

## ISSUE #6

### Should any areas be designated Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) and what kind of management is needed to protect the values they contain?

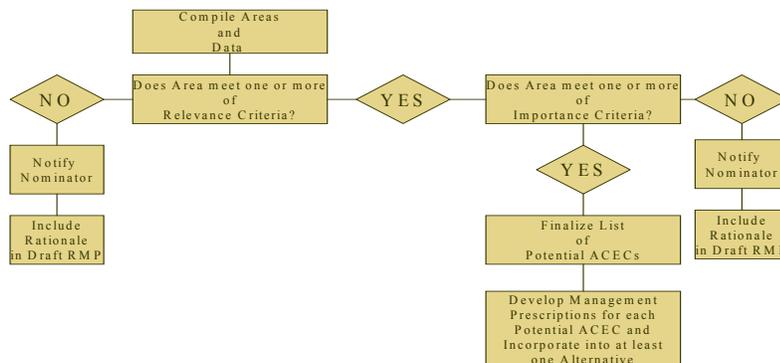
An Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) is an area of public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management where special management attention is required to protect important historic, cultural or scenic values, fish and wildlife resources or other natural systems, or to protect life and provide for safety from natural hazards. Management is considered “special” if it is unique to the area and includes terms and conditions specifically to protect the values in the ACEC. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act states that priority should be given to the designation and protection of these areas when developing land use plans.

Areas that are nominated for consideration as ACECs must meet relevance and importance criteria that are established in regulation and in BLM guidance (see next page for these criteria). These “potential” ACECs are then considered further in the planning process as alternatives are developed.

Proponents of ACECs consider the designation as a way to prevent loss or impact to certain values of particular interest. Concerns with ACEC designation revolve around limitations that special management might place on current and future uses. All ACECs do not require the same type of management. Special management is dependent upon the values which lend to the ACEC designation and the types of action necessary to protect those values. Some examples of special management might be:

1. withdrawal from mineral entry or leasing
2. changes in access/closure to motorized vehicles
3. changes in livestock grazing
4. changes in recreational uses
5. timing or seasonal restrictions
6. restrictions on new development or project construction

Steps in the evaluation of areas nominated as Areas of Critical Environmental concern are presented in the flowchart to the right.



## RELEVANCE AND IMPORTANCE CRITERIA

### 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 archaeological 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, sensitive, or threatened plant species; rare, endemic, or relic plants or plant communities which 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 may meet the relevance criteria if it is determined through the RMP process that it has become part of a natural process.

### IMPORTANCE

The value, resource, system, process or hazard that is present in the nominated area must have substantial significance and be characterized by one or more of the following:

- Has more than locally significant qualities which 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 in order to satisfy national priority concerns or to carry out the mandates of FLPMA.
- Has qualities which warrant highlighting in order to satisfy public or management concerns about safety and public welfare.
- Poses a significant threat to human life and safety or to property.