

## APPENDIX H

### AREAS OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

This appendix provides a comprehensive assessment of the areas nominated by the public and BLM as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) and the evaluation of those nominations. A total of 31 nominations were received (see Table H.1). During the internal review of the preliminary draft RMP/EIS and the public comment period on the draft RMP/EIS BLM received additional ACEC nominations and new information on current nominations. To maintain BLM's planning schedule and commitment to the public we could not include additional nominations to this RMP/EIS. If additional nominations or new information shows a nomination qualifies for further consideration, per the ACEC criteria, it will be considered through an amendment to the Judith Valley Phillips RMP/EIS.

The following additional ACEC nomination were received.

1. Mixed Grass Prairie in north Valley County
2. Saddle Butte in the Little Rocky Mountains
3. Old Scraggy Peak (cultural resources) in the Little Rocky Mountains
4. Little Rocky Mountains.

New information was received and evaluated for the following nominations. The evaluation is included in this Appendix.

1. Joiner Coulee (Nomination #11)
2. Woody Island Coulee (Nomination #12)
3. Mountain Plover Complex (Nomination #20)

#### ACEC Evaluation Process

**Purpose:** Provide policy and procedural guidance on identification, evaluation, and designation of ACECs for resource management plans and amendment completion.

**Objectives:** Designate ACEC. Alert agency of significant values and resources in ACECs which must be accommodated during future actions near or within an ACEC.

**Policy:** FLPMA requires that priority shall be given to the designation and protection of ACECs. BLM will give precedence to the identification, evaluation, and designation of areas which require "special management attentions".

#### ACEC Characteristics

**Relevance:** An area meets the "relevance" criteria if it contains one or more of the following:

1. Significant historic, cultural, or scenic values including rare or sensitive archeological resources and religious or cultural resources important to Native Americans.
2. Fish and wildlife resources including habitat for endangered, sensitive or threatened species, or habitat essential for maintaining species diversity.
3. Natural process or systems including endangered, sensitive, or threatened, or sensitive species; rare, endemic, or relic plants or plant communities which are terrestrial, aquatic, or riparian, or rare geological features.
4. Natural hazards including avalanche, dangerous flooding, landslides, unstable soils, seismic activity, or dangerous cliffs.

**Importance:** Value, resource, system, procedures, or hazard described above must have substantial significance and values characterized by one or more of the following.

1. More than locally significant qualities.
2. Qualities or circumstances that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, unique, endangered, threatened, or vulnerable to adverse change.
3. Recognized as warranting protection to satisfy national priority concerns or to carry out the mandates of FLPMA.
4. Qualities which warrant highlighting to satisfy public or management concerns about safety and public welfare.
5. Poses a significant threat to human life and safety or to property.

Areas To Be Considered:

1. Existing ACECs are subject to reconsideration and must be reviewed.
2. Areas recommended for ACEC consideration.
  - a. External Nominations: Any public (group or person) or other agency may nominate. Can be submitted anytime. No formal or special procedures required.
  - b. Internal Nominations: No constraints, except they must appear to meet the relevance and importance criteria.
3. Areas identified at any time through inventory and monitoring.
4. Adjacent designations of other federal and state agencies must be reviewed.

Data On Relevance and Importance:

An interdisciplinary team evaluates each area to determine if it meets both the relevance and importance criteria. Evidence of relevance and importance may be secured from BLM or non-BLM sources, or from professional judgments, written comments and expert opinions, or various listings.

If an area does not meet the criteria, analysis supporting that conclusion is incorporated in the RMP/EIS and the nomination is not considered as a potential ACEC. If an area does meet both the relevance and importance criteria the nomination is a potential ACEC.

