



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Uncompahgre Field Office Resource Management Plan Amendment Areas of Critical Environmental Concern Evaluation Report – 2024 Update



*Prepared by the Bureau of Land Management
Uncompahgre Field Office Interdisciplinary Team
September 23, 2024*

This page intentionally left blank

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Introduction	1
2	Overview of the Process.....	3
2.1	Relevance Criteria	3
2.2	Importance Criteria.....	4
2.3	Determining Relevance and Importance	4
2.4	Areas Evaluated	5
2.4.1	Existing ACECs Evaluated	5
2.4.2	Proposed ACECs Evaluated.....	6
3	ACEC Evaluations	12
3.1	Adobe Badlands ACEC.....	12
3.1.1	Summary of Findings	15
3.2	Big Game Winter Range ACECs	18
3.2.1	Summary of Findings	23
3.3	Dolores River Riparian and Paradox Cliffs ACEC	27
3.3.1	Summary of Findings	29
3.4	Dolores Slickrock Canyon ACEC	31
3.4.1	Summary of Findings	33
3.5	East Paradox/Biological Soil Crust ACEC	36
3.5.1	Summary of Findings	38
3.6	Elephant Hill ACEC.....	41
3.6.1	Summary of Findings	44
3.7	Fairview South ACEC/RNA.....	47
3.7.1	Summary of Findings	48
3.8	La Sal Creek ACEC.....	51
3.8.1	Summary of Findings	52
3.9	Lower Uncompahgre Plateau ACEC	55
3.9.1	Summary of Findings	56
3.10	Needle Rock ACEC/ONA.....	59
3.10.1	Summary of Findings	59
3.11	Paradox Rock Art ACEC	62
3.11.1	Summary of Findings	62
3.12	Roubideau ACEC.....	65

3.12.1 Summary of Findings	67
3.13 San Miguel Gunnison Sage-Grouse ACEC	71
3.13.1 Summary of Findings	72
3.14 San Miguel River ACEC	74
3.14.1 Summary of Findings	75
3.15 Sims-Cerro Gunnison Sage-Grouse ACEC.....	78
3.15.1 Summary of Findings	80
3.16 Shavano-Tabeguache ACEC.....	83
3.16.1 Summary of Findings	85
3.17 West Paradox Proposed ACEC	88
3.17.1 Summary of Findings	89
4 Uncompahgre Field Office Interdisciplinary Team	91
5 Literature Cited.....	92

TABLES

Table 1: CNHP Global and State Rankings Considered in ACEC Evaluations	4
Table 2: Existing ACECs	6
Table 3: Proposed ACECs Evaluated	7
Table 4: Adobe Badlands ACEC Relevance Findings	15
Table 5: Adobe Badlands ACEC Importance Findings	16
Table 6: CPW Nomination Summary – Relevant Values Present.....	22
Table 7: Big Game Winter Range ACECs Relevance Findings.....	23
Table 8: Big Game Winter Range ACEC Importance Findings.....	24
Table 9: Dolores River Riparian and Paradox Cliffs ACEC Relevance Findings.....	29
Table 10: Dolores River Riparian and Paradox Cliffs ACEC Importance Findings	29
Table 11: Dolores Slickrock Canyon ACEC Relevance Findings	33
Table 12: Dolores Slickrock Canyon ACEC Importance Findings.....	34
Table 13: East Paradox ACEC Relevance Findings.....	38
Table 14: East Paradox ACEC Importance Findings	38
Table 15: Elephant Hill ACEC Relevance Findings	44
Table 16: Elephant Hill ACEC Importance Findings.....	44
Table 17: Fairview South ACEC Relevance Findings.....	48
Table 18: Fairview South ACEC Importance Findings	49
Table 19: La Sal Creek ACEC Relevance Findings	52
Table 20: La Sal Creek ACEC Importance Findings	53
Table 21: Lower Uncompahgre Plateau ACEC Relevance Findings.....	56
Table 22: Lower Uncompahgre Plateau ACEC Importance Findings	56
Table 23: Needle Rock ACEC Relevance Findings	59
Table 24: Needle Rock ACEC Importance Findings	60
Table 25: Paradox Rock Art ACEC Relevance Findings.....	62

Table 26: Paradox Rock Art ACEC Importance Findings.....	63
Table 27: Roubideau ACEC Relevance Findings	67
Table 28: Roubideau ACEC Importance Findings.....	68
Table 29: San Miguel Gunnison Sage-Grouse ACEC Relevance Findings.....	72
Table 30: San Miguel Gunnison Sage-Grouse ACEC Importance Findings.....	72
Table 31: San Miguel River ACEC Relevance Findings	75
Table 32: San Miguel River ACEC Importance Findings	76
Table 33: Sims-Cerro Gunnison Sage-Grouse ACEC Relevance Findings	80
Table 34: Sims-Cerro Gunnison Sage-Grouse ACEC Importance Findings	81
Table 35: Shavano-Tabeguache ACEC Relevance Findings	85
Table 36: Shavano-Tabeguache ACEC Importance Findings.....	86
Table 37: West Paradox Proposed ACEC Relevance Findings.....	89
Table 38: West Paradox Proposed ACEC Importance Findings.....	89
Table 39: List of Evaluators	91

