



July 2010

This edition of the Bighorn Basin Resource Management Plan Revision Newsletter announces several new documents available on the project website.

Management Options Maps

In preparation for the 90-day public comment period on the Draft Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), currently scheduled to begin January 2011, three maps are provided on the project website as examples of the management options that will be fully presented in the Draft RMP and EIS.

The first map, *Current Management*, depicts management under the existing Grass Creek RMP, Washakie RMP and Cody RMP.

The other two maps depict examples of management options that would emphasize the most resource use and the least resource use. These maps represent bookends: two extremes of a spectrum of possibilities within the bounds of laws, regulations and policies. The general themes of *Least Resource Use* and *Most Resource Use* are more fully explained on the project website.

These maps serve as examples of how the BLM may choose to manage lands within the Bighorn Basin. These maps do not represent a final agency decision—that decision will be made after changes from the 90-day public comment period are made and released in the Proposed RMP, scheduled for 2012.

You may be asking, “*Why is more than one management option, or alternative, included in an EIS?*”

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires analysis of continuation of current existing management called the *No Action Alternative*. The anticipated impacts of changing management direction or intensity are compared to the impacts of continuing existing management. Further, NEPA regulations requires the BLM to consider reasonable alternatives, which would avoid or minimize adverse impacts or enhance the quality of the human environment. The BLM acknowledges that there could be a large number of variations to alternatives. However, the BLM is not required to analyze each variation. Rather, a full spectrum of options that meet the RMP’s purpose and need and are reasonable given BLM mandates, policies and programs are analyzed. The full spectrum of options would include management intensity greater than and less than current management, resulting in more and less resource uses.

Bighorn RMP Website Updates:

- ACEC Report
- Management Options Maps
- Field Trip Information

www.blm.gov/wy/st/en/programs/Planning/rmps/bighorn.html

forms completed by the Cody and Worland field offices that determine which areas meet the criteria for ACEC designation. Areas that meet the criteria will be further evaluated in the RMP revision, where possible management actions are identified and analyzed in an environmental analysis.

Mark Your Calendars!

FIELD TRIPS :

- **July 23, 29 & 31**
- **August 5, 10 & 14**

Report Available

The BLM has released a report of possible Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) in the Bighorn Basin. An ACEC is a designation that provides special management attention to areas that require protection to prevent irreparable damage to important historic, cultural and scenic values; fish and wildlife resources or other natural systems or processes; or to protect human life and safety from natural hazards. The newly-released report contains the evaluation



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Commonly Used Acronyms:

ACEC Area of Critical Environmental Concern
EIS Environmental Impact Statement
RMP Resource Management Plan

BLM Bureau of Land Management
NEPA National Environmental Policy Act

An environmental analysis informs the BLM what special management is needed, if any. After the analysis is complete, the BLM will determine which potential ACECs will be designated and how they will be managed.

The Cody and Worland field offices currently manage nine ACECs: Carter Mountain, Five Springs Falls, Little Mountain, Sheep Mountain Anticline, Brown/Howe Dinosaur Area, Upper Owl Creek Area, Spanish Point Karst, Red Gulch Dinosaur Tracksite and Big Cedar Ridge.

The report determined that eight new areas and areas adjacent to existing ACECs meet the designation criteria and will be considered potential ACECs in the ongoing RMP revision process.

Common Questions About ACECs

What's the difference between ACECs and other designations (like WSAs)?

ACECs differ from other special areas, such as Wilderness Study Areas. ACEC designation by itself does not automatically prohibit or restrict other uses in the area. While a WSA is managed to a “non-impairment” standard that excludes surface disturbing activities and permanent structures that would diminish the area’s natural character, the management of an ACEC is focused on the resource or natural hazard of concern. This varies considerably from area to area, and in some cases may involve surface disturbing actions.

Who designates ACECs?

ACEC designation is an administrative designation made by the BLM through a land use plan. It is unique to the BLM—no other agency uses this form of designation. Private lands and lands administered by other agencies may be located within the boundaries of ACECs, but are not subject to the BLM’s management of the ACEC.

Why does the BLM designate ACECs?

Congress mandated the designation of ACECs through the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) to manage areas containing truly unique and significant resource values.

Why are ACECs an important management tool?

ACEC designations highlight significant resources or hazards where special management measures are needed to prevent irreparable damage. The ACEC designation enables a land manager to specifically address the relevant and important value or hazard and formulate a way to manage it. Designation also enhances the BLM’s ability to obtain land from willing sellers for the American people.

How does the BLM evaluate a proposed ACEC?

Proposed areas must pass the test for relevance and importance before they are evaluated for ACEC designation. To make this determination, a BLM interdisciplinary team evaluates the area. Nominated areas meeting relevance and importance criteria become proposed ACECs and are considered in the array of RMP alternatives. Each proposed ACEC is considered for designation and management actions are established in at least one of the management alternatives. The need for special management attention and the effects of applying such management are assessed in the environmental analysis.

What can or cannot occur in an ACEC?

Since the BLM sets special management measures for each designated ACEC, what can and cannot occur in different ACECs may vary dramatically. For example, leasing of oil and gas resources does not occur in the Spanish Point Karst ACEC, but oil and gas leasing is allowed in the Brown/Howe Dinosaur Area.

How can the public become involved in ACEC determinations?

You are encouraged to comment on the Draft RMP and EIS, currently scheduled for January 2011. You may comment on any aspect of the ACEC analysis, including the importance and relevance evaluation, the projected need for special management attention, the analysis of impacts, as well as the ACEC management and limitations on other resource uses.

An example of an effective comment is, “Habitat for the threatened and endangered plant species in the proposed Mountain Front ACEC does not extend beyond Highway 16 as documented in (Reference). Therefore, the western most boundary of the ACEC should be adjusted to the habitat area.”

Please Join Us!

Field Trips for the Bighorn Basin Resource Management Plan Revision

Date	Destinations and Objectives
Friday 7/23	West slope of the Bighorn Mountains (in the vicinity of Ten Sleep and Big Cedar Ridge): RMP issues to be discussed include travel management, visual resource management (VRM), off-highway vehicle (OHV) use, paleontology, ACECs, multiple use lands with wilderness characteristics, land tenure adjustment, wildlife habitat and sage-grouse, oil and gas management, renewable energy, social and economic considerations.
Thursday 7/29	Tatman Mountain/Fifteen Mile: RMP issues to be discussed include travel management, VRM, OHV use, wilderness study areas, multiple use lands with wilderness characteristics, wild horse management, wildlife habitat and sage-grouse, social and economic considerations, etc.
Saturday 7/31	Legend Rock/Grass Creek Oil Field/LU Ranch: RMP issues to be discussed include geothermal leasing, travel management, VRM, cultural resources, oil and gas management areas, multiple use lands with wilderness characteristics, social and economic considerations, vegetation management (fire/fuels), etc.
Thursday 8/5	Carter Mountain ACEC: issues pertinent to the ACEC to be discussed include fragile soils, wildlife habitats, threatened and endangered species, geology and minerals, oil and gas leasing.
Tuesday 8/10	Little Mountain: issues to be discussed include cultural resources, caves, travel management, wildlife habitats, land acquisitions and fuels management.
Saturday 8/14	McCullough Peaks: issues to be discussed include the wild horse herd management area, oil and gas exploration/development, recreation, VRM and paleontology.



Craig Thomas Little Mountain Special Management Area