TABLE N.1. ACEC NOMINATIONS

<u>Name</u>	<u>Nominated by</u>	<u>Reason</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Relv</u>	<u>Impt</u>	<u>Summary</u>
1) Burnt Lodge WSA	USFWS-CMR	Adjacent to CMR	13,730	Yes	No	Unqualified
2) Two Calf WSA	USFWS-CMR	Adjacent to CMR	15,000	No	No	Unqualified
3) Antelope WSA	USFWS-CMR	Adjacent to CMR	12,350	Yes	No	Unqualified
4) Azure Cave	Dwain Prellwitz Audubon Council	Bat Population	479	Yes	Yes	Qualified
5) Rock Creek (VRA)	Dwain Prellwitz	Wildlife and T&E	12,800	Yes	No	Unqualified
6) Itchpair Slough	Dwain Prellwitz	Wetlands Complex	450	Yes	No	Unqualified
7) Old Scraggy Peak	Dwain Prellwitz	Historic Landmark	2,080	No	No	Unqualified
8) Shed Lake	Dwain Prellwitz	Waterfowl	691	No	No	Unqualified
9) Rock Creek Canyon	Nature Conservancy	Endemic Plant	80	No	No	Unqualified
10) Beaver Creek	Nature Conservancy	Unique Vegetation	3,830	No	No	Unqualified
11) Joiner Coulee	Nature Conservancy	Unique Vegetation	4,640	No	No	Unqualified
12) Woody Island	Nature Conservancy	Unique Vegetation	4,500	No	No	Unqualified
13) Acid Shale-Pine	Nature Conservancy	Unique Vegetation	1,500	Yes	Yes	Qualified
14) Judith Landing	Rod Pratt	Riparian Community	NA	No	No	Unqualified
15) Lidstone Ferry	R. L. Brownson	Family Heritage	NA	No	No	Unqualified
16) Prairie Dog #1	Dwain Prellwitz	Black-Footed Ferret	93,376	Yes	Yes	Qualified
17) Prairie Dog #2	Dwain Prellwitz	Black-Footed Ferret	17,088	Yes	Yes	Qualified
18) Prairie Dog #3	Dwain Prellwitz	Black-Footed Ferret	10,688	No	No	Unqualified
19) Prairie Dog #4	Dwain Prellwitz	Black-Footed Ferret	51,840	No	No	Unqualified
20) Mountain Plover	Dwain Prellwitz	Candidate Species	9,600	Yes	Yes	Qualified
21) Lower Judith River	Audubon Council	Riparian	NA	No	No	Unqualified
22) Anderson Bridge	Wilderness Assoc	Scenic, Wilderness	NA	No	No	Unqualified
23) Square Butte OMA	BLM	Scenic, Wildlife	1,947	Yes	Yes	Qualified
24) Sage Grouse Habitat	BLM	Sage Grouse	NA	No	No	Unqualified
25) Prairie Dog/Ferret	BLM	Black-Footed Ferret	NA	No	No	Unqualified
26) Waterfowl/Wetlands	BLM	Waterfowl	NA	No	No	Unqualified
27) Prairie Riparian	BLM	Riparian	NA	No	Yes	Unqualified
28) Collar Gulch	BLM	Westslope Cutthroat	1,160	Yes	Yes	Qualified
29) Big Bend	BLM	Cultural Resources	38,707	Yes	Yes	Qualified
30) Bitter Creek WSA	BLM	Scenic Values	26,000	Yes	No	Unqualified
31) Moccasins/Judith	BLM	Scenic	4,566	Yes	Yes	Qualified

PUBLIC NOMINATIONS

1. BURNT LODGE WSA ("Larb Hills"): Nominated by USFWS-CMR. The Service has comparable federal land and resource values on the adjacent Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge which the Service manages and does not want jeopardized by non-conforming activities on the nominated BLM-administered area. The visual qualities found on BLM-administered land in this portion of the Missouri River Breaks compliment the visual qualities on the adjoining

CMR National Wildlife Refuge.

Relevance Criteria: This nomination meets Relevance Criteria 1. The Burnt Lodge area (13,700 acres) contains a variety of significant scenic values. A visual resource team completed a 1977 inventory that identified both Class A and B scenic zones within this area. The rugged Badlands terrain with its exposed sandstone, sheer walls, and castle-like formations in a forested landscape presents an exceptional view for the visitor. Class A and B scenic rating and VRM Class II rating were designated in the Missouri Breaks Grazing EIS completed in August 1979.

Importance Criteria: This nomination does not meet Importance Criteria 1 through 5. The Burnt Lodge WSA contains significant visual qualities but only on a local basis. The landscape features are typical of the Missouri River Breaks.

Summary: The Burnt Lodge ACEC nomination (13,700 acres) meets Relevance Criteria 1 with significant visual values but does not meet any of the Importance Criteria. Burnt Lodge WSA is not recommended for further consideration as an ACEC.

2. TWO CALF WSA: Nominated by USFWS-CMR. Nominated for the same values as the Burnt Lodge WSA.

Relevance Criteria: Does not qualify for any criteria because the essential resources are not present.

Importance Criteria: Does not qualify for any criteria because the essential resources are not present.

Summary: This nomination is a WSA and was recommended by BLM as not suitable for inclusion in the Wilderness System. The area is similar to other Missouri River Breaks habitats. Based on the relevance and importance criteria this nomination is not recommended for further consideration as an ACEC.

3. ANTELOPE CREEK WSA: Nominated by USFWS-CMR. Nominated for the same values as the Burnt Lodge WSA.

Relevance Criteria: This nomination meets Relevance Criteria 1. The Antelope Creek WSA (9,600 acres) possesses significant scenic values. A visual resource team completed an inventory in 1977 that categorized the area as having a Class A scenic value. The area contains excellent visual qualities. The heavily eroded, steep slopes of exposed shale divided by numerous narrow, finger-like tree-covered ridges adds to the view.

Importance Criteria: This nomination does not meet Importance Criteria 1 through 5. The Antelope Creek WSA possesses significant visual qualities but only on a local basis. The landscape features are typical of the Missouri River Breaks.

Summary: The Antelope Creek WSA nomination (9,600 acres) meets Relevance Criteria 1 with significant visual values. It does not meet any of the Importance Criteria. This nomination is not recommended for further consideration as an ACEC.

