giant WSA and Sheep Creek WSA. The ACEC has steep irregular topography, with elevations ranging from 3,600 to 6,800 feet. About half the area is forested with mixed conifers, including Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), limber pine (*Pinus flexilis*), and lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*). Cottonwood trees (*Populus* spp.) and deciduous shrubs are associated with numerous riparian areas within the ACEC. The nonforested portions are composed of sedimentary rock ledges, talus slopes, and native grasslands. Twenty drainages dissect the area. Watershed values are high, and there are six important perennial streams.

Relevance Criteria

This area meets Relevance Criteria 1 for significant scenic values and Relevance Criteria 2 for a fish and wildlife resource. The most outstanding features or landmark in the ACEC is the Sleeping Giant, a formation created by the profile of the Beartooth Mountain and the rock outcroppings of the lower ridgeline that extend toward the Missouri River. The Sleeping Giant is a well-known landmark visible from the city of Helena.

The overall terrain is highly natural, providing outstanding scenic values. Off-site vistas of the surrounding landscape also are outstanding. Seven miles of ridgeline hiking routes offer panoramic views of the Rocky Mountains. The nationally significant Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail traverses the area. Recreation opportunities are diverse and include fishing, camping, hiking, horse travel, hunting, nature study, photography, and snowshoeing. There is an abandoned homestead, consisting of a cabin, framed house, barn, outhouse, shed, and root cellar, in the area. Another important value includes 11 miles of Holter Lake/Missouri River shoreline (BLM 1991, 2004).

Important wildlife species include bighorn sheep, mountain goat, elk, American black bear (*Ursus americanus*), mule deer, furbearers, coldwater fisheries (particularly trout [*Oncorhynchus spp.*]), Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*), osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), the federally listed as threatened grizzly bear, and the federally listed as threatened bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*).

Importance Criteria

This area meets Importance Criteria 1 for scenic values and a fish and wildlife resource because the values have more than locally significant qualities that give the area special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern, especially compared to any similar resources. Also, the area meets Importance Criteria 2 for both relevant values because the values have qualities or circumstances that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, unique, endangered, threatened, or vulnerable to adverse change.

Findings

This nomination continues to meet the relevance and importance criteria and will be carried forward as a potential ACEC.

5.7 Sleeping Giant ACEC Extension

This external nomination was made during the Butte RMP public scoping process in 2004. The nominated area is shown in **Figure 2**.

Description of Area/Nomination

The nomination stated that the proposed Sleeping Giant Extension ACEC is at the west end of the existing Sleeping Giant ACEC on both sides of Interstate 15. It includes BLM lands in Sections 21, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, 33, 34, and 35 of Township 14 North, Range 4 West; and Sections 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, and 13 of Township 13 North, Range 4 West, and Section 18 of Township 13 North, Range 3 West, Montana Principal Meridian, Lewis and Clark County. The site is composed of approximately 8,000 acres within a diverse landscape of ridges, hills, grasslands, and aspen-sagebrush mosaics. The area includes Little Prickly Pear Creek and several hiking trails, logging roads, and all-terrain vehicle trails.

Relevance Criteria

When the Sleeping Giant ACEC was originally evaluated in the early 1980s, the extension areas included in this nomination did not meet any relevance criteria. The relevant values of the Sleeping Giant ACEC – significant scenic and historical values (unique topographic and vegetation features and stage coach travel route and ford from Great Falls to Butte) (Relevance Criteria 1) and a wildlife resource (Relevance Criteria 2) – are not present in the nominated extension area.

Importance Criteria

The importance criteria were not reviewed because the relevance criteria were not met.

Findings

This nomination does not meet any of the relevance criteria so will not be carried forward as a potential ACEC.