FIGURES

Figure 1: Existing ACECs	9
Figure 2: Previously Analyzed ACECs Reevaluated	10
Figure 3: 2024 Nominated ACECs Evaluated	11
Figure 4: Adobe Badlands ACEC.....	17
Figure 5: Big Game Winter Range ACEC.....	26
Figure 6: Dolores River Riparian and Paradox Cliffs ACEC	30
Figure 7: Dolores Slickrock Canyon ACEC	35
Figure 8: East Paradox/Biological Soil Crust ACEC	40
Figure 9: Elephant Hill ACEC.....	46
Figure 10: Fairview South CNHP Expansion ACEC.....	50
Figure 11: La Sal Creek ACEC.....	54
Figure 12: Lower Uncompahgre Plateau ACEC	58
Figure 13: Needle Rock ACEC.....	61
Figure 14: Paradox Rock Art ACEC	64
Figure 15: Roubideau ACEC.....	70
Figure 16: San Miguel Gunnison Sage Grouse ACEC.....	73
Figure 17: San Miguel River ACEC	77
Figure 18: Sims-Cerro Summit Gunnison Sage-Grouse ACEC	82
Figure 19: Shavano-Tabeguache ACEC.....	87
Figure 20: West Paradox ACEC	90

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACEC	Area of Critical Environmental Concern
AIM	Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring
BCS	Biological Soil Crust
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CHNP	Colorado Natural Heritage Program
CPW	Colorado Parks and Wildlife
CWP	Colorado Wildlands Project
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
ESA	Endangered Species Act
FLPMA	Federal Land Policy and Management Act
GUSG	Gunnison sage-grouse
IBA	Important Bird Area
IDT	Interdisciplinary Team
NCA	National Conservation Area
NPS	National Park Service
ONA	Outstanding Natural Area
PCA	Potential Conservation Area
PFCY	Potential Fossil Yield Classification
RMP	Resource Management Plan
RNA	Research Natural Area
ROD	Record of Decision
UFO	Uncompahgre Field Office
USFS	United States Forest Service
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
VRI	Visual Resource Inventory
VRM	Visual Resource Management
WSA	Wilderness Study Area
WSCC	Western Slope Conservation Center
WSERC	Western Slope Environmental Resource Council

1 INTRODUCTION

An Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) is defined in Section 103(a) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) as an area on Bureau of Land Management (BLM)-administered lands where special management attention is required to protect and prevent irreparable damage to important historic, cultural, or scenic values; fish and wildlife resources; natural systems or processes; or to protect life and ensure safety from natural hazards. The BLM regulations implementing the ACEC provisions of the FLPMA are found in 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1610.7-2. To be considered for ACEC designation, a nominated area must meet criteria for both relevance and importance, as found in 43 CFR 1610-7-2(d)(1)-(2) and defined in BLM Manual 1613, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (MS-1613; BLM 2024a).

During public scoping for the Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO) Resource Management Plan (RMP) revision, in 2010, members of the public were invited to nominate areas for ACEC consideration. In addition, internal nominations from the BLM interdisciplinary team (IDT) were sought. Nominated ACECs were evaluated in the 2013 Evaluation of Existing and Proposed Areas of Critical Environmental Concern for the Uncompahgre Planning Area (BLM 2013) to determine whether the area met the relevance and importance criteria and warranted further consideration in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The 2013 ACEC Report documented all nominations received through the UFO RMP revision effort and described all nominations that were determined by the BLM to meet relevance and importance criteria. Every area that met relevance and importance criteria was identified as a potential ACEC. As RMP revision alternatives were developed, a BLM IDT created management prescriptions for each potential ACEC based on the relevant and important values. These potential ACECs and management prescriptions were brought forward for analysis in one or more alternative in the 2019 Uncompahgre Field Office Proposed Resource Management Plan (UFO RMP) and Final EIS (BLM 2019).

The BLM issued the UFO Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (ROD/ARMP) in April 2020 (BLM 2020b) and received three lawsuits challenging the decision. In 2022, the BLM entered into settlement agreements on two of the lawsuits stipulating that the BLM would initiate an RMP amendment, to include the reevaluation of proposed ACECs previously analyzed under Alternative B of the 2019 UFO RMP/Final EIS. In response to the terms, the BLM published a Notice of Intent (NOI) for the UFO RMP Amendment in the Federal Register in January 2024. The NOI described existing ACEC designations and the ACECs being reconsidered under the terms of the settlement agreements. Per the NOI, new ACEC nominations would also be considered.

Public involvement is important in the process of identification, evaluation, and designation of an ACEC. The public is provided an opportunity to submit nominations or recommendations for areas to be considered for ACEC designation. Such recommendations are actively solicited from the public by the BLM at the beginning of a planning effort. Nominations should be accompanied by supporting materials, which can include but are not limited to maps, descriptions of the proposed ACEC, and evidence of the relevance and importance of the resources or hazards to facilitate a timely evaluation.

The public will have an opportunity to comment on the BLM's assessment of relevance and importance criteria and alternative management prescriptions for ACECs (and supporting analyses) when the draft RMP Amendment/EIS is made available for public review. The public may also comment on proposed ACEC areas that the BLM has determined do not meet the criteria for designation, which will be

identified as alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed analysis following MS-1613 (BLM 2024a). The public is encouraged to focus comments on the proposed management of the area rather than on whether or not the area is proposed for designation.

2 OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS

The process and procedural requirements for the designation of ACECs through the land use planning, revision, or amendment process are established in BLM planning regulation 43 CFR 1610.7-2, which states that ACEC protection and designation shall be considered throughout the planning process. Specific guidance for ACEC nomination, analysis, and designation includes:

- Nomination of ACECs, either by the BLM or the public.
- Evaluation of existing and nominated ACECs to determine whether they have values, resources, systems, or processes that meet established relevance and importance criteria.
- Establishing potential “special management attention” for potential ACEC areas that meet relevance and importance criteria.
- Analysis of potential ACECs and effectiveness of special management in alternatives during environmental review (usually an EIS).
- It is presumed that all potential ACEC designations that meet the relevance and importance criteria and require “special management attention” in order to protect their relevance values, resources, systems or processes will be designated [43 CFR 1610.7-2(j)(1)(i)].

