
APPENDIX G

ACEC Evaluations for the Vernal Resource Management Plan

APPENDIX G - ACECs

ACEC EVALUATIONS FOR THE VERNAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Introduction

Section 202 (c) (3) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) requires that priority be given to the designation and protection of areas of critical environmental concern (ACECs). FLPMA Section 103 (a) defines ACECs as public lands 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, fish and wildlife resources or other natural systems or processes, or to protect life and safety from natural hazards.

The BLM requested nominations for areas that the public believed met ACEC criteria in the Federal Register, Vol. 66, No. 48, March 12, 2001, Notice of Intent, Environmental Impact Statement, Vernal Resource Management Plan, Utah.

Nominations for ACECs were reviewed by an interdisciplinary team of BLM specialists to see if they meet mandatory relevance and importance criteria.

Relevance and Importance Criteria

To be considered for designation as an ACEC, an area must meet the requirements of relevance and importance as described in the Code of Federal Regulations (43 CFR 1610.7.2). The definitions for relevance and importance are as follows:

Relevance

An area is considered relevant if it contains one or more of the following:

1. A significant historic, cultural or scenic value (for example: rare or sensitive archaeological resources and religious or cultural resources important to Native American Indians).
2. A fish and wildlife resource (for example: habitat for endangered, sensitive, or threatened species, or habitat essential for maintaining species diversity).
3. A natural process or system (for example: endangered, sensitive, or threatened plant species; rare, endemic, or relict plants or plant communities ; rare geologic features).
4. A natural hazard (for example: 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 resource management planning process that it has become part of the natural process.

Importance

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

1. Has more than locally significant qualities which give it special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern, especially compared to any similar resource.

2. Have 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 the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.
4. Have qualities that warrant highlighting in order to satisfy public or management concerns about safety and public welfare.
5. Poses a significant threat to human life and safety or to property.

Currently Designated ACECs

The Diamond Mountain RMP/ROD designated seven ACECs totaling 165,944 acres. These are: Browns Park, Lears Canyon, Red Mountain-Dry Fork, Pariette Wetlands, Red Creek Watershed, Lower Green River, and Nine Mile Canyon. These will all be carried forward as ACECs in the Vernal RMP.

Potential ACECs Being Considered in the Vernal RMP

External nominations were received as part of the RMP scoping process. BLM's interdisciplinary team completed the relevance and importance review of all nominated ACECs. Seven areas totaling 476,679 acres were determined to have relevance and importance and were identified as potential ACECs. In some cases the interdisciplinary team review resulted in additional resource concerns and different boundary configurations for some potential ACECs from what was identified in the nominations.

On December 17, 2001, the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA) submitted ACEC nominations for Bitter Creek, Cliff Creek, Cliff Ridge, Coyote Basin, and the Lower Green River. Of these, Coyote Basin, Bitter Creek, and the Lower Green River were determined to meet the mandatory criteria and are considered as potential ACECs in this planning effort. Some of these potential ACECs were modified by BLM resource specialists to better meet resource needs.

On February 10, 2003, SUWA submitted proposals for Main Canyon, Lower Bitter Creek, White River, Sweetwater Watershed, Dragon/Atchee/Davis Canyons and Nine Mile Canyon. White River and Main Canyon were determined to meet the mandatory criteria. Sweetwater Watershed was integrated into a previous BLM proposal and became the Bitter Creek potential ACEC. SUWA's nomination for Nine Mile Canyon resulted in a potential ACEC for Nine Mile Canyon that is an expansion of the existing Nine Mile Canyon ACEC.

On January 21, 2003, the Center for Native Ecosystems submitted proposals to protect the white-tailed prairie dog and its associated ecosystem in Coyote Basin, Kennedy Wash, Myton Bench, Shiner, and Snake John. These nominations were integrated into a previous BLM proposal and became the potential Coyote Basin Complex Research Natural Area/ACEC.

