
APPENDIX G—AREAS OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN EVALUATION

AREAS OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN CRITERIA

As part of the process for developing the Little Snake resource management plan (RMP), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) planning team reviewed all BLM-administered public lands in the planning area to determine whether any areas should be considered for designation as areas of critical environmental concern (ACEC), or whether any existing ACEC designations should be modified or terminated. Only BLM-administered public lands (i.e., public land “surface”) can be considered for ACEC designation.

To be eligible for designation as an ACEC, an area must meet the relevance and importance criteria described in 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1610.7-2 and BLM Manual 1613, *Areas of Critical Environmental Concern*.

Relevance and importance are defined as follows:

Relevance: There shall be present a significant historic, cultural, or scenic value, a fish or wildlife resource or other natural system or process, or natural hazard.

Importance: The above described value, resource, system, process, or hazard shall have substantial significance and value, which generally requires qualities of more than local significance and special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern. A natural hazard can be important if it is a significant threat to life or property.

Relevance

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

- ❑ 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).
- ❑ A fish and wildlife resource (including but not limited to habitat for endangered, sensitive, or threatened species or habitat essential for maintaining species diversity).
- ❑ A natural process or system (including but not limited to endangered, nonsensitive, or threatened plant species; rare, endemic, or relic plants or plant communities that are terrestrial, aquatic, or riparian; or rare geological features).
- ❑ 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 might meet the relevance criteria if it is determined through the resource management planning process to have become part of a natural process.

Importance

An area meets the importance criterion if it meets one or more of the following:

- ❑ Has more than locally significant qualities that give it special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern, especially compared to any similar resource.
- ❑ Has qualities or circumstances that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, unique, endangered, threatened, or vulnerable to adverse change.

- ❑ Has been recognized as warranting protection to satisfy national priority concerns or to carry out the mandates of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA).
- ❑ Has qualities that warrant highlighting to satisfy public or management concerns about safety and public welfare.
- ❑ Poses a significant threat to human life and safety or to property.

Eight ACEC nominations were received during the ACEC evaluation process. The Center for Native Ecosystems, Biodiversity Conservation Alliance, Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, American Lands Alliance, Forest Guardians, Sinapu, and Terry Tempest Williams for the White-tailed Prairie Dog (WTPD) complex each submitted nominations. The WTPD complex was first nominated in January 2003 and again in November 2004 as part of the public scoping period. Also, the Biodiversity Conservation Alliance, Center for Native Ecosystems, Colorado Environmental Coalition, and Wilderness Society nominated the Sage-Grouse Conservation ACEC on June 3, 2004. The Colorado Wilderness Network, et. al. nominated Cross Mountain, Diamond Breaks, and Vermillion Basin as ACECs in a proposal dated on July 8, 2005. The Center for Native Ecosystems nominated all sites within the Little Snake Field Office (LSFO) identified as Potential Conservation Areas (PCA) by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP) in a proposal dated July 8, 2005, and a private citizen, T. Wright Dickinson, Vermillion Ranch, Limited Partnership, nominated “The Real West” or “The Real Working West” ACEC in a proposal dated July 8, 2005. Nominations were evaluated in accordance with BLM Manual 1613. Values meeting mandatory relevance and importance criteria were identified and are the basis for establishing potential ACECs for further consideration in the RMP.

Table G-1 shows the areas identified in the review and the BLM relevance and importance determinations made.