4. AZURE CAVE: Nominated by Dwain Prellwitz and the Montana Audubon Council. The primary values for which this cave was nominated are: critical bat hibernaculum of national significance, and its general hazard to public safety.

Relevance Criteria: This nomination meets Relevance Criteria 2 and 3. Azure cave was surveyed in 1979 ("Caves of Montana", N.P. Campbell, 1978. Report available at the Lewistown District Office) by Chester et. al. They identified this as one of two known caves in the Northwest that contains hibernating bats. None of the bat species are known to be rare or endangered but a complete survey of the bats by a professional bat expert was recommended and is needed to assess the significance of the cave. Because of the cave importance as a hibernaculum the report also recommended that entry by the public take place only from June 15 to August 15 each year (Chester et al., 1979).

The cave is hazardous to the general public and only experienced cave explorers should be allowed in it (Chester et al., 1979) by permit.

Importance Criteria: This nomination meets Importance Criteria 1 and 2. The cave has national significance because of the bat hibernaculum. It is one of only two in the Pacific Northwest, and possibly the northern-most hibernaculum in the United States (Chester et al., 1979).

The gate and restrictions that the BLM placed on the cave should be left intact to protect the cave and bat population.

Summary: Azure Cave meets Relevance and Importance Criteria and is recommended for further consideration as an ACEC.

5. ROCK CREEK (Valley County): Nominated by Dwain Prellwitz and the BLM. Resources for which it was nominated are: unique topography found nowhere else in Valley County; outstanding scenic values; falcon nesting habitat for American kestrel, prairie falcon, merlin, and potential peregrine falcon habitat; riparian habitat; ORV damage to trails and slopes; "walk-in" hunting area; golden eagle nesting habitat; potential as a small "Birds of Prey Natural Area"; and trophy mule deer hunting area.

Relevance Criteria: This nomination meets Relevance Criteria 1. The area contains outstanding scenic values. It received a 23 rating of a possible 33 for scenic quality which places it in a Class A category. This is the highest visual rating in the Valley RA.

Importance Criteria: This nomination does not meet any Importance Criteria. The only importance values that could apply are fish and wildlife resources under Criteria 2. Rock Creek possesses potential peregrine falcon habitat, an endangered species. No specific nesting areas or adequate prey base have been identified at this time and the canyon is not currently recommended for peregrine reintroduction. Rock Creek, like other drainages in northern Valley County, supports a wide variety of species.

Two other nearby areas have similar scenic values: Eagle Nest Coulee and Frenchman Creek. The Rock Creek Canyon area is considered locally significant.

Summary: The Rock Creek Canyon area meets the Relevance Criteria 1 with significant scenic values and wildlife resources, but is considered only locally important. It does not meet both Relevance and Importance criteria and is not recommended for further consideration as an ACEC.

6. ITCHPAIR SLOUGH: Nominated by Dwain Prellwitz for fish and wildlife resources. Grable Lake and Itchpair Slough are part of a significant waterfowl complex of 30 reservoirs and numerous potholes located in northwestern Valley County. Itchpair Slough occupies approximately 450 acres administered by BLM. The area is critical habitat for waterfowl and shorebirds.

Relevance Criteria: Does not qualify for any criteria because the essential resources are not present.

Importance Criteria: Does not qualify for any criteria because the essential resources are not present.

Summary: The major benefits of designation would be to provide pairing and nesting habitat for declining waterfowl numbers and protect any important cultural sites. Itchpair Slough does not produce a significant number of waterfowl to warrant protection under an ACEC designation. This nomination is not recommended for further consideration as an ACEC.

7. OLD SCRAGGY PEAK: Nominated by Dwain Prellwitz for its prominence in the Little Rocky Mountains.

Relevance Criteria: This nomination does not meet Relevance Criteria 1 through 4. Old Scraggy Peak does not contain any historic, cultural, or scenic values; habitat for endangered, sensitive, or threatened fish and wildlife species; unique natural plant process or systems; or natural hazards beyond local significance.

Importance Criteria: This nomination does not meet Importance Criteria 1 through 5. Old Scraggy Peak does not contain any qualities that are fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, unique, endangered, threatened or vulnerable to adverse change; needing protection to satisfy national priority concerns or to carry out the mandates of FLPMA; does not satisfy public or management concerns about safety and public welfare or contain any significant hazards to public safety. Old Scraggy Peak has local significance being the highest peak in Phillips County.

Summary: Old Scraggy Peak does not meet any relevance and importance criteria. There are no known significant historic, cultural, or scenic values, habitat for endangered, sensitive or threatened wildlife species, unique natural systems,

or natural hazards associated with the peak. It has local significance. This nomination is not recommended for further consideration as an ACEC.

8. **SHED LAKE:** Nominated by Dwain Prellwitz. Nominated because it is the most productive waterfowl area in Phillips County.