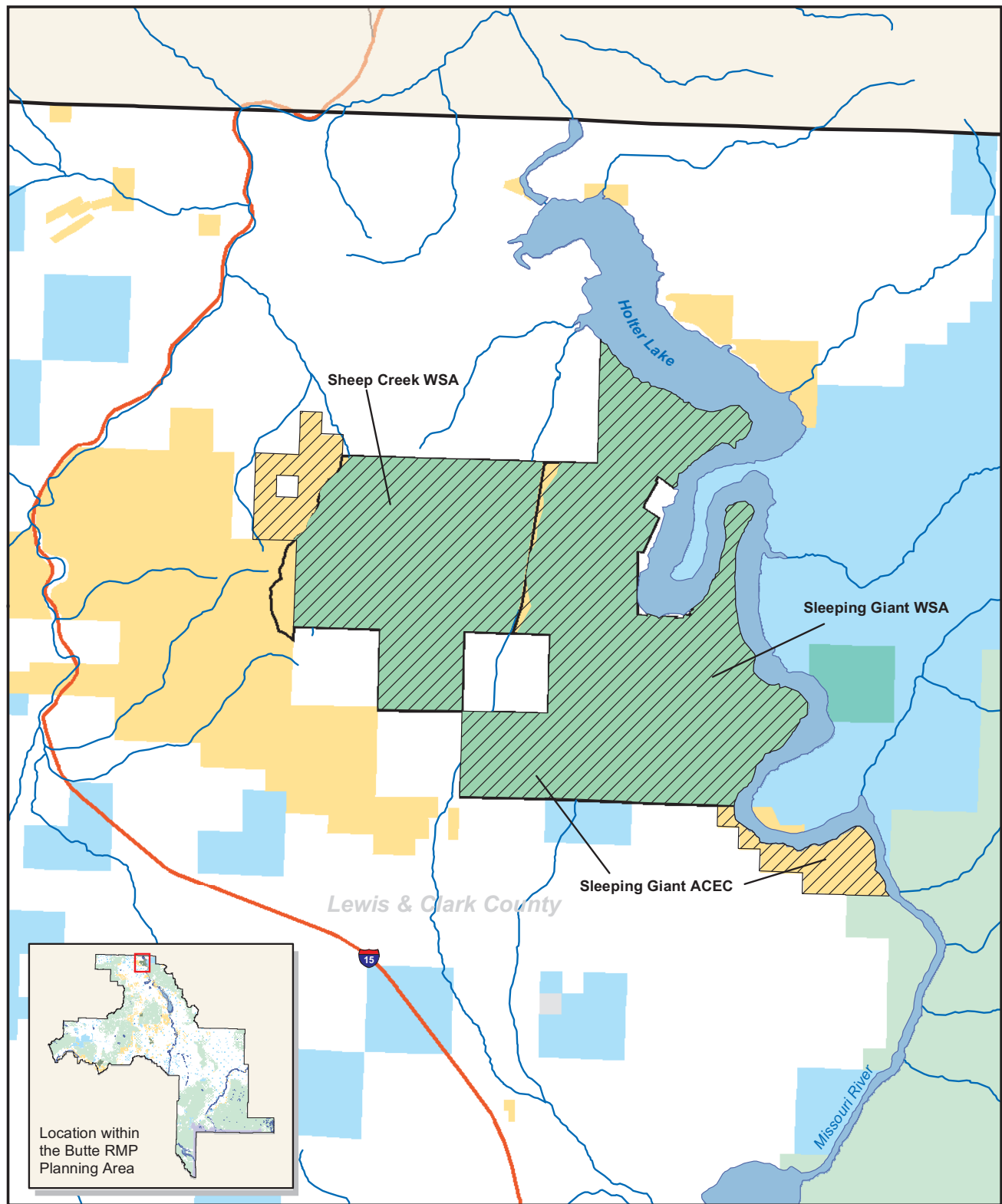
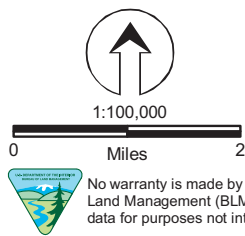
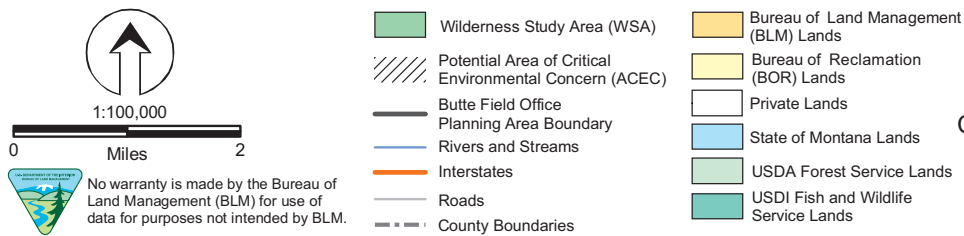


FIGURE 4

Location of Existing Area of Critical Environmental Concern
BLM, Butte Field Office
Butte RMP and EIS



5.8 Spokane Creek

This internal nomination made by BLM specialists is depicted in **Figure 5**.