Table G-1. Evaluation of ACEC Relevance and Importance Criteria

Existing or Proposed ACECs	Relevance Criteria (Resources)	Importance Criteria	Recommended	Comments
Cross Mountain Canyon (Proposed)	Criteria 1 & 2	Criteria 1, 2, 3, & 4	No (see existing ACEC below)	The proposed ACEC includes the existing Cross Mountain ACEC (650 acres), Cross Mountain Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (14,100 acres), and lands that have been determined to have wilderness characteristics that surround the WSA (4,000 acres). The total proposed area is roughly 18,100 acres. Identified values that meet relevance and importance criteria include scenic values, threatened and endangered species for the Colorado pikeminnow, Sensitive Plant Species, and potential hazards within the canyon; however, all of these values are located only within the boundary of the existing ACEC (see Cross Mountain ACEC below).
Diamond Breaks ACEC (Proposed)	N/A	N/A	No	The proposed ACEC includes the existing Diamond Breaks WSA (31,500 acres) and the lands that have been determined to have wilderness characteristics that surround the WSA (1,500 acres). The total proposed area is roughly 33,000 acres. None of the values sited in the Colorado Wilderness Network, et al., proposal meet any of the relevance or importance criteria.
Natural Systems ACECs (Proposed)	Criteria 3	Criteria 2	Yes	The original proposal submitted by the Center for Native Ecosystems nominated all sites within the LSFO identified as PCAs by the CNHP, totaling 83 sites. The LSFO Interdisciplinary (ID) Team analyzed every site individually. Of these 83 sites, 40 of them were dropped from further consideration because they did not meet any of the importance criteria. An additional 14 sites were eliminated from further consideration because the value(s) in question were not located on BLM-administered land. Two PCAs, Irish Canyon and Lookout Mountain, are existing ACECs, and two additional PCAs, North and South Vermillion Bluffs, are also located within the Lookout Mountain ACEC. These sites were eliminated from further consideration because they are within ACECs that are being carried forward (see applicable ACEC descriptions below). The remaining 25 PCAs meet the relevance and importance criteria because all of the sites contain a plant on the BLM Sensitive list or a plant community of concern to the BLM. These 25 PCAs have been combined into 11 potential ACECs to be carried forward for analysis. These areas and the values contained within them are as follows: <u>Gibben's Beardtongue ACEC</u> —BLM Sensitive Plant Species (<i>Penstemon gibbensii</i>) <u>Bull Canyon ACEC</u> —BLM Sensitive Plant Species (<i>Eriogonum tumulosum</i> , <i>Oreocarya caespitosa</i> , <i>Bolophyta ligulata</i>) and a significantly rare plant community (<i>Atriplex confertifolia</i> / <i>Stipa comata</i>) <u>G Gap ACEC</u> —BLM Sensitive Plant Species (<i>Cymopterus duchesnensis</i> and <i>Oreocarya caespitosa</i>) and a significantly rare plant community (<i>Atriplex</i>)

Existing or Proposed ACECs	Relevance Criteria (Resources)	Importance Criteria	Recommended	Comments
				<p><i>confertifolia/Pseudoroegneria spicata</i>) <u>Cold Desert Shrublands ACEC</u>—BLM Sensitive Plant Species (<i>Astragalus nelsonianus</i> and <i>Oreocarya caespitosa</i>) and a significantly rare plant community (<i>Artemisia tridentata</i> SSP <i>Tridentata/Leymus cinereus</i>, <i>Atriplex gardneri/Oryzopsis hymenoides</i>, <i>Atriplex confertifolia/Stipa comata</i>) <u>Little Juniper Canyon ACEC</u>—Significantly rare plant community, Skunkbrush Riparian Shrubland (<i>Rhus trilobata</i>) <u>No Name Spring ACEC</u>—BLM Sensitive Plant Species, Narrow-leaf Evening Primrose (<i>Oenothera acutissima</i>) <u>Bassett Spring ACEC</u>—BLM Sensitive Plant Species, Narrow-leaf Evening Primrose (<i>Oenothera acutissima</i>) <u>Pot Creek ACEC</u>—BLM Sensitive Plant Species, Narrow-leaf Evening Primrose (<i>Oenothera acutissima</i>) <u>Willow Springs ACEC</u>—BLM Sensitive Plant Species, Narrow-leaf Evening Primrose (<i>Oenothera acutissima</i>) <u>Whiskey Springs ACEC</u>—BLM Sensitive Plant Species, Narrow-leaf Evening Primrose (<i>Oenothera acutissima</i>) <u>Deception Creek ACEC</u>—Significantly rare plant community, Sagebrush Bottomland Shrublands (<i>Artemisia tridentata</i> SSP, <i>Tridentata/Leymus cinereus</i>) Within the range of alternatives, the proposed Natural Systems ACEC would be managed in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Alternative A: No ACECs would be designated because there is no need for special management attention. Rare plant occurrences would be avoidance areas for surface-disturbing activities. ■ Alternative B: No ACECs would be designated because there is no need for special management attention. Rare plant and rare plant community occurrences would be avoidance areas for surface-disturbing activities. ■ Alternative C (Preferred Alternative): Same as Alternative B. ■ Alternative D: The areas would be designated as ACECs. The areas would be controlled surface use (CSU) for oil and gas development, and off-highway vehicle (OHV) use would be limited to designated roads and trails.
Sage-Grouse Conservation (Proposed)	Criteria 2	N/A	No	The area proposed meets relevance as a BLM Sensitive Plant Species but does not meet any importance criteria because the area is not unique compared to other areas containing the nominated species. The nominated species are no more sensitive than other sage-grouse species in the LSFO.