Relevance Criteria: This nomination does not meet Relevance Criteria 1 through 4. Shed Lake is a natural lake that is a very productive waterfowl area. A Fish and Wildlife Service biologist in the early 1970's stated that Shed Lake on a per-acre basis, is the most productive waterfowl area in Phillips County. The lake is not unique as a natural waterfowl production area. The lake does not contain historic, cultural, or scenic values; habitat for endangered, sensitive or threatened species; unique natural systems; or natural hazards beyond local significance.

Importance Criteria: This nomination does not meet Importance Criteria 1 through 5. Shed Lake is locally significant. The lake does not contain qualities that are significant, unique, endangered, rare, threatened or vulnerable. The area does not contain any significant hazards to public safety.

Summary: Shed Lake does not meet the relevance and importance criteria as an ACEC nomination. This nomination is not recommended for further consideration as an ACEC.

9. **ROCK CREEK CANYON (Snowy Mountains):** Nominated by The Nature Conservancy. Nominated for its unique and rich plant communities interspersed with limestone outcrops.

Relevance Criteria: This nomination does not meet Relevance Criteria because the essential resources are not present.

Importance Criteria: This nomination does not meet Importance Criteria because the essential resources are not present.

Summary: The vegetative species list provided by The Nature Conservancy for Rock Creek Canyon was used as a basis for additional inventory for this botanical community by BLM staff. Half-Moon Canyon on the Lewis and Clark National Forest on the east side of the Big Snowies has similar botanical communities. This botanical community is not unique to Rock Creek. The majority of the vegetation type is found on Lewis and Clark National Forest.

The nominated area, although not recommended as an ACEC, will not be logged, the land will remain in federal ownership, and it will not be leased for livestock grazing. This nomination is not recommended for further consideration as an ACEC.

10. **BEAVER CREEK PONDS:** Nominated by The Nature Conservancy. Nominated for its unique aquatic plant communities.

Relevance Criteria: This nomination does not meet Relevance Criteria 1 through 4. The Beaver Creek Ponds do not contain any historic, cultural, or scenic values; habitat for endangered, sensitive, or threatened fish and wildlife species; unique natural plant process or systems; or natural hazards beyond local significance. These ponds are common from the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation to Beaver Creek throughout the bentonite area of south Phillips County. Plants identified by The Nature Conservancy are not listed as endangered, threatened, or sensitive species by the Fish and Wildlife Service or the State.

Importance Criteria: This nomination does not meet Importance Criteria 1 through 5. The Beaver Creek Ponds do not contain qualities that are fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, unique, endangered, threatened or vulnerable to adverse change; needing protection to satisfy national priority concerns or to carry out the mandates of FLPMA; does not satisfy public or management concerns about safety and public welfare or contain any nationally significant hazards to public safety. These ponds are ephemeral. The BLM has developed many of the ponds by placing permanent pits and waterfowl nesting islands in the basins.

Summary: The Beaver Creek Ponds do not meet the relevance and importance criteria. These ponds are common from the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation to Beaver Creek throughout the bentonite area of south Phillips County. Plant species identified by The Nature Conservancy are not endangered, threatened, or sensitive. These are ephemeral ponds. This nomination is not recommended for further consideration as an ACEC.

11. JOINER COULEE: Nominated by The Nature Conservancy. This area was nominated for its unique aquatic botanical communities.

Relevance Criteria: This nomination does not meet Relevance Criteria 1 through 4. Joiner Coulee does not contain significant historic, cultural, or scenic values; habitat for endangered, sensitive, or threatened fish and wildlife species; unique natural plant process or systems; or natural hazards. The Joiner Coulee potholes are common in north Phillips County. The plants that The Nature Conservancy has identified are not listed as endangered, threatened, or as candidates species by the Fish and Wildlife Service or the State.

Importance Criteria: This nomination does not meet Importance Criteria 1 through 5. Joiner Coulee does not contain any qualities that are significant, fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, unique, endangered, threatened or vulnerable to adverse change; needing protection to satisfy national priority concerns or to carry out the mandates of FLPMA; does not satisfy public or management concerns about safety and public welfare or contain any nationally significant hazards to public safety. Joiner Coulee is not unique to the area.

Summary: Joiner Coulee does not meet the relevance and importance criteria. No plants identified by The Nature Conservancy are considered endangered, threatened, or sensitive. This nomination is not recommended for further consideration as an ACEC.

12. WOODY ISLAND COULEE: Nominated by The Nature Conservancy. Nominated for its unique botanical communities.

Relevance Criteria: This nomination does not meet Relevance Criteria 1 through 4. Woody Island Coulee does not contain any significant historic, cultural, or scenic values; habitat for endangered, sensitive, or threatened fish and wildlife species; unique natural plant process or systems; or natural hazards. The species of plants that the Nature Conservancy has identified are not listed as endangered, threatened, or sensitive species by the Fish and Wildlife Service or the State.

Importance Criteria: This nomination does not meet Importance Criteria 1 through 5. The Woody Island Coulee area does not contain any qualities that are significant, fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, unique, endangered, threatened or vulnerable to adverse change; needing protection to satisfy national priority concerns or to carry out the mandates of FLPMA; does not satisfy public or management concerns about safety and public welfare or contain any nationally significant hazards to public safety. The area is unique in that it possesses habitat for a potentially large number of raptors. The area is locally significant.