Description of Area/Nomination

This area is part of the McMaster Ranch acquisition that was facilitated by The Conservation Fund and purchased by the BLM in 2004 with Land and Water Conservation Funds. The approximately 14-acre area is located on BLM-managed lands along Hauser Lake in Sections 4 and 5, Township 7 North, Range 4 West, Montana Principal Meridian, Lewis and Clark County (Figure 5).

The area is comprised of two converging perennial reaches of Spokane Creek and a diverse composition of riparian vegetation. It is immediately downstream of a 120-acre private parcel that is under a conservation easement. The Conservation Fund, and ultimately the BLM, has first right of purchase for the privately owned parcel if the private owners decide to sell in the future. Within the conservation easement, there are several large springs that contribute the majority of the stream flows through the nominated area. The BLM has been entrusted to manage the conservation easement and its water resources to maintain or enhance its natural values. Partnerships are currently underway to protect this important resource.

Relevance Criteria

The natural characteristics of the nominated Spokane Creek area meet Relevance Criteria 2 and 3. The area provides essential habitat for maintaining both plant and animal diversity (Relevance Criteria 2). The aquatic and riparian plant communities provide a natural functioning system (Relevance Criteria 3).

Importance Criteria

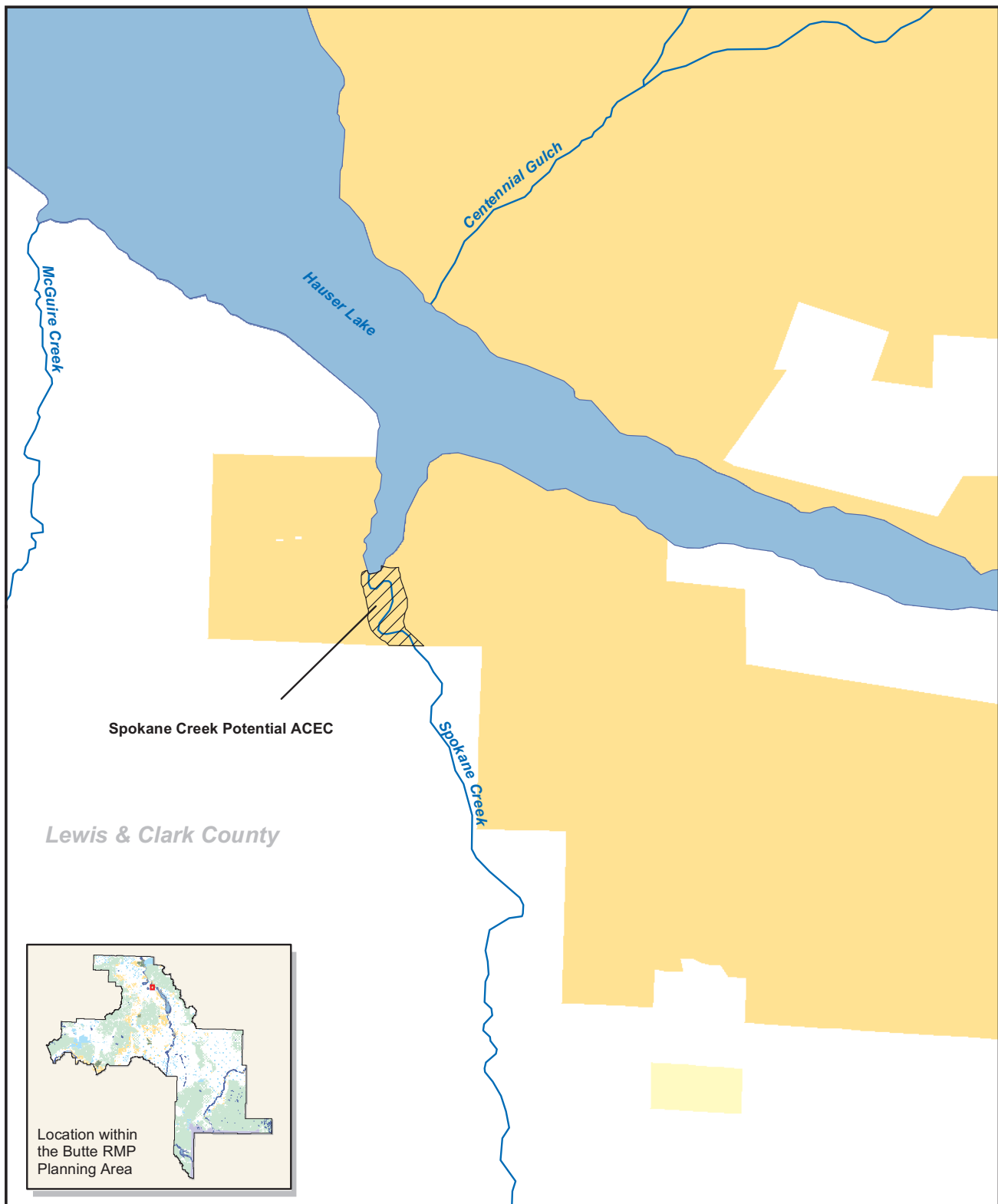
The relevant resource values are substantially significant and meet Importance Criteria 1, 2, and 3. Spokane Creek and its associated riparian vegetation, which provide a natural functioning system, present more than locally significant qualities of special worth, distinctiveness, and cause for concern (Importance Criteria 1). It is critically important as a natural spawning stream for three key sport fish species (brown trout [*Salmo trutta*], rainbow trout [*Oncorhynchus mykiss*] and Kokanee salmon [*Oncorhynchus nerka kennerlyi*]) in Hauser Lake and the Missouri River that attract anglers throughout Montana and the US. This important spawning stream also provides food sources for the federally listed as threatened bald eagle.