Special management attention refers to management prescriptions developed during an RMP amendment expressly to protect the relevant and important values of an area from identified potential threat. Special management attention means management prescriptions that:

1. Protect and prevent irreparable damage to the relevant and important values, or that protect life and safety from natural hazards; and
2. Would not be prescribed if the relevant and important values were not present. In this context, “irreparable damage” means harm to a value, resource, system, or process that substantially diminishes the relevance or importance of that value, resource, system, or process in such a way that recovery of the value, resource, system, or process to the extent necessary to restore its prior relevance or importance is impossible [43 CFR 1610.7-2(d)(3)(i)-(ii)].

The BLM must evaluate the need for special management attention for the potential ACECs under 43 CFR 1610.7-2(g) (BLM 2024a). Management prescriptions for proposed ACEC designation are developed and analyzed during preparation of the draft and final RMP Amendment/EIS. If the analysis in the EIS determines special management attention is needed to protect the relevant and important values of the proposed ACEC, the designation is made in the Record of Decision. ***Designations are made when the relevance and importance criteria are met, and protection of those values from irreparable harm could not be met through other law, policy, or action.***

2.1 RELEVANCE CRITERIA

Under 43 CFR 1610.7-2(d)(1) an area has relevance if it contains one or more of the following:

1. An important historic, cultural, or scenic value.
2. Fish and wildlife resources.
3. Natural systems or processes.
4. Natural hazards potentially impacting life and safety.

2.2 IMPORTANCE CRITERIA

Under 43 CFR 1610.7-2(d)(2) a proposed area meets the importance criterion if one or more of the following characteristics is present:

1. Qualities of special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern.
2. National or more than local importance, subsistence value, or regional contribution of a resource, value, system, or process.
1. Contributes to ecosystem resilience, landscape intactness, or habitat connectivity.
2. A natural hazard can be important if it is a significant threat to human life and safety.

2.3 DETERMINING RELEVANCE AND IMPORTANCE

An interdisciplinary team of specialists (see **Table 39**) reviewed all existing and proposed ACECs using a wide variety of information and data, following guidance in MS-1613 (BLM 2024a). The 2013 UFO ACEC Report utilized the Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP) Element Imperilment Rankings as a primary tool for evaluating relevance and importance criteria for ACECs nominated during the UFO RMP revision (CNHP 2024a). The CNHP rankings are indicators for global rarity and state rarity of biological communities (**Table 1**). The IDT continued to use the CNHP Element Imperilment Rankings as a primary evaluation tool for determining relevance and importance (BLM 2024c).

In addition, the IDT used the CNHP Potential Conservation Area (PCA) determinations for evaluating relevance and importance (CNHP 2024b). PCAs are CNHP's estimate of an area's long-term ability to support and maintain healthy, viable targets over the long term (100+ years), including the ability to respond to natural or human-caused environmental change. PCAs do not necessarily preclude human activities, but their ability to function naturally may be greatly influenced by them. PCAs at all scales may require ecological management or restoration to maintain their functionality. PCAs are assigned biodiversity significance ranks ranging from 1 (Outstanding Significance) to 5 (General Interest). Ranks are based on the rarity and quality of the element occurrences in the site (**Table 1**). PCA ratings of B1 and B2 may meet importance criteria 2 for regional contribution to a resource, when a relevant biological resource is present.

Table 1: CNHP Global and State Rankings Considered in ACEC Evaluations

CNHP GLOBAL RARITY RANKING (based on the range-wide status of a species)	
G1	Critically imperiled globally because of extreme rarity (5 or fewer occurrences, or very few remaining individuals), or because of some factor of its biology making it especially vulnerable to extinction. (Critically endangered throughout its range).
G2	Imperiled globally because of rarity (6 to 20 occurrences), or because of other factors demonstrably making it very vulnerable to extinction throughout its range. (Endangered throughout its range.)
G3	Very rare or local throughout its range or found locally in a restricted range (21 to 100 occurrences). (Threatened throughout its range.)
G4	Apparently secure globally, though it might be quite rare in parts of its range, especially at the periphery.

CNHP GLOBAL RARITY RANKING (based on the range-wide status of a species)	
G5	Demonstrably secure globally, though it may be quite rare in parts of its range, especially at the periphery.

CNHP STATE RARITY RANKING (based on status of species [relative abundance of individuals] in each state)	
S1	Critically imperiled in state because of extreme rarity (5 or fewer occurrences, or very few remaining individuals), or because of some factor of its biology making it especially vulnerable to extirpation from the state. (Critically endangered in state.)
S2	Imperiled in state because of rarity (6 to 20 occurrences), or because of other factors demonstrably making it very vulnerable to extirpation from the state. (Endangered or threatened in state.)
S3	Rare in state (21 to 100 occurrences).