Existing or Proposed ACECs	Relevance Criteria (Resources)	Importance Criteria	Recommended	Comments
"The Real West" or "The Real Working West" ACEC (Proposed)	Criteria 1	N/A	No	The area proposed meets relevance criteria #1 because of significant historical and/or cultural value, but it does not meet any importance criteria because public land livestock grazing is not more than locally significant compared to other similar resources or regions in the west. These areas are also not unique, endangered, or rare, nor do they meet importance as a fragile, sensitive, or vulnerable to change criteria because of historic use throughout the region, which is expected to continue on public lands.
Vermillion Basin ACEC (Proposed)	Criteria 1 & 3	Criteria 1 & 2	No	The proposed ACEC includes the existing Irish Canyon ACEC (11,680 acres) and lands that have been determined to have wilderness characteristics. The total proposed area is roughly 90,000 acres. Identified values that meet relevance and importance criteria include scenic and geologic values; however, all of these values are located only within the boundary of the existing ACEC (see Irish Canyon ACEC below).
White-Tailed Prairie Dog (Proposed)	Criteria 2 & 3	Criteria 1 & 2	Yes	<p>The WTPD has petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and is listed as a Species of Special Concern by the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW). They are a highly visible species on BLM lands in Colorado because of their integral role in the recovery of the black-footed ferret. In addition, the sylvatic plague is continuous throughout the WTPD complexes in northwest Colorado; thus, the WTPD complexes are vulnerable to adverse change.</p> <p>WTPDs provide habitat for other imperiled species, such as the listed black-footed ferret, and are essential for maintaining species diversity. Prairie dog complexes are unique natural systems, and WTPDs are considered a keystone species because their contribution to processes or community structure is much greater than would be expected from their numbers.</p> <p>Within the range of alternatives, the proposed WTPD ACEC would be managed in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Alternative A: No ACEC would be designated because there is no need for special management attention. Active WTPD colonies would continue to be avoidance areas for surface-disturbing activities within the black-footed ferret reintroduction area. ■ Alternative B: No ACEC would be designated because there is no need for special management attention. There would be no stipulations or prescriptions designed to protect relevant and important values. ■ Alternative C (Preferred Alternative): Same as Alternative A. In addition, a CSU stipulation would protect towns less than 10 acres in size and timing limitation stipulations would apply to towns greater than 10 acres in size. See Section 2.5.5.2. ■ Alternative D: The area would be designated as an ACEC. The area would be no surface occupancy (NSO) for oil and gas development, and OHV use would be limited to designated roads and trails.