The relevant values are sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, unique, and vulnerable, which makes them worthy of special management and protection (Importance Criteria 2). These qualities are a result of Spokane Creek being the only properly functioning perennial, spawning stream that flows into Hauser Lake. The stream is primarily spring fed, has high water quality, maintains consistently cool temperatures, and provides excellent yearlong spawning habitat because of its abundant gravel bars, overhanging banks, and vegetative shading. In addition to its unique qualities for sustaining fisheries on Hauser Lake and the Missouri River, this nominated area provides habitat for bald eagle, osprey, and numerous species of waterfowl, and excellent opportunities for wildlife observation and nature study.

The FLPMA mandates that important fish and wildlife resources be protected through special management attention that ACEC designations provide (Importance Criteria 3).

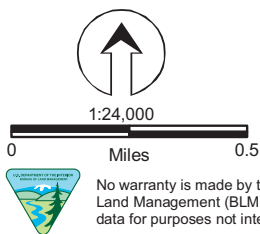
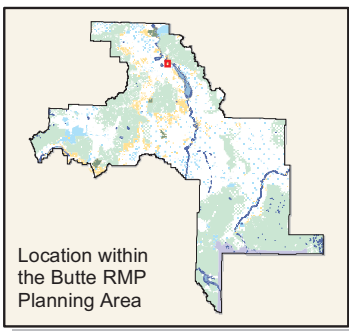
Findings

This nomination meets the relevance and importance criteria and will be carried forward as a potential ACEC.



Spokane Creek Potential ACEC

Lewis & Clark County



No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for use of data for purposes not intended by BLM.

- Wilderness Study Area (WSA)
- Potential Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)
- Butte Field Office Planning Area Boundary
- Rivers and Streams
- Interstates
- Roads
- County Boundaries
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Lands
- Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) Lands
- Private Lands
- State of Montana Lands
- USDA Forest Service Lands
- USDI Fish and Wildlife Service Lands

FIGURE 5

Location of Potential Area of Critical Environmental Concern
Spokane Creek
BLM, Butte Field Office
Butte RMP and EIS

5.9 Ringing Rocks

This internal nomination made by BLM specialists is depicted in **Figure 6**.

Description of Area/Nomination

The Ringing Rocks are located approximately four miles northeast of the town of Pipestone and Interstate 90. The nominated ACEC is about 160 acres of BLM-administered lands in Section 9, Township 2 North, Range 5 West, Montana Principal Meridian, Jefferson County. The ACEC encompasses an approximate one-acre open outcrop of weathered monzonite with a wide range of weathered boulders. These weathered blocks range from 3 to 13 feet. The rocks ring with bell-like tones when struck lightly with a stout stick or rock hammer. The rocks only ring in outcrop; hand samples broken off will not ring.