CNHP POTENTIAL CONSERVATION AREA (PCA) RANKINGS (based on biodiversity rankings)	
B1	Outstanding Biodiversity Significance
B2	Very High Biodiversity Significance
B3	High Biodiversity Significance
B4	Moderate Biodiversity Significance
B5	General Interest/Open Space

In addition to the CNHP rankings the UFO IDT relied on external reports such as CPW Data Analysis Units, CPW high priority habitats (CPW 2023), and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recovery plans (USFWS 2020); the BLM State Director’s Sensitive Species List (BLM 2023a); internal monitoring such as Land Health Assessments (LHA), Assessment, Indicator, and Monitoring (AIM) data, current BLM species distribution mapping (BLM 2024d), and bat acoustic monitoring; and formal BLM reports such as the UFO Visual Resource Inventory (BLM 2009b) and the UFO Paleontological Resource Sampling Survey (BLM 2009a). The BLM used this information to verify information provided in nomination report (WSCC 2024).

2.4 AREAS EVALUATED

2.4.1 Existing ACECs Evaluated

The 2020 UFO ROD designated six ACECs covering approximately 30,100 acres to protect the relevant and important values from irreparable harm (see **Table 2** and **Figure 1**). Of the six designations, two were new, one was an expansion of a previously existing ACEC, and three were existing ACECs carried forward from the San Juan/San Miguel RMP (BLM 1985) and the Uncompahgre Basin RMP (BLM 1989).

Many of these ACECs are within the boundary of a larger proposed ACEC. This report evaluates all existing ACECs following MS-1613 (BLM 2024a). To reduce redundancy, only the largest area for an existing or proposed ACEC is evaluated, as described in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Existing ACECs

ACEC NAME	STATUS	ACRES*	AREA EVALUATED	LEGAL DESCRIPTION
Adobe Badlands ACEC/ONA	Existing	6,400	This ACEC is entirely within the proposed Adobe Badlands expanded ACEC and is evaluated under the larger proposed area.	6th Principal Meridian T. 14 S., R. 96 W., Secs. 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 33, 34, 35, and 36 T. 15 S., R. 96 W., Secs. 2, 3, and 4
Biological Soil Crust ACEC	Existing	400	This ACEC is entirely within the proposed East Paradox ACEC and is evaluated under the larger proposed area.	New Mexico Principal Meridian T. 47 N., R. 18 W., Secs. 22, 23, 26, and 27
Fairview South ACEC/RNA BLM Expansion	Existing	600	This ACEC is entirely within the proposed Fairview South expanded ACEC and is evaluated under the larger proposed area.	New Mexico Principal Meridian T. 48 N., R. 8 W., Secs. 6 and 7 T. 48 N., R. 9 W., Secs. 1 and 12
Needle Rock	Existing	100	This ACEC is evaluated as it currently exists.	6th Principal Meridian T. 15 S., R. 91 W., Sec. 27
Paradox Rock Art	Existing	1,100	This ACEC is evaluated as it currently exists.	New Mexico Principal Meridian T. 46 N., R. 16 W., Sec. 18 T. 46 N., R. 17 W., Secs. 1, 2, 3, 11, 12, and 13
San Miguel River ACEC	Existing	21,500	This ACEC is entirely within the proposed San Miguel River expanded ACEC and is evaluated under the larger proposed area.	New Mexico Principal Meridian T. 43 N., R. 11 W., Secs. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 T. 43 N., R. 12 W., Secs. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 21, 27, 28, and 34 T. 44 N., R. 11 W., Secs. 19, 20, 21, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, and 33 T. 44 N., R. 12 W., Secs. 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 17, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, and 35 T. 45 N., R. 12 W., Secs. 18, 19, 20, 28, 29, 30, and 33 T. 45 N., R. 13 W., Secs. 1, 2, 3, 11, 12, 13, and 24 T. 46 N., R. 13 W., Secs. 28, 29, 32, and 33

2.4.2 Proposed ACECs Evaluated

The settlement agreements specifically require the BLM to consider the 15 proposed ACECs previously analyzed under Alternative B of the 2019 UFO RMP/Final EIS. Many of the ACECs required by the settlement agreement are contained within a larger proposed ACEC being evaluated in this report. To reduce redundancy, only the largest area for an ACEC required for reconsideration under the settlement

agreement is evaluated. Individual evaluations identify all existing or previously analyzed ACECs within the boundary of the larger area. See **Figure 2**.

During scoping for the 2024 UFO RMP Amendment, the BLM received new ACEC nominations from Colorado Wildlands Project (CWP) and the Western Slope Conservation Center (WSCC). Four out of five of the nominations from CWP and WSCC are expansions of ACECs previously analyzed in 2019 and required for reconsideration under the settlement agreement. To reduce redundancy, only the largest area for an ACEC nomination received by CPW and WSCC in 2024 during scoping for the UFO RMP Amendment is evaluated. The exception is the Dolores River Riparian and Paradox Cliffs ACEC, which encompasses four ACECs previously analyzed in 2019, but is significantly larger with additional relevant and important values not found within the smaller areas; it is evaluated individually. See **Figure 3**.

The BLM also received ACEC nominations from the Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW). The initial nomination package from the CPW included 23 individual areas totaling 260,000 acres, including private lands. The nomination indicated these areas contain habitat for big game and BLM special status wildlife species. Due to the geographic extent and generalized nature of the initial CPW nomination package, the BLM and the CPW agreed that CPW would focus their nominations on priority areas where big game habitat and special status wildlife species values were most likely to meet relevance and importance criteria. As a result of this agreement, the CPW refined their nominations to seven areas totaling 126,000 acres (the BLM removed private lands that were submitted by CPW from the total acres evaluated). The BLM evaluated these seven areas together for relevance and importance regardless of any overlap with other ACECs already being evaluated. See **Figure 3**.

