

## EVALUATION OF RELEVANCE AND IMPORTANCE CRITERIA FOR EXISTING AND PROPOSED ACECS—BLM RAWLINS FIELD OFFICE

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) are areas of BLM-administered lands where special management attention is needed to protect their important and relevant values. "Special management attention" refers to management prescriptions developed during preparation of a Resource Management Plan (RMP) or amendment expressly to protect the important and relevant values on an area from the potential effects of actions permitted by the RMP, including proposed actions deemed to be in conformance with the terms, conditions, and decisions of the RMP (BLM Manual 1613). These are management measures that would not be necessary or prescribed if the critical and important features were not present.

To be designated as an ACEC, the area must meet the criteria of relevance and importance (as defined in BLM Manual 1613). Areas meeting the relevance criterion possess significant historic, cultural, or scenic values; fish or wildlife resources, including threatened and endangered species; or natural hazards. To meet the importance criterion, the resource must have substantial significance and value. This generally requires qualities of more than local significance and special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern, especially compared to any similar resource, or qualities or circumstances that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, unique, endangered, threatened, or vulnerable to adverse change.

There were four existing ACECS within the Resource Management Plan Planning Area (RMPPA): Como Bluff ACEC, Sand Hills ACEC, Jep Canyon ACEC, and Shamrock Hills ACEC. Public comment received during scoping suggested that a number of areas be considered for designation as ACECs, and some areas were proposed as potential ACECs by BLM. Areas within the RMPPA that were identified as potential ACECs include the Red Rim-Daley Area, Upper Muddy Creek Watershed/Grizzly Area, High Savery Dam, Stratton Sagebrush Steppe Research Area, Chain Lakes Areas, Laramie Peak Area, Pennock Mountain wildlife habitat management area (WHMA), Wick-Beumee WHMA, Shirley Mountain Bat Caves area, Laramie Plains Lakes Area (which includes the Lake Hattie, Twin Buttes Lake, and Hutton Lake Habitat Areas), blowout penstemon area, prairie dog areas, historic trails, mountain plover concentration areas, the Bates Hole/Chalk Mountain cushion plant community, and the Powder Rim juniper woodland.

BLM was required to determine if existing ACECs and areas proposed for ACEC designation meet the relevance and importance criteria prior to inclusion in the RMP process. This report presents the evaluation forms used by BLM to make this evaluation for all existing and proposed ACECs. Areas that did not meet the relevance and importance criteria were dropped from further consideration for ACEC designation. Areas that met the relevance and importance criteria were included in the management alternatives analyzed in the RMP.

Based on public comments concerning a discrepancy in the way that similar resource values were considered in evaluating the relevance and importance values for consideration of proposed ACECs, we will reexamine all proposed ACECs, ACEC Proposal Evaluation Forms, and the necessity for special management, as we move forward to complete the Rawlins Proposed RMP Final EIS.