Relevance Criteria

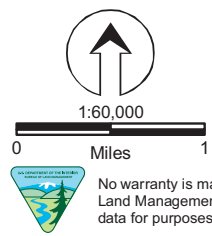
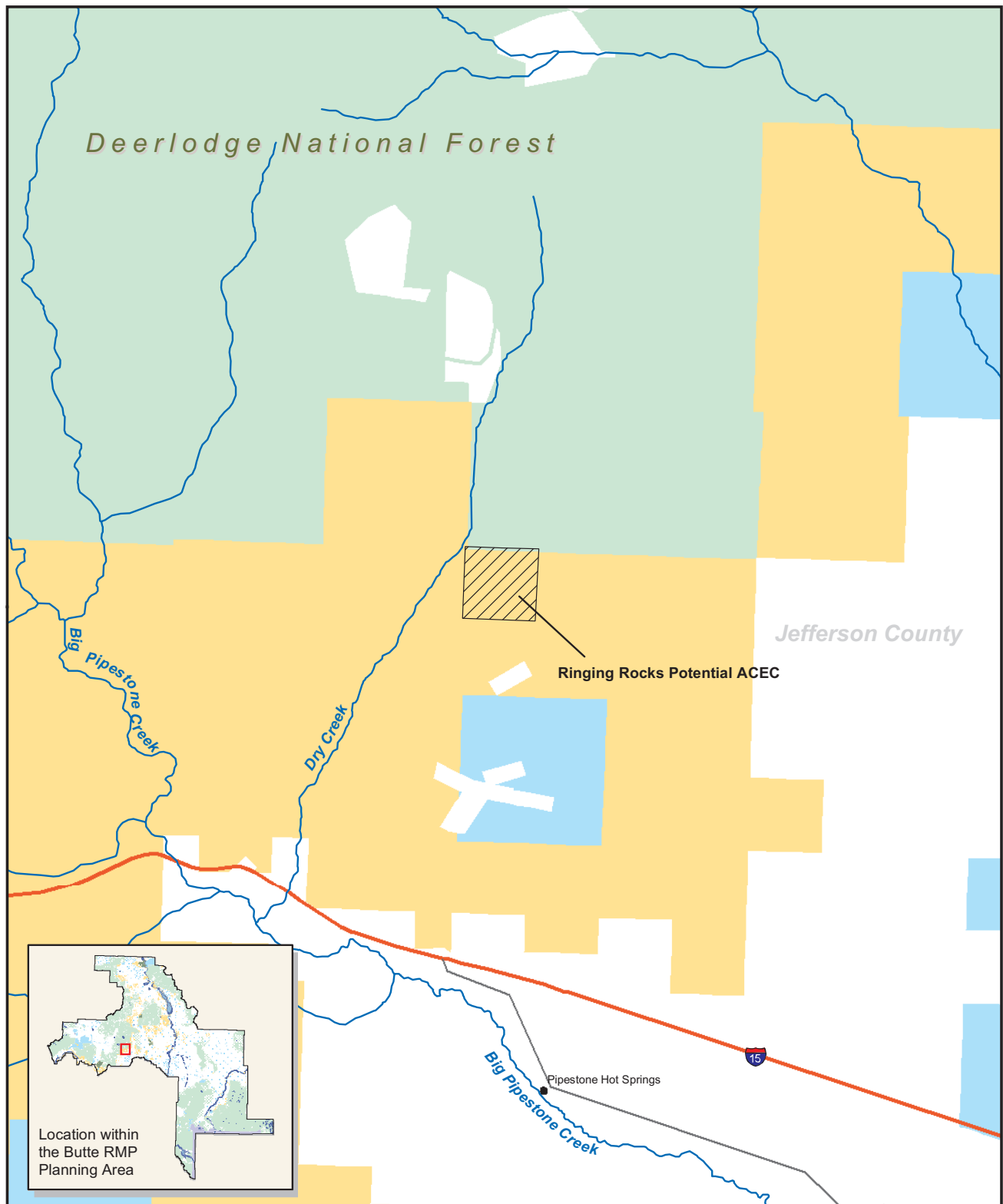
This area meets Relevance Criteria 3 for a rare geological feature. Ringing rocks are reportedly found throughout the world, but they are not common. The only other site where ringing rocks are found in the US is in Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

Importance Criteria

The geologic feature meets Importance Criteria 1 (more than locally significant distinctive geological feature) and 2 (rare and unique geological feature). The Ringing Rocks site is one of only two known sites in the continental US where rocks ring when struck, thus making this an extremely rare occurrence.