Table 3 and **Figures 1–3** show all proposed ACECs evaluated in this report. Acres in **Table 3** are not shown due to the overlapping nature and variable boundaries of existing, previously proposed, and newly nominated ACECs. For ACECs where it is determined that relevant and important values exist, the BLM may adjust ACEC boundaries following 43 CFR 1610.7-2(f) and MS-1613 (BLM 2024a). Legal descriptions for the proposed ACECs shown in **Table 3** are included in each evaluation.

Table 3: Proposed ACECs Evaluated

ACEC NAME	STATUS	RELEVANCE CRITERIA SUPPORTED	IMPORTANCE CRITERIA SUPPORTED	RELEVANT AND IMPORTANT?
Adobe Badlands ACEC	existing; previously analyzed in 2019; 2024 nomination	2	2	Yes
Big Game Winter Range ACECs	2024 nomination			
Atkinson Mesa	2024 nomination	2	3	Yes
Chaffee Creek	2024 nomination	2	None	No
Elephant Hill	2024 nomination	2	None	No
Naturita Ridge	2024 nomination	2	None	No
Roubideau	2024 nomination	2	2, 3	Yes
Sims Mesa	2024 nomination	2	1, 3	Yes
Third Park	2024 nomination	2	3	Yes
Dolores River Riparian and Paradox Cliffs	2024 nomination	1, 2, 3	1, 2, 3	Yes
Dolores Slickrock Canyon ACEC	previously analyzed in 2019	1, 2	1, 2, 3	Yes

ACEC NAME	STATUS	RELEVANCE CRITERIA SUPPORTED	IMPORTANCE CRITERIA SUPPORTED	RELEVANT AND IMPORTANT?
East Paradox ACEC/Biological Soil Crust ACEC	existing; previously analyzed in 2019	2, 3	1, 2, 3	Yes
Elephant Hill ACEC	2024 nomination	2	None	No
Fairview South ACEC/RNA	existing; previously analyzed in 2019	1, 2	1, 2	Yes
La Sal Creek ACEC	previously analyzed in 2019	1, 2, 3	1, 2, 3	Yes
Lower Uncompahgre Plateau ACEC	previously analyzed in 2019	1, 2	1, 2, 3	Yes
Roubideau ACEC	previously analyzed in 2019; 2024 nomination	1, 2, 3	1, 2, 3	Yes
San Miguel Gunnison Sage Grouse ACEC	previously analyzed in 2019	2	1, 2	Yes
San Miguel River ACEC Expansion	existing; previously analyzed in 2019	1, 2, 3	1, 2, 3	Yes
Sims Cerro Gunnison Sage Grouse ACEC	previously analyzed in 2019	2	1, 2	Yes
Shavano-Tabeguache ACEC	previously analyzed in 2019; 2024 nomination	1, 2	1, 2, 3	Yes
West Paradox ACEC	previously analyzed in 2019	2, 3	1, 2	Yes