Summary: Woody Island Coulee does not meet the relevance and importance criteria. This nomination is not recommended for further consideration as an ACEC.

13. ACID SHALE-PINE FOREST: Nominated by The Nature Conservancy. Nominated for its unique and endemic botanical community and fragile soils.

Relevance Criteria: The nomination qualifies for Relevance Criteria 3 because the War Horse area is an unique ecosystem which is composed primarily of endemic terrestrial plants.

Importance Criteria: The War Horse area qualifies for Importance Criteria 1 and 2 and, is a natural ecosystem which has an exemplary and unique plant community and fragile soils.

Summary: This unique plant community is limited to relatively few acres in the planning area. This nomination qualifies for further consideration as an ACEC.

14. JUDITH LANDING CAMPGROUND: Nominated by Mr. Rod Pratt for its remnant riparian community along the Missouri River.

Relevance Criteria: Does not qualify for any criteria.

Importance Criteria: Does not qualify for any criteria.

Summary: This is a private campground, leased by MDFWP during the summer, and administered by agreement by BLM. It is privately owned and can not be further considered as a potential ACEC.

15. LIDSTONE FERRY SITE: Nominated by Mrs. Ramona Lidstone Brownson.

Relevance Criteria: Does not qualify for any criteria.

Importance Criteria: Does not qualify for any criteria.

Summary: This nomination was not carried forward in the evaluation process because of the private ownership involved in the nomination area. The south side of the ferry operation is on private land, and the north is on BLM land.

16. PRAIRIE DOG COMPLEX No. 1: Nominated by Dwain Prellwitz. Nominated for its extremely diverse wildlife populations including candidate ESA species mountain plover, and ferruginous hawk. It would serve as potential black-footed ferret and swift fox reintroduction habitat.

Relevance Criteria: This nomination meets Relevance Criteria 2. Complex 1 is an important group of prairie dog colonies that contain sensitive wildlife species such as the mountain plover, burrowing owl and the ferruginous hawk. This area along with colonies on the CMR may be used to introduce the swift fox. This complex and another (Complex 2) are being considered for the reintroduction of the black-footed ferret. This area has national significance because it is only one of about 10 sites that are being considered for the reintroduction of the ferret. The Complex is 93,376 acres.

Importance Criteria: This nomination meets Importance Criteria 1 through 3. This complex is unique because it does contain a large number of burrowing owls, mountain plovers, ferruginous hawks and about 70 other wildlife species (Reading et al, 1989). It also is part of the area identified for the reintroduction of the black-footed ferret by the Montana Black-footed Ferret Working Group. This area is nationally significant for the potential reintroduction of the black-footed ferret.

Summary: Complex 1 meets the relevance and importance criteria. This complex is unique because it contains a large number of sensitive and ESA wildlife (burrowing owls, ferruginous hawks, and mountain plover). It is habitat for about 75 wildlife species including those identified above. This nomination qualifies for further consideration as an ACEC and will be addressed in the Prairie Dog and Black-Footed Ferret Management issue in this RMP/EIS.

17. PRAIRIE DOG COMPLEX No. 2: Nominated by Dwain Prellwitz. Nominated for same wildlife values as for No. 1 above.

Relevance Criteria: This nomination meets Relevance Criteria 2. Complex 2 is an important group of prairie dog colonies that contain sensitive wildlife species such as the mountain plover, burrowing owl and the ferruginous hawk. The area along with colonies on the CMR may be used to introduce the swift fox. This complex and another (Complex 1) are being considered for the reintroduction of the black-footed ferret. This area has national significance because it is only one of about 10 sites that are being considered for the reintroduction of the ferret. This Complex is 17,088 acres.

Importance Criteria: This nomination meets Importance Criteria 1 through 3. Complex 2 is unique because it does contain a large number of burrowing owls and mountain plovers and ferruginous hawks and about 70 other wildlife species (Reading et al, 1989). It also is part of the area identified of the reintroduction of the black-footed ferret by the Montana Black-footed Ferret Working Group.

Summary: Complex 2 meets the relevance and importance criteria. This nomination qualifies for further consideration as an ACEC and will be addressed in the Prairie Dog and Black-Footed Ferret Management issue in this RMP.

18. PRAIRIE DOG COMPLEX No. 3: Nominated by Dwain Prellwitz. Nominated for the same wildlife values as Complex 1.

Relevance Criteria: This nomination does not meet Relevance Criteria 1 through 4. Complex 3 is mostly on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. Very few prairie dog colonies are found outside of the reservation. Most of these colonies do not contain sensitive wildlife species such as the mountain plover, burrowing owl and the ferruginous hawk. However,

this complex is being considered for the reintroduction of the black-footed ferret. Because most of this complex is on the reservation it should be evaluated by the Tribal Government and not by the BLM. Land outside the reservation contains no significant historic, cultural, or scenic values; habitat for endangered, sensitive, rare or threatened species; unique natural systems; or natural hazards. This Complex is 10,688 acres.