Findings

This nomination meets the relevance and importance criteria and will be carried forward as a potential ACEC.



- Wilderness Study Area (WSA)
- Potential Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)
- Butte Field Office Planning Area Boundary
- Rivers and Streams
- Interstates
- Roads
- County Boundaries
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Lands
- Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) Lands
- Private Lands
- State of Montana Lands
- USDA Forest Service Lands
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FIGURE 6
Location of Potential Area of Critical Environmental Concern Ringing Rocks BLM, Butte Field Office Butte RMP and EIS

5.10 Humbug Spires ACEC Nomination

This internal nomination by BLM specialists is depicted in Figure 7.

Description of Area/Nomination

This potential ACEC includes the majority of both the Humbug Spires original Primitive Area designated in 1972 and the recommended wilderness Instant Study Area that was finalized in 1981. The potential ACEC totals about 8,400 acres of public land. The area is located in Silver Bow County in southwestern Montana, approximately 15 miles south of Butte and four miles east of Divide and Interstate 15. The area is accessible from I-15 via a primitive road from the Divide interchange and an improved gravel road from the Moose Creek interchange that leads to a developed trailhead.

The Humbug Spires potential ACEC is a highly natural and pristine area. The majority of the area is forested with dense stands of Douglas-fir and lodgepole pine. Small areas of old growth Douglas-fir trees exist within numerous drainage bottoms. Riparian areas of willows, dogwood, alder, aspen, and cottonwoods are scattered throughout the streams and upper tributaries. The topography is extremely diverse with numerous ridges and dissecting drainages. Geologically, there are hundreds of large granite spires throughout the area. About ten of these light gray spires are between 300 and 600 feet tall. Moose Creek is the primary perennial stream bisecting the area. Moose Creek supports small populations of brook, rainbow, and cutthroat trout. Important big-game species include elk, mule deer, black bear, moose, and bighorn sheep. Other wildlife species common to the area are mountain lion, coyote, fox, weasel, bobcat, beaver, squirrels, rabbits, grouse, and several species of raptors.

Relevance Criteria

The natural characteristics of the Humbug Spires area meet Relevance criteria 1, 2, and 3. The natural and diverse topography, vegetation, streams, and rock spires of the area provide outstanding scenic values that are significant. The Visual Resource Management Classification of this area is Class 1 which is highest and most protective BLM rating possible. These characteristics meet Criterion 1.

The area provides essential habitat for maintaining both plant and animal diversity, thus meeting relevance criterion 2. In addition the area provides active habitat for the following Threatened/Endangered/Sensitive species: Canada lynx, bald eagle, Northern goshawk, peregrine falcon, black-backed woodpecker, three-toed woodpecker, Townsend's big-eared bat, fringed myotis, long-legged myotis and the long-eared myotis.

The aquatic and riparian plant communities associated with Moose Creek and its upper tributaries provide a natural functioning system. Sensitive plant species found within the area include Idaho sedge and Sapphire rockcress. These features meet relevance Criterion 3.