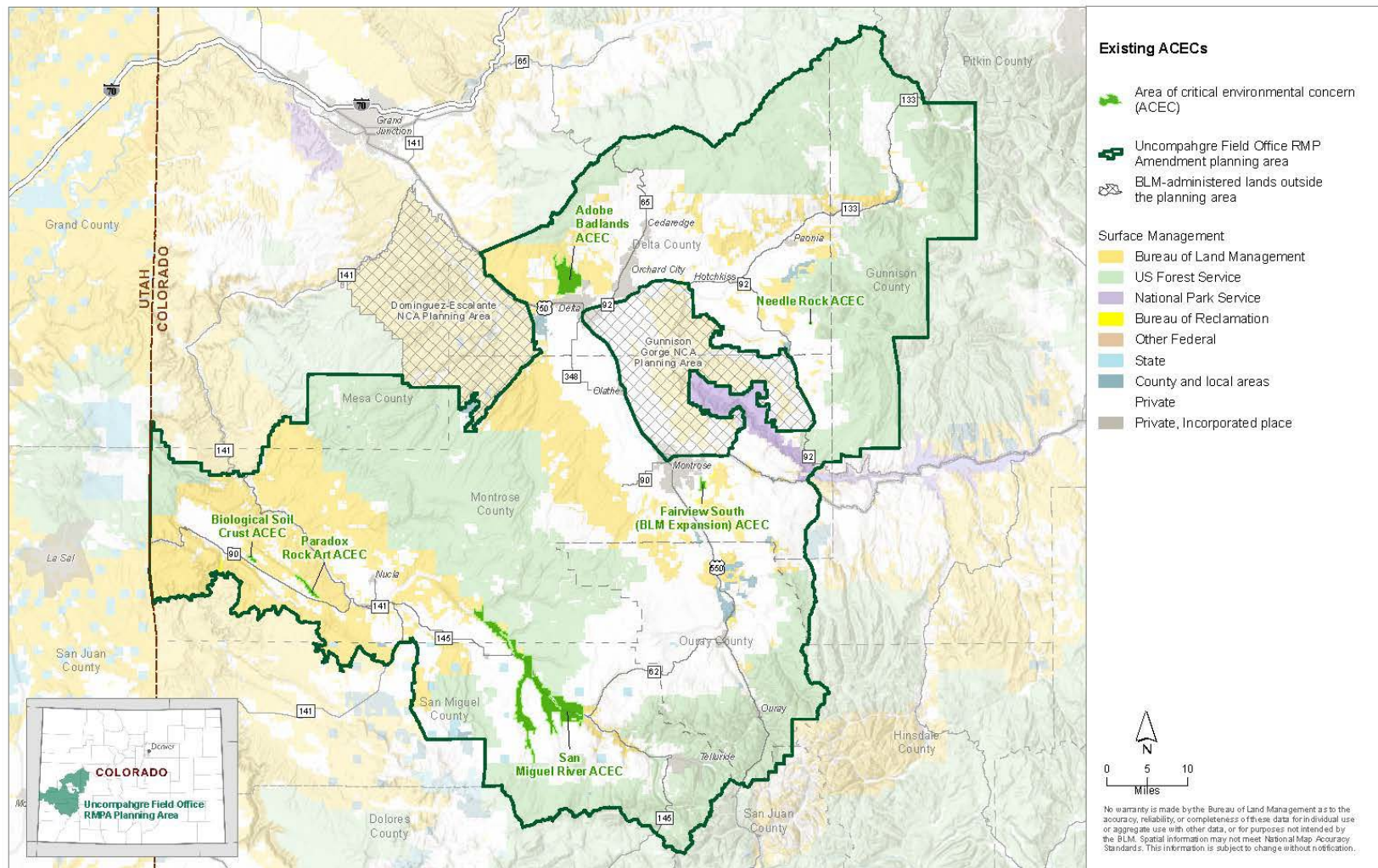


Figure 1: Existing ACECs

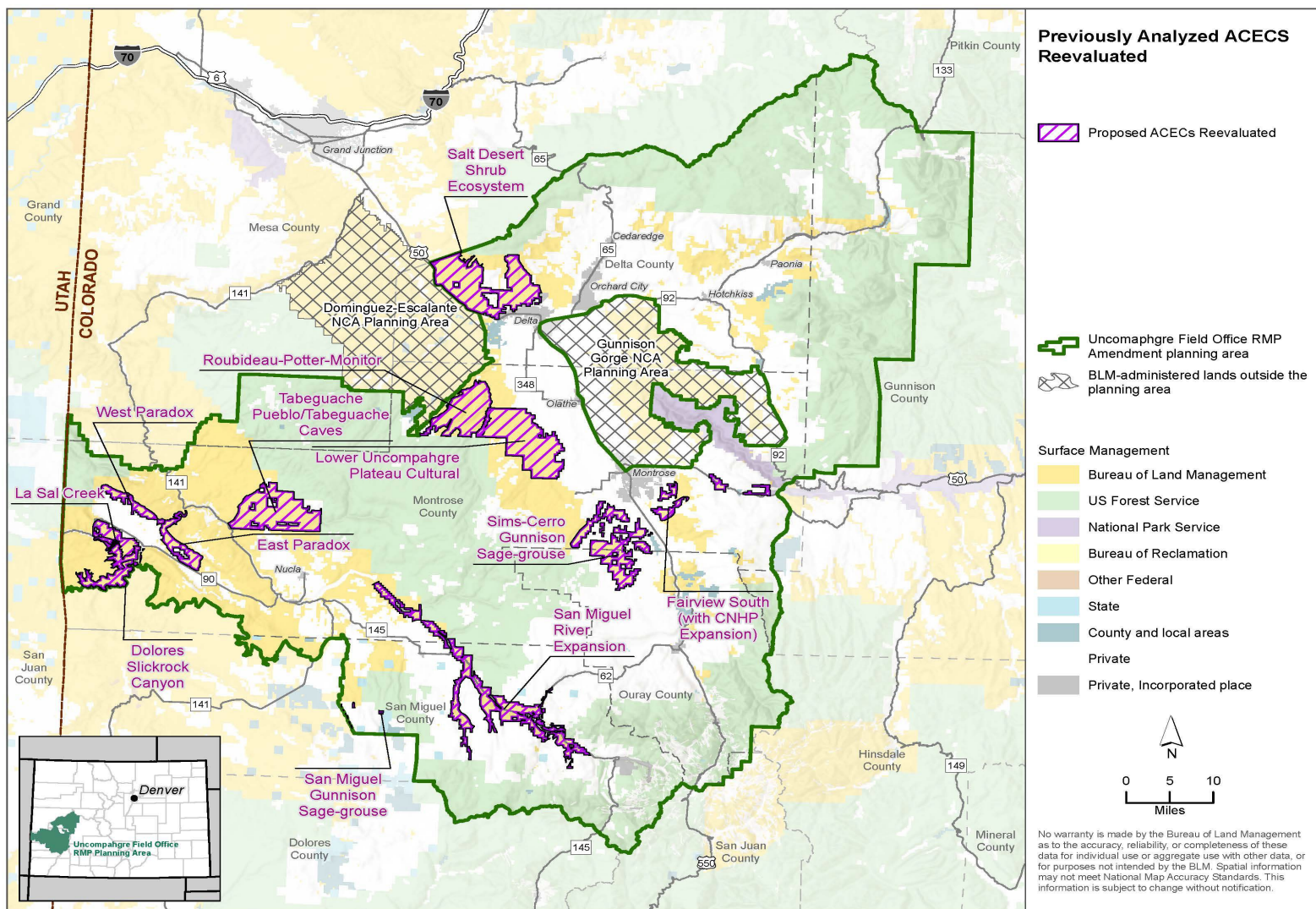


Figure 2: Previously Analyzed ACECs Reevaluated

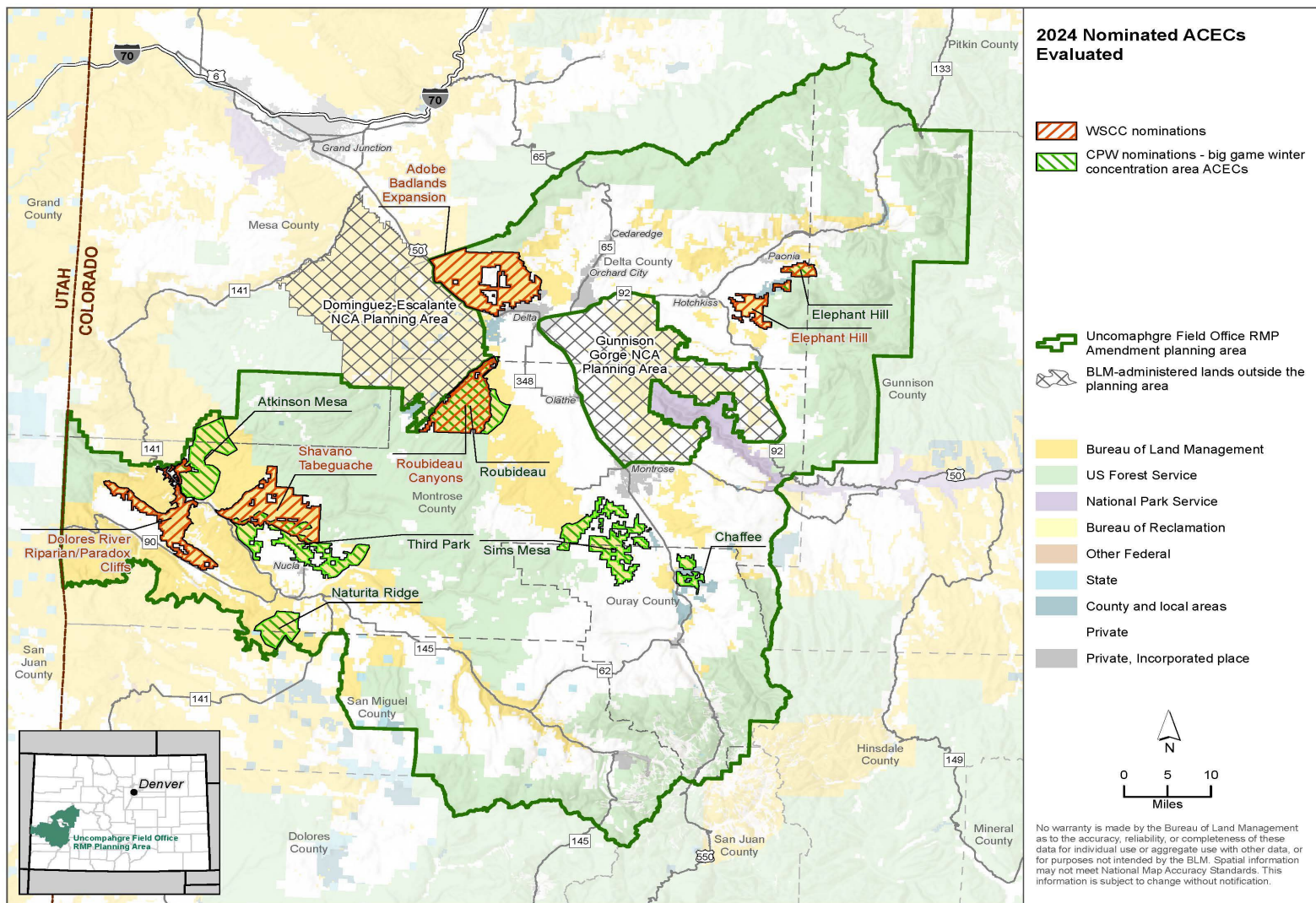


Figure 3: 2024 Nominated ACECs Evaluated

3 ACEC EVALUATIONS

3.1 ADOBE BADLANDS ACEC

Nomination: The Adobe Badlands is an existing ACEC. It was nominated for expansion in 2010 by Western Slope Environmental Resource Council (WSERC), WSCC, and a member of the BLM IDT during the UFO RMP revision; it was a proposed ACEC (Salt Desert Shrub Ecosystem ACEC) under Alternative B of the 2019 Proposed RMP. The area was nominated for expansion (Adobe Badlands Expansion) by WSCC and CWP in 2024 during public scoping for the UFO RMP Amendment.

The Salt Desert Shrub Ecosystem ACEC analyzed under Alternative B in the 2019 Proposed RMP, the Adobe Badlands Expansions ACEC nominated in 2024, and the existing Adobe Badlands ACEC will henceforth be known simply as the Adobe Badlands ACEC with multiple boundary options.

Legal Description:

6th Principal Meridian

T. 13 S., R. 96 W., Sec. 34

T. 13 S., R. 97 W., Secs. 32 and 33

T. 14 S., R. 96 W., Secs. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, and 36

T. 14 S., R. 97 W., Secs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 23, 25, 26, 35, and 36

T. 14 S., R. 98 W., Secs. 1, 11, and 12

T. 15 S., R. 96 W., Secs. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 18

T. 15 S., R. 97 W., Secs. 1, 2, 11, and 12

Ute Principal Meridian

T. 4 S., R. 3 E., Secs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 35, and 36

Size: The existing ACEC is 6,400 acres. The Salt-Desert Shrub Ecosystem ACEC analyzed under Alternative D in the 2019 Proposed RMP is 34,500 acres. The 2024 proposed expansion is 40,715 acres.

General Location: Delta County, Colorado northwest of the town of Delta, north and east of Colorado State Highway 50, and south of the Grand Mesa National Forest. The ACEC includes 6,380 acres of the Adobe Badlands WSA. See **Figure 4**.

Evaluation Completed: Evaluated by the UFO IDT in 2013; reevaluated by the UFO IDT in March 2024.