Importance Criteria: This nomination does not meet Importance Criteria 1 through 5. The BLM has very little information on sensitive species in this complex. Very few observations have been made of the mountain plover, burrowing owl or ferruginous hawk. The area does not contain any qualities that are significant, unique, endangered, rare, threatened or vulnerable. The area does not contain any significant hazards to the public safety.

Summary: Complex 3 does not meet the relevance and importance criteria. This complex is largely on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. Few prairie dog colonies are found outside the reservation. These colonies do not contain the sensitive wildlife species as do complexes 1 and 2. This complex is being considered for reintroduction of the black-footed ferret. The BLM-administered land pattern is very broken, and has a bearing on possible wildlife management as for sensitive species. There are few data for the area, and few observations of sensitive species have been made. This nomination is not recommended for further consideration as an ACEC.

19. PRAIRIE DOG COMPLEX No. 4: Nominated by Dwain Prellwitz. Nominated for the same wildlife values as Complex 1.

Relevance Criteria: This nomination does not meet Relevance Criteria 1 through 4. Complex 4 is a very small complex of prairie dog colonies that contain sensitive wildlife species such as the mountain plover, burrowing owl and the ferruginous hawk. Only a small number of observations of the above sensitive species have been recorded. Most of the prairie dog colonies are on private or state land and are being actively poisoned. The area does not contain any significant historic, cultural, or scenic values; habitat for endangered, sensitive, rare, or threatened species; unique natural systems; or natural hazards. There is nothing that is unique for special management of the area. This Complex is 51,840 acres.

Importance Criteria: This nomination does not meet Importance Criteria 1 through 5. This complex does not contain any qualities that are significant, unique, endangered, rare, threatened or vulnerable. The area does not contain any significant hazards to public safety.

Summary: This complex is largely on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. Few prairie dog colonies are found outside the reservation. These colonies do not contain the sensitive wildlife species as do complexes 1 and 2. This complex is being considered for reintroduction of the black-footed ferret. The BLM-administered land pattern is very broken, and has a bearing on possible wildlife management as for sensitive species. There are few data for the area, and few observations of sensitive species have been made. Complex 4 does not meet the relevance and importance criteria. It does not qualify for further consideration as an ACEC.

20. MOUNTAIN PLOVER COMPLEX: Nominated by Dwain Prellwitz. Nominated for the mountain plover (ESA candidate specie) habitat values.

<p><u>Relevance Criteria:</u> This area meets Criteria 2. The area provides habitat for the mountain plover and is not associated with black-tailed prairie dogs. This is the natural habitat of the plover and not biologically created by prairie dogs. The plover is a species of special concern to the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. It is a category 1 species under the Endangered Species Act and is being considered for listing by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (January, 1992). This is one of the three documented breeding sites in Montana and may represent the second major population in the State. Knowles, 1991, has reviewed the record of mountain plover sightings in this area and has found 123 observations of 314 birds since 1978.</p>
---

<p><u>Importance Criteria:</u> The area meets Criteria 1 and 3. This habitat is important to the plover and needs to be maintained. The area is unique because it contains natural habitat of the mountain plover. It is one of the last areas of native plover habitat in the United States. It is more than locally significant to the survival of the plover. The area would qualify under Sec 102.(a)(8) of FLPMA as an area to be managed that will protect the quality of scientific...values and provide food and habitat for fish and wildlife.</p>
---



**Summary:** The Mountain Plover Complex is recommended for further consideration as an ACEC. This nomination will be addressed as an amendment to this RMP/EIS.

21. **LOWER JUDITH RIVER:** Nominated by the Montana Audubon Council for its unique riparian and wetlands botanical communities.

**Relevance Criteria:** This nomination does not qualify for any criteria.

**Importance Criteria:** This nomination does not qualify for any criteria.

**Summary:** No criteria are met because this river reach is about 95 percent private land, and is not recommended for further consideration as an ACEC.

22. **ANDERSON BRIDGE:** Nominated by Montana Wilderness Association. Nominated for its significant geological features including dikes, badlands, and canyons; outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation; and excellent back-country hunting, specifically for mule deer.

**Relevance Criteria:** This nomination does not meet any criteria. This area is average to below average wildlife habitat. There are no known unique vegetation communities. Geologic values area similar to those up and downstream on the Judith as well as the Missouri River. The area is Class B scenic quality, however the area is primarily Judith River Breaks landscapes and lacks the additional water-oriented Judith River landscape attributes because there is no federal land along the Judith River. This is a limiting factor.

**Importance Criteria:** This nomination does not meet any criteria. None of the subject area resources are of more than local importance, nor are they considered subject to jeopardy under current uses.

**Summary:** Based on the above determinations it has been concluded that the BLM land in this nomination does not meet the relevance and importance criteria necessary for further consideration as an ACEC.