Existing or Proposed ACECs	Relevance Criteria (Resources)	Importance Criteria	Recommended	Comments
Cross Mountain Canyon (Existing)	Criteria 1, 2, 3, & 4	Criteria 1, 2, 3, & 4	Yes	<p>Cross Mountain Canyon is located 3 miles east of the confluence of the Little Snake River and the Yampa River, and it contains three federally listed endangered species: the Colorado pikeminnow, humpback chub, and peregrine falcon, and one State-listed threatened species: the razorback sucker.</p> <p>Cross Mountain Canyon exhibits steep rock cliffs that tower above the raging Yampa River, and high visual and scenic qualities exist within the ACEC. The area contains <i>Penstemon yampaensis</i> (Yampa beardtongue) and <i>Leptodactylon watsonii</i> (Watson's pricklygilia), two regional endemic and rare plant species.</p> <p>Within the range of alternatives, Cross Mountain Canyon would be managed in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Alternative A: ACEC designation would remain. The area would be NSO to oil and gas development and OHV travel. ■ Alternative B: ACEC designation would be removed because there is no need for special management attention. The prescriptions for Cross Mountain WSA would protect relevant and important values in the area. ■ Alternative C (Preferred Alternative): Same as Alternative B. ■ Alternative D: ACEC designation would remain. The area would be closed to oil and gas development and OHV travel.
Irish Canyon (Existing)	Criteria 1 & 3	Criteria 1, 2, & 3	Yes	<p>Meets the relevance criteria for cultural and scenic values. Meets the importance criteria for more than locally significant cultural and geologic values and for cultural values that are nationally significant.</p> <p>Current management actions include avoidance stipulations for seismic activity and existing oil and gas leases, closed to coal leasing, and OHV use limited to designated roads and trails, except for permitted uses. Woodcutting is not allowed, and it is managed as a right-of-way ROW exclusion area. All other resource uses are allowed as long as they are compatible with the ACEC prescriptions.</p> <p>Irish Canyon centers significant archaeological history for the northwest Colorado tristate region. The area encompasses some of the most notable rock art in northwest Colorado and western Colorado.</p> <p>The Irish Canyon area is one of the major landmarks in northwest Colorado, and it exhibits the most complete record of geologic history in the eastern Uinta Mountains. It contains good condition examples of three rare plant associations: <i>Juniperus osteosperma/Agropyron spicatum</i> (Utah juniper/bluebunch wheatgrass), <i>Artemisia nova/Agropyron spicatum</i> (black sagebrush/bluebunch wheatgrass), and <i>Juniperus osteosperma-Pinus edulis/Cercocarpus ledifolius var. intricatus</i> (Utah juniper-pinyon/curl-leaf mountain mahogany).</p> <p>The Irish Canyon area also contains five statewide and regionally rare or Sensitive Plant</p>

Existing or Proposed ACECs	Relevance Criteria (Resources)	Importance Criteria	Recommended	Comments
				<p>Species, which are listed as regionally rare by both BLM and the Colorado Natural Heritage Inventory. The rare plants known to occur here are <i>Penstemon yampaensis</i> (Yampa beardtongue), <i>Parthenium ligulatum</i> (Uinta Basin feverfew), <i>Eriogonum tumulosum</i> (hummock buckwheat), <i>Trifolium andinum</i> (Andes clover), and <i>Cryptantha caespitosa</i> (caespitose catseye). There are few places in Moffat County where so many rare plants occur in such close association with one another.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Within the range of alternatives, the Irish Canyon would be managed in the following ways: Alternative A: ACEC designation would remain. The area would be CSU for oil and gas development, and OHV use would be limited to designated roads and trails. ■ Alternative B: ACEC designation would be removed because there is no need for special management attention. There would be no stipulations or prescriptions designed to protect relevant and important values. ■ Alternative C (Preferred Alternative): ACEC designation would remain. The area would be closed to oil and gas development, and OHV use would be limited to designated roads and trails. ■ Alternative D: Same as Alternative C (Preferred Alternative).
Limestone Ridge (Existing)	Criteria 1 & 3	Criteria 1	Yes	<p>Meets the relevance criteria for scenic values and significant natural processes or systems. Meets the importance criteria for more than locally or nationally significant qualities and for the scenic values.</p> <p>Current management actions include avoidance stipulations for seismic activity and existing oil and gas leases, closed to coal leasing, ROW exclusion area (except for valid and existing rights), no mineral material sales, or range, wildlife, or watershed projects. OHV use is closed, except for permitted uses. All other resource uses are allowed as long as they are compatible with the ACEC prescriptions.</p> <p>Limestone Ridge is situated immediately west and north of the Irish Canyon site. The five remnant plant associations on the ridge include <i>Juniperus osteosperma-Pinus edulis/Artemisia nova/Agropyron spicatum</i> (Utah juniper-pinyon/black sagebrush/bluebunch wheatgrass), <i>Juniperus osteosperma/Agropyron spicatum</i> (Utah juniper/bluebunch wheatgrass), <i>Cercocarpus ledifolius var. intricatus/Agropyron spicatum</i> (Curl-leaf mountain mahogany/bluebunch wheatgrass), <i>Agropyron spicatum-Arenaria hookeri</i> (Bluebunch wheatgrass-sandwort), and <i>Cercocarpus ledifolius/Artemisia tridentata ssp. Wyomingensis-Symphoricarpos oreophilus/Agropyron spicatum</i> (Curl-leaf mountain mahogany/Wyoming big sagebrush-snowberry/bluebunch wheatgrass).</p> <p>Limestone Ridge is critical winter range for elk and has been identified as an elk concentration area. It has high visual and scenic qualities and is a prominent landmark in northwest Colorado. The area also contains an occurrence of a rare plant species, <i>Penstemon yampaensis</i> (Yampa beardtongue).</p> <p>Within the range of alternatives, Limestone Ridge would be managed in the following</p>