The seven potential ACECs and the two potential expansion ACECs are discussed below:

Bitter Creek and Bitter Creek-P.R. Springs

Relevance Criteria: The area has relevance due to the existence of an old growth forest, significant cultural and historic resources, important watershed, and critical ecosystem for wildlife and migratory birds.

Importance Criteria: The relevant values described above have substantial significance due to qualities that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, and unique.

The ancient pinyon forest is over 1200 years old, and includes the Utah champion pinyon, which is irreplaceable. Within the unit is the ancestral home of the Northern Ute Tribe when they were relocated from Colorado in the late 1800s. Many features, including graves, are within the potential ACEC, but specific locations are not known. Also in the potential ACEC is the most extensive wetland in the multi-state Book Cliffs. It exists because of a uniquely perched water table. This wetland and surrounding watershed is unique as a critical ecosystem for migratory birds and a wide variety of wildlife.

White River

Relevance Criteria: The area has relevance due to the existence of unique geological formations, high value scenery, significant historical events, and riparian ecosystem.

Importance Criteria: The relevant values described above have substantial significance due to qualities that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, and unique. An area of unique, spectacular rock spires, named “Goblin City” by the John Wesley Powell 1869 expedition is a major destination point for White River boaters. A cottonwood grove campsite, now used by boaters, is the place where Powell Expedition members camped and explored the nearby fragile geological formations. The river and adjacent landscape provide spectacular scenery viewed by increasing numbers of visitors from several states. The lush riparian vegetation is rare in this desert ecosystem.

Middle Green River

Relevance Criteria: This area has relevance due to the existence of an important riparian ecosystem and high value scenery.

Importance Criteria: The relevant values described above have substantial significance due to qualities that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, and unique. The river and adjacent landscape provide spectacular scenery viewed by increasing numbers of visitors from many states and countries. The lush riparian vegetation is rare in this desert ecosystem.

Coyote Basin

Relevance Criteria: This area has relevance due to the existence of an important white-tailed prairie dog complex.

Importance Criteria: This area is a critical ecosystem for the white-tailed prairie dog, and is one of 25 white-tailed prairie dog complexes nominated for ACEC status in the Western states. It has substantial significance due to qualities that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, and unique. This species occupies only an estimated eight percent of the area it once occupied, and most of this is on BLM administered lands. The white-tailed prairie dog is particularly vulnerable to adverse change from a variety of current causes. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is currently being petitioned to list this species.

Four Mile Wash

Relevance Criteria: This area has relevance due to the existence of high value scenery, important riparian ecosystem, and special status fish.

Importance Criteria: The relevant values described above have substantial significance due to qualities that make them fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, and unique. This exemplary canyon and adjacent landscape provides spectacular scenery viewed by increasing

numbers of visitors from many states and countries. The lush riparian vegetation is rare in this desert ecosystem.

Critical habitat for four endangered fish is located within the potential ACEC: These include the Colorado pikeminnow (*Ptychocheilus lucius*), Bonytail (*Gila elegans*), Humpbacked chub (*Gila cypha*), and the Razorback sucker (*Xyrauchen texanus*).

Main Canyon

Relevance Criteria: This area has relevance due to the existence of important cultural and historic resources, and natural systems.

Importance Criteria: The relevant values described above have substantial significance due to qualities that make them fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, and unique. Within the area there are numerous sites associated with the historic Northern Ute migration route along Main Canyon. In addition, there is a recently discovered historic inscription from the early French fur trade era. This area has been the focus of several past proposals to manage it in a way that would accentuate its exemplary natural systems. It is a part of a larger area that was first proposed as a Book Cliffs National Conservation Area, and then became the focus of a 1998 cooperative project of the BLM and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) known as the Book Cliffs Conservation Initiative. Most of the potential ACEC is within the Winter Ridge Wilderness Study Area.