### INTERNAL NOMINATIONS

23. **SQUARE BUTTE ONA:** Mandatory ACEC review by BLM.

**Relevance Criteria:** Relevance Criteria 1, 2, and 3 apply. The area is unique and diverse and offers the opportunity to observe mountain goats, elk, mule deer, prairie falcons and a host of other wildlife species.

There are a number of vision quest sites on the summit of Square Butte which were used by Native Americans for religious purposes. The slopes and outcrops probably contain prehistoric and historic graves. These cultural resources are considered sacred by modern Native Americans in the region. The BLM should consider Square Butte as a potential AIRFA situation.

Burials and vision quest sites are not common in the region. The sites are considered sensitive by traditional religious leaders of Native Americans.

Square Butte contains shonkinite a porphyritic igneous rock unique to Montana.

**Importance Criteria:** Importance Criteria 1, 2 and 3 apply. This site and its resources meet the first three Importance Criteria.

In addition to non-wildlife values, e.g., geologic, hikers may see elk, mountain goat and more common wildlife such as mule deer. This makes Square Butte a unique experience.

Burials and vision quest sites are not common in the region. The sites are considered sensitive by traditional Native American religious leaders. Square Butte contains shonkinite a porphyritic igneous rock unique to Montana.

Summary: Square Butte is recommended for further consideration as an ACEC.

24. SAGE GROUSE HABITAT: Nominated by the BLM. Nominated as representation of the excellent sage grouse habitat in this region and Montana.

Relevance Criteria: Does not meet any Relevance Criteria because a specific geographic nomination area was not identified and the essential resources were not present.

Importance Criteria: No Importance Criteria apply because a specific geographic nomination area was not identified and the essential resources were not present.

Summary: Central and eastern Montana has some of the highest quality sage grouse habitat in the world. Because of its abundance in Montana and because it is felt that sage grouse are adequately protected by resource management, this area is not recommended for further consideration as an ACEC.

25. PRAIRIE DOG/BLACK-FOOTED FERRET/SWIFT FOX AREA: Nominated by the BLM. Nominated to identify and designate a habitat which can support these species after reintroduction.

Relevance Criteria: No criteria apply because no specific geographic nomination area was identified and the essential resources are not present.

Importance Criteria: No criteria apply because no specific geographic nomination area was identified and the essential resources are not present.

Summary: Prairie Dog Complexes No. 1 and 2 fully meet these standards and can be identified as meeting the above nomination objectives. Areas that biologically qualify for this unique habitat are recommended for further consideration as an ACEC.

26. WATERFOWL/WETLANDS: Nominated by the BLM. Nominated to enhance and preserve a major representative waterfowl wetland complex.

Relevance Criteria: This nomination does not meet Relevance Criteria 1 through 4. No specific geographic area was presented for the nomination.

B. Importance Criteria: The Prairie Pothole Region of North America is a nationally significant waterfowl production area. The area is unique to the BLM because of the lack of pothole modification or destruction. No specific geographic area was presented for the nomination. At this time the nomination does not meet the importance criteria.

Summary: The waterfowl/wetlands does not meet relevance and importance criteria. It is not recommended for further considered as an ACEC. Beaver Creek Ponds, Itchpair Slough, and Shed Lake were nominated, evaluated, and found unqualified. These three wetlands are identified with this nomination and represent the objectives.

27. PRAIRIE RIPARIAN AREA: Nominated by the BLM. Nominated to identify and manage a representative prairie riparian ecosystem.

Relevance Criteria: This nomination does not meet Relevance Criteria 1 through 4. The Riparian nomination does not have a specified boundary to evaluate.

Importance Criteria: This nomination meets Importance Criteria 1 through 3. The prairie riparian region is a nationally significant vegetation resource for both plant and wild life. Riparian habitat has been a nationally recognized issue for decades. The riparian vegetation is a fragile, irreplaceable and unique resource that needs to be managed to insure its long-term presence. No site specific geographic area for the nomination was identified.

Summary: The Prairie Riparian Area should not be carried forward as an ACEC nomination.

28. COLLAR GULCH: Nominated by the BLM. Nominated for its unique and critically important aquatic habitat

supporting a viable population of a pure strain of westslope cutthroat trout.

Relevance Criteria: Relevance Criteria 2 applies. Presence of the westslope cutthroat trout which is a Species of Special Concern (Class A) by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Because of habitat loss and genetic dilution, pure populations of westslope cutthroat are becoming rare.

Importance Criteria: Importance Criteria 2 applies. Because genetic variation in westslope cutthroat trout is contained between populations instead of within populations, this population is rare, sensitive, irreplaceable, unique, threatened and vulnerable to adverse change. Because of the impacts on water quality from mining the health of trout may be in jeopardy.

The historic range of the westslope cutthroat trout in Montana was conservatively estimated at 25,547 stream kilometers, 44.7% of this were east of the Continental Divide (Likness & Graham 1988). In 1984, a status review of westslope cutthroat trout determined that 384.2 stream kilometers, 3.4% of the historic range, were inhabited by the westslope cutthroat trout east of the Continental Divide (Liknes 1984). However, only 14.1 stream kilometers were known to contain genetically pure populations.