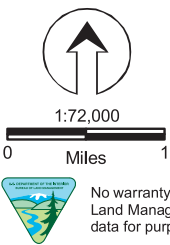
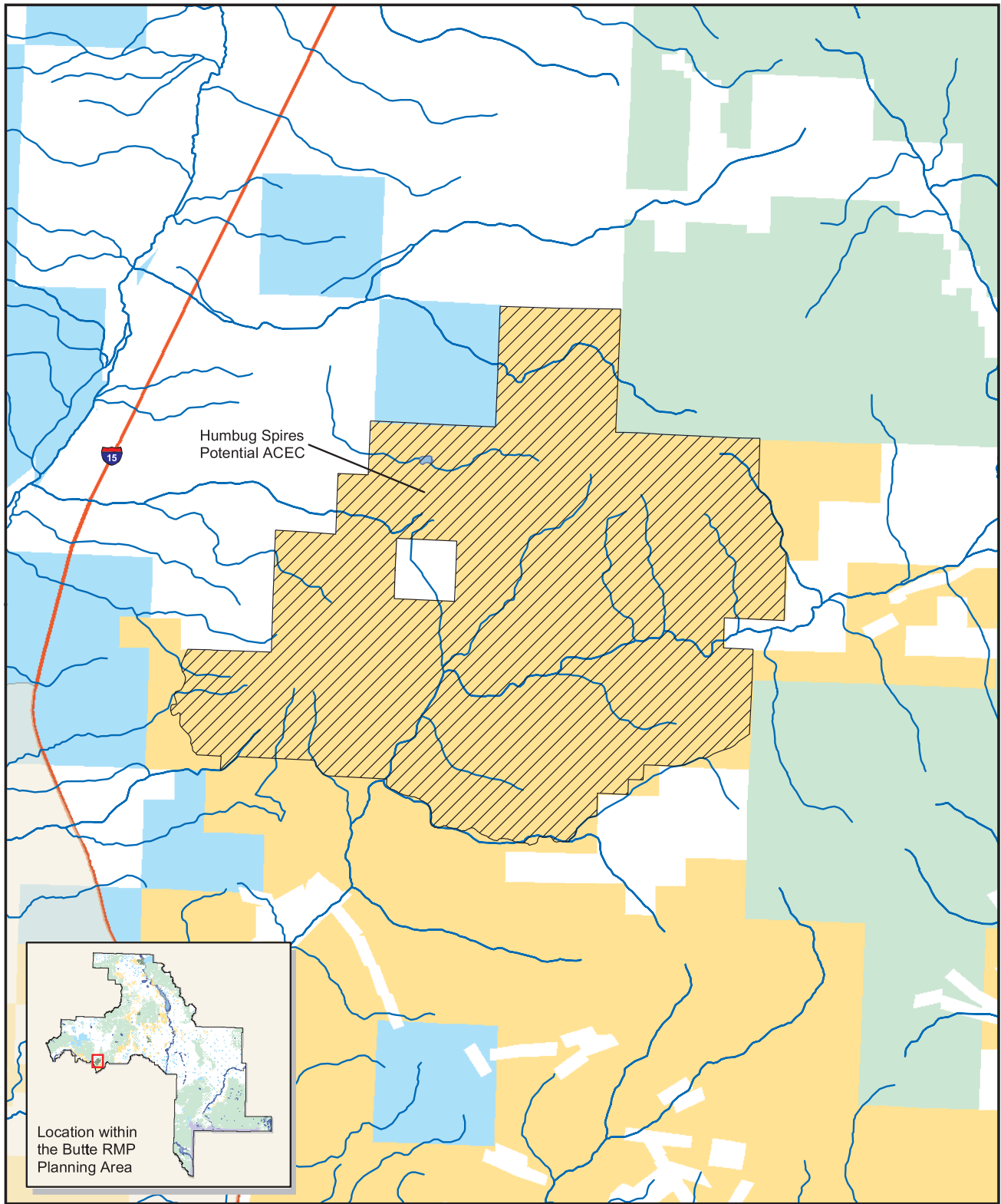
Importance Criteria

The above resource values are substantially significant and meet Importance Criteria 1, 2, and 3.

The abundance, size, and quality of the granite spires provide outstanding rock climbing opportunities that are regionally significant. Levels of difficulty range from beginner to expert. The overall availability, setting and diversity of climbing experiences provided in the area is exceptional and significantly important. These qualities meet importance Criterion 1.

This area has qualities that are sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, unique and vulnerable that makes it worthy of special management and protection. These qualities are due to the fact that it is highly natural in character and provides important habitat for several big-game species as well as Threatened/Endangered/Sensitive species of both plants and animals. These characteristics meet importance Criterion 2.

Due to the outstanding qualities of scenery, naturalness, solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities the area has been both designated as a Primitive Area as well as recommended for Wilderness designation. These qualities meet importance Criterion 3.



- Potential Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)
- Butte Field Office Planning Area Boundary
- Rivers and Streams
- Interstates
- Roads
- County Boundaries
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Lands
- Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) Lands
- Private Lands
- State of Montana Lands
- USDA Forest Service Lands
- USDI Fish and Wildlife Service Lands

FIGURE 7
Location of Potential Area of Critical Environmental Concern
Humbug Spires
BLM, Butte Field Office
Butte RMP and EIS

6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A total of ten nominated areas and existing ACECs were evaluated. These included five external nominations (made by other agencies or the public), three internal nominations (made by BLM specialists), one recommendation from the Dillon Management Framework Plan (BLM 1979), and one existing ACEC. Five areas totaling approximately 87,700 acres meet the relevance and importance criteria and will be carried forward as potential ACECs (**Table 1**).