Existing or Proposed ACECs	Relevance Criteria (Resources)	Importance Criteria	Recommended	Comments
				<p>ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Alternative A: ACEC designation would remain. The area would be NSO for oil and gas development and closed to OHV use. ■ Alternative B: ACEC designation would be removed because there is no need for special management attention. There would be no stipulations or prescriptions designed to protect relevant and important values. ■ Alternative C (Preferred Alternative): ACEC designation would be removed because there is no need for special management attention. The relative and important values would be avoided through a CSU stipulation for oil and gas development and closed to OHV use. ■ Alternative D: ACEC designation would remain. The area would be closed to oil and gas development and OHV use.
Lookout Mountain (Existing)	Criteria 1 & 3	Criteria 1 & 2	Yes	<p>Meets the relevance criteria for scenic values and natural processes or systems. Meets the importance criteria for more than locally significant qualities and for qualities that make the area fragile, sensitive, rare, and vulnerable to adverse change.</p> <p>Current management actions include avoidance stipulations for seismic activity and existing oil and gas leases, closed to coal leasing, and OHV use limited to designated roads and trails, except for permitted uses. All other resource uses are allowed as long as they are compatible with the ACEC prescriptions.</p> <p>Lookout Mountain is habitat for four State and regionally rare plant species, two of which only occur on this site in Colorado. The rare plants are <i>Astragalus detritalis</i> (debris milkvetch), <i>Cryptantha caespitosa</i> (caespitose catseye), <i>Sphaeromeria capitata</i> (capitate chicken sage), and <i>Townsendia strigosa</i> (hairy townsendia). The plant association of <i>Juniperus osteosperma</i>/<i>Agropyron spicatum</i> (Utah juniper/bluebunch wheatgrass) is of critical State concern because of the extreme rarity of sites in good condition. It is rare and restricted throughout its range; remaining stands are threatened by livestock grazing. The other plant association at this site is <i>Atriplex confertifolia</i>/<i>Agropyron spicatum</i> (shadescale saltbrush/bluebunch wheatgrass), which occurs only in Moffat County, Colorado.</p> <p>Within the range of alternatives, Lookout Mountain would be managed in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Alternative A: ACEC designation would remain. The area would be CSU for oil and gas development, and OHV use would be limited to designated roads and trails. ■ Alternative B: ACEC designation would be removed because there is no need for special management attention. There would be no stipulations or prescriptions designed to protect relevant and important values. ■ Alternative C (Preferred Alternative): ACEC designation would be removed because

Existing or Proposed ACECs	Relevance Criteria (Resources)	Importance Criteria	Recommended	Comments
				<p>there is no need for special management attention. The relative and important values would be avoided through a CSU stipulation for oil and gas development, and OHV use would be limited to designated areas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Alternative D : ACEC designation would remain. The area would be NSO for oil and gas development, and OHV use would be limited to designated areas.

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