Summary: The nomination is recommended for further consideration as an ACEC.

29. BIG BEND OF THE MILK RIVER: Nominated by the BLM. Nominated for its high density and diverse cultural resources with the objective of designating a representative cultural and historic site.

Relevance Criteria: This nomination meets Relevance Criteria 1 through 4. The Big Bend of the Milk River contains several significant cultural resources of national, regional and local importance. In particular, two archaeological sites have been nominated to and are currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These include the Henry Smith Buffalo Jump Site and the Beaucoup Site which represents a Besant and Avonlea Phase occupation/bison kill site.

Importance Criteria: This nomination meets Importance Criteria 1 through 3. The Big Bend of the Milk River contains known qualities that are nationally significant, fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, unique, or vulnerable to adverse change; needing protection to satisfy national priority concerns or to carry out the mandates of FLPMA.

The area is highly significant to the national archaeological community and should be considered significant at the national level, regional and local levels. Several authors have suggested that the Avonlea Phase represents the commencement of the common use of the bow and arrow rather than the assumed former throwing stick or atlatl and dart as a hunting weapon. The entire area of the Big Bend of the Milk River bears extensively on this important question. The probability that this important question can be resolved by a research-oriented management strategy of carefully selected sites in this area is very high.

Many other research concerns including but not limited to; relative and absolute dating of sequences of occupations, paleoenvironmental reconstruction, land use, settlement patterns, non-game resource utilization, lithic tool manufacturing methods, and housing types and changes through time are all related within the context of the Big Bend area. Based completely on the research potential remaining in the Big Bend area, the entire area should be considered to be rare, and completely irreplaceable. The site is located in a fragile, precarious physical environment and situated on and in moderate to steep slopes consisting of soils that are easily eroded. The location is well known to local artifact collectors. These individuals have vandalized portions of the area, thus endangering the value of the entire area by destroying part of the resource, which is already threatened by natural forces of erosion. The area is thus extremely vulnerable to continued adverse effect.

The central areas of the complex have been nominated to the National Register and were listed on December 20, 1978. Since the central portions of the area already listed, establishment of an area encompassing additional cultural resources of added significance, would increase the total value of the area. For these reasons, the area warrants additional protection.

Summary: Big Bend of the Milk River should be considered further as an ACEC for cultural values.

30. BITTER CREEK WSA Nominated by the BLM. The benefits of an ACEC designation would be to maintain the

significant aesthetic (visual) qualities found in the Bitter Creek watershed.

Relevance Criteria: This nomination meets Relevance Criteria 1. An area of 26,000 acres contains significant scenic values. A visual resource team conducted an inventory in 1979 that identified both Class A and Class B scenery visual ones. Wave-like formations of sand and shale referred to as "blow-out" areas and pockets of aspen groves contributed to these ratings in this Northern Plains Physiographic Region. The Eagles Nest Coulee area which is similar to the Rock Creek Canyon and Frenchman Creek scenic zones to the west is included in this acreage.

Importance Criteria: This nomination does not meet any Importance Criteria. The scenic qualities are outstanding on a local basis but are not considered significant at the regional or national level.

Summary: The Bitter Creek ACEC nomination (26,000 acres) meets Relevance Criteria 1 with significant scenic values but is determined to possess visual quality only at a local level. It does not meet any Importance Criteria. Bitter Creek is not recommended for further consideration as an ACEC.

31. SOUTH MOCCASINS-JUDITH MOUNTAINS SCENIC AREA Nominated by the BLM to protect the scenic qualities of the visual resources in the Judith and South Moccasin Mountains.

Relevance Criteria: This nomination meets Relevance Criteria 1. Significant scenic values are found in an area that includes 4,566 acres of BLM land in the Judith and South Moccasin Mountains. The Class "B" scenic category and VRM Class II is indicative of the excellent scenic quality of the area. The relevance of the scenic values is increased by the occurrence of scenic impacts in neighboring mountain ranges. This area is the dominant scenic feature on the landscape and can be readily seen from Lewistown and Highways US 191 and 87.

Importance Criteria: This nomination meets Importance Criteria 1 and 2. The scenic values of the Judith and South Moccasin Mountains have regionally significant qualities. This area is the last outlying forested mountain range before entering the Great Plains Physiographic Region as you travel east. Recreation use data indicates it is important to the tourist traveling through the area as well as to recreational services in nearby communities. The scenic qualities are used in their marketing efforts such as videos, brochures, and newspapers.

The scenic quality of the area is vulnerable to adverse change. The VRM Class II rating identifies the sensitive quality of the scenic values as well as their importance in resource protection. The objective of this visual standard is to retain the existing character of the landscape and require that any changes in the basic elements (form, line, color and texture) not evident to the observer.

Summary: Both Relevance and Importance Criteria are met and it should be considered further as an ACEC.