Various alternatives in the Draft RMP will recommend the areas for designation as ACECs (or continued designation in the case of Sleeping Giant ACEC) if special management is required to protect the relevant and important values. Areas found not to meet the relevance and importance criteria are not being carried forward as potential ACECs.

**Table 1
Potential Areas of Critical Environmental Concern**

| Potential ACEC | Size (acres) | Relevance Criteria Met | Importance Criteria Met |
|---|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Elkhorn Mountains | 67,500 | 1, 2 | 1, 2, 3 |
| Sleeping Giant ACEC (existing designation) | 11,609 | 1, 2 | 1, 2 |
| Spokane Creek | 14 | 2, 3 | 1, 2, 3 |
| Ringing Rocks | 160 | 3 | 1, 2 |
| Humbug Spires | 8,400 | 1, 2, 3 | 1, 2, 3 |

REFERENCES

- BLM (US Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management). 1979. Management Framework Plan, Dillon Summary, Montana. BLM, Montana. September 1979.
- _____. 1984. Headwaters Resource Area Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement, Butte District, Montana. BLM, Butte District, Montana.
- _____. 1988a. Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. BLM Manual 1613. Rel.1-1541. BLM, Washington, DC. September 29, 1988.
- _____. 1988b. Sleeping Giant ACEC Management Plan. Butte District Office and Headwaters Resource Area, Montana. December 28, 1988.
- _____. 1991. Sleeping Giant and Sheep Creek Wilderness Study/Environmental Impact Statement – Final. BLM, Butte District Office, Montana.
- _____. 2004. Montana Westside Recreation Sites, BLM Recreation Sites in western Montana. Internet Web site: <http://www.mt.blm.gov/bdo/pages/recsites.html>. Accessed on March 26 and May 6, 2004.
- Federal Register. 2003. Notice of Intent To Prepare a Resource Management Plan for the Butte Field Office and Associated Environmental Impact Statement. Vol. 68, No. 244, page 70833. December 19, 2003.

GLOSSARY

AREA OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN (ACEC). An area established through the planning process, as provided in FLPMA, where special management attention is required (when such areas are developed or used or where no development is required) to protect and prevent irreparable damage to important historic, cultural, or scenic values; or to fish and wildlife resources or other natural systems or processes; or to protect life and afford safety from natural hazards.

IDENTIFICATION CRITERIA. To be considered as a potential ACEC and analyzed in RMP alternatives, an area must meet the criteria of relevance and importance, as established and defined in 43 CFR 1610.7-2.

RELEVANCE. An area meets the relevance criterion if it contains one or more of the following:

1. A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value (including but not limited to rare or sensitive archeological resources and religious or cultural resources important to native Americans);
2. A fish and wildlife resource (including but not limited to habitat for endangered, sensitive, or threatened species, or habitat essential for maintaining species diversity);
3. A natural process or system (including but not limited to endangered, sensitive, or threatened plant species; rare, endemic, or relict plants or plant communities that are terrestrial, aquatic, or riparian; or rare geological features); and/or
4. Natural hazards (including but not limited to areas of avalanche, dangerous flooding, landslides, unstable soils, seismic activity, or dangerous cliffs). A hazard caused by human action may meet the relevance criteria if it is determined through the RMP process that it has become part of a natural process.

IMPORTANCE. The value, resource, system, process, or hazard described above must have substantial significance and values in order to satisfy the importance criteria. This generally means that the value, resource, system, process, or hazard is characterized by one or more of the following:

1. Has more than locally significant qualities that give it special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern, especially compared to any similar resource;
2. Has qualities or circumstances that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, unique, endangered, threatened, or vulnerable to adverse change;
3. Has been recognized as warranting protection in order to satisfy national priority concerns or to carry out the mandates of FLPMA;
4. Has qualities that warrant highlighting in order to satisfy public or management concerns about safety and public welfare; and/or
5. Poses a significant threat to human life and safety or to property.

PLANNING AREA. The geographical area for which land use and resource management plans are developed and maintained.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN (RMP). A land use plan that establishes land use allocations, multiple-use guidelines, and management objectives for a given planning area. The BLM has used the RMP planning system since about 1980.