**Table 23. ACEC Proposal Evaluation Form—Powder Rim Juniper Woodland**

<b>Powder Rim Juniper Woodland Area Considered</b>		
General Location	The area is located about 20 miles west of Baggs, Wyoming, along the Colorado/Wyoming border (T12N, R93-96W and T13N, R94-96W).	
General Description	Juniper shrub woodland providing habitat for juniper obligate bird species and Gibben's penstemon (a BLM-Wyoming State Sensitive Species); also, a resident elk herd occurs in this area.	
Acreage	About 33,280 acres of federal land	
Values Considered	Wildlife, special status species	
<b>Identification Criteria</b>		
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:		
Relevance Value	Yes/No	Rationale for Determination
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).	YES	The Cherokee Trail traverses the Powder Rim ACEC area. The Cherokee Trail was include in the ACEC Proposal for Historic Trails. The relevant values of the Cherokee Trail are evaluated above in the Historic Trails ACEC evaluation of relevant and important criteria; the evaluation of the Cherokee Trail is not repeated here.
A fish and wildlife resource (including but not limited to habitat for endangered, sensitive, or threatened species; or habitat essential for maintaining species diversity).	YES	The Powder Rim area includes juniper/shrub habitat that is unique in the RFO planning area, and provided habitat for nine of ten juniper obligate bird species occurring in Wyoming. Gibben's penstemon, a BLM-Wyoming State Sensitive Species, occurs within this area, as does fringe habitat for Brewer's sparrow, also a BLM-Wyoming State Sensitive Species. Also, numerous raptors, including the ferruginous hawk (a BLM-Wyoming State Sensitive Species) nest in the area. Finally, mule deer, antelope, and elk use the Powder Rim junipers for crucial winter range.
A natural process or system (including but not limited to endangered, sensitive, or threatened plant species; rare, endemic, or relic plants or plant communities which are terrestrial, aquatic, or riparian; or rare geological features).	YES	Gibben's penstemon, a BLM-Wyoming State Sensitive Species, occurs within this area. One population has been fenced for additional protection, and monitoring is conducted both inside and outside the enclosure to document the trend and influence of disturbance on the species.
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 resource management planning process that it has become part of a natural process.	NO	No natural hazards are known to occur.
<b>Importance</b>		
The value, resource, system, process, or hazard described above must have substantial significance and values 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:		

Powder Rim Juniper Woodland		
Importance Value	Yes/No	Rationale for Determination
<p>Has more than locally significant qualities, which give it special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern, especially compared to any similar resource.</p>	<p>NO</p>	<p>While the Powder Rim area includes juniper/shrub habitat that is unique in the RFO planning area, this habitat is abundant in Colorado and Utah. Southern Wyoming is the northern extreme of the juniper habitat that occurs in these states.</p>
<p>Has qualities or circumstances that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, unique, endangered, threatened, or vulnerable to adverse change.</p>	<p>NO</p>	<p>Gibben's penstemon, a BLM-Wyoming State Sensitive Species, occurs within this area. Current management provides for protection of this species; and these populations do not possess qualities that warrant consideration of additional or special management. It should be noted that the objective of the sensitive species designation is to ensure that BLM consider the overall welfare of these species when undertaking actions on public lands and those actions do not contribute to the need to list the species under the provisions of the Endangered Species Act.</p> <p>Several other populations of Gibben's penstemon exist outside the Powder Rim area.</p> <p>Other plant species of concern from the Heritage and Wyoming Conservation Priority lists include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Androstephium breviflorum</i></li> <li>• <i>Atriplex wolffii</i></li> <li>• <i>Boechera selbyi</i></li> <li>• <i>Cryptantha stricta</i></li> <li>• <i>Erigeron compactus var. consimilis</i></li> <li>• <i>Populus deltoids var. wislizenii</i></li> </ul> <p>The BLM completes an annual review of its BLM-Wyoming State Sensitive Species List. During the review process, Heritage and Wyoming Conservation Priority species are reviewed for inclusion in the List. To date, the six species listed above have not been found to warrant listing on the BLM-Wyoming State Sensitive Species List.</p> <p>Only 21 of the 1,923 ferruginous hawk nests within the entire field office have been identified in Powder Rim area. This area provides no unique or special habitat requirements that are not found elsewhere. Current management includes a timing stipulation for the protection of raptors.</p> <p>Brewer's sparrow are sagebrush obligates, and are dependent on high shrub cover. Within juniper sites, Brewer's sparrow are associated with large sagebrush patch sizes. The Powder Rim area contains marginal Brewer's sparrow habitat. This area provides no unique or special habitat requirements that are not found elsewhere.</p> <p>Elk, mule deer, and antelope are common to the areas outside the Powder Rim, both in Colorado and southern Wyoming. This area provides no unique or special habitat requirements that are not currently found elsewhere within the vicinity of Powder Rim. Management for big game is no different within the proposed Powder Rim area than the area outside the area. Current management includes has a timing stipulation to protect big game crucial winter range.</p>