Nine Mile Canyon Expansion

Relevance Criteria: This area has relevance due to the existence of significant cultural resources, special status plant species, and high quality scenery.

Importance Criteria: The relevant values described above have substantial significance due to qualities that make them fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, and unique. This area is an extension of the currently designated Nine Mile Canyon ACEC, where the significance of these important resources has been recognized.

Lower Green River Expansion

Relevance Criteria: This area has relevance due to the existence of significant riparian habitat and outstanding scenic values.

Importance Criteria: The relevant values described above have substantial significance due to qualities that make them fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, and unique. This area is an extension of the currently designated Lower Green River ACEC, where the significance of these important resources has been recognized.

Relevance and Importance Summary - All Areas

Currently designated ACECs and nominated areas that were evaluated by BLM resource specialists for relevance and importance are listed in the table below, along with determinations and rationale. Those nominated areas that do not meet both relevance and importance criteria are not considered as potential ACECs in the Vernal RMP/EIS.

TABLE 1. RELEVANCE AND IMPORTANCE SUMMARY – ALL AREAS		
Nominator	Nominated Area or Currently Designated ACEC	Determination and Rationale
SUWA (Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance)	Dragon/Atchee/Davis Canyons (nominated area)	Scenic, cultural resources and natural systems have relevance, but do not qualify under the importance criteria because they do not have substantial significance
SUWA	Cliff Creek (nominated area)	Cultural resources and natural systems have relevance, but do not qualify under the importance criteria because they do not have substantial significance.
SUWA	Cliff Ridge (nominated area)	Scenic values and natural systems have relevance, but do not qualify under the importance criteria because they do not have substantial significance.
SUWA	Main Canyon (nominated area)	Cultural, historic resources and natural systems meet relevance and importance criteria.
SUWA	Lower Bitter Creek (nominated area)	The natural system has relevance, but does not quality under the importance criteria because it does not have substantial significance.
BLM	Browns Park (currently designated ACEC)	High value scenery, wildlife habitat, cultural, and historic resources meet relevance and importance criteria.
BLM	Lears Canyon (currently designated ACEC)	Relict plant communities meet relevance and importance criteria.
TNC (The Nature Conservancy)	Red Mountain-Dry Fork (currently designated ACEC)	Relict plant communities, high value archaeological and paleontological sites, watershed, and crucial deer and elk habitat meet relevance and importance criteria
BLM	Pariette Wetlands (currently designated ACEC)	Special status bird and plant habitat, wetlands ecosystem meet relevance and importance criteria.

TABLE 1. RELEVANCE AND IMPORTANCE SUMMARY – ALL AREAS		
Nominator	Nominated Area or Currently Designated ACEC	Determination and Rationale
BLM	Red Creek Watershed (currently designated ACEC)	Regionally significant critical watershed meets relevance and importance criteria.
BLM/SUWA	Lower Green River (currently designated ACEC and nominated area)	Significant riparian habitat and outstanding scenic values meet relevance and importance criteria.
BLM/SUWA	Nine Mile Canyon (currently designated ACEC and nominated area)	Nationally significant Fremont, Ute, Archaic rock art and structures, and special status plant habitat meet relevance and importance criteria.
BLM/SUWA	Bitter Creek (nominated area)	State significant old growth forest, cultural and historic resources, watershed, critical ecosystems for migratory birds meet relevance and importance criteria.
SUWA	White River (nominated area)	Unique geologic formations, high value scenic vistas, and riparian ecosystem meet relevance and importance criteria.
BLM	Middle Green River (nominated area)	High value riparian ecosystem meets relevance and importance criteria.
CNE (Center for Native Ecosystems)/SUWA	Coyote Basin-Myton Bench (nominated area)	Critical ecosystem for white-tailed prairie dog meets relevance and importance criteria.
BLM	Four Mile Wash (nominated area)	High value scenery, riparian ecosystem, special status fish meets relevance and importance criteria.