Values Assessed:

- Cultural: Archaeological Sites
- Vegetation: Special Status Plant Species
- Fish and Wildlife: Special Status Species
- Natural Hazards: Selenium Soils

Cultural

Per the 2024 nomination report, this area contains evidence of the presence of prehistoric peoples. While the area is six miles away from Eagle Rock Shelter, and contains lithic scatters and isolated stone tools, those cultural resources are relatively common throughout the region and beyond. Prehistoric people have lived, hunted, gathered, and traveled all throughout the region leaving behind similar artifacts.

Vegetation

This broad, gently sloping shrub/grassland covers a large area east of the Gunnison River in western Delta County. The existing Adobe Badlands ACEC lies within part of the proposed ACEC. Vegetation in much of the area is characterized by shadscale with galleta grass, except on north facing slopes where the dominant grass is salina wildrye. The area also has two occurrences of globally vulnerable to globally secure (G3/G5) and locally imperiled (G3/S2) cold desert shrubland communities.

The area contains populations of the threatened Colorado hookless cactus (*Sclerocactus glaucus*). The species has been recommended for delisting by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in 2023 and is considered globally and locally vulnerable (G2/S2). The Intermountain Indian breadroot (*Pediomelum megalanthum*) occurs over a wide area, usually on the edges of dry washes, but is never abundant in any one place. The high elevation hillslopes are less weedy than the lower elevations of the proposed ACEC. Low-lying swales are dominated by greasewood, along with seablight and winterfat.

Long term and impacting drought coupled with upland rangeland health issues have resulted in extensive downward trends in the vegetation communities including extensive die back of the salt desert shrubland. Recent data indicates this area does not meet BLM Colorado Land Health Standards for soils and upland vegetation. Data indicates a substantial increase in invasive annual plants including halogeton, cheatgrass, and annual wheatgrass. Evidence exists to suggest that these degraded conditions may not be a recent phenomenon and have likely existed since at least the early 1970's. Substantial portions of the recommended area have departures from the ecological reference condition; given the sensitivity of this habitat type the area may not recover from these long-term impacts. Additionally, the landscape and vegetation are fragmented by numerous utility corridors, private land, county roads, and unauthorized uses such as off route travel and dumping.

Fish and Wildlife

To support relevance criteria, the 2024 nomination report identified the following special status species or their habitat as occurring in the nominated ACEC: Golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) breeding range; Bald eagle nest site, winter concentration, and winter forage; bonytail chub (*Gila elegans*); cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii*); Colorado pikeminnow (*Ptychocheilus lucius*); razorback sucker (*Xyrauchen texanus*); and lynx predictive summer and winter presence. Each are discussed in more detail below.

Bald eagle (G5/S3) nest sites, winter concentration areas, and winter forage habitat and Golden eagle (G5/S3) nests and breeding range are present. Both are BLM sensitive species and meet relevance criteria 2. However, no rationale was provided as to why the presence of Bald or Golden eagles meet the importance criteria. The nomination did not identify how these raptor nests or roost sites are distinct, at-risk, or have more than locally significant qualities compared to other raptor nests or eagle concentration areas. Further, BLM lands have many occurrences of Bald and Golden eagle, so the mere presence of either species habitat or nests does not automatically meet importance criteria.

Per the 2024 nomination report, CPW Species Activity Mapping (CPW 2024) layers for aquatic resources in the area include Aquatic Native Species Conservation Waters and Aquatic Sportfish Management Waters. Aquatic Native Species Conservation Waters are adjacent to, but not within, the proposed ACEC and do not meet relevance criteria. Aquatic Sportfish Management Waters are not conservation focused and do not meet relevance criteria. The nomination identifies presence of bonytail chub, Colorado pikeminnow, and razorback sucker. The streams within the area run into the Gunnison River where these species are present, but they are not present in the streams within the nominated ACEC. The streams in the area contain cutthroat trout; however, it is not native Cutthroat trout lineage.

The nomination identifies lynx predictive summer and winter presence, which is derived from a habitat model. There are no known occurrences of lynx within the proposed ACEC. The presence of modeled habitat does not confer relevance or importance for ACEC consideration.

The BLM determined that the area provides suitable habitat for BLM sensitive species including the white-tailed prairie dog (*Cynomys leucurus*), which is globally secure and state apparently secure (G4/S4); burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*), which is globally and locally secure G4/S4; and the ferruginous hawk (*Buteo regalis*), which is globally secure and state vulnerable (G4/S3). The area may once have contained kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis*), which is globally secure but locally critically imperiled (G4/S1) but based on work by both BLM and CPW the species is now considered extirpated south of Grand Junction. Globally secure populations do not meet importance criteria.

Big Game Crucial Winter Habitat

Per the 2024 nomination report, the following CPW Species Activity Mapping (CPW 2024) layers for big game are within the area: bighorn sheep winter range; elk migration corridor, severe winter range, and winter concentration area; mule deer winter concentration area; and pronghorn winter concentration area. Many of these Species Activity Mapping layers were identified in the nomination because they are adjacent to the proposed ACEC. As such, only the layers that directly overlap the nominated area is addressed: elk severe winter range and pronghorn winter concentration areas.

Big game species habitat, such as elk severe winter range and pronghorn winter concentration areas are widespread across the field office and are considered general habitat. Neither of these species is managed as BLM special status and when considered alone, these species do not meet relevance criteria. Big game severe winter range or winter concentration areas meet the relevance criteria because it is habitat essential for maintaining species diversity. However, this habitat is widespread and does not contain “more than locally important” values required to meet importance criteria. Due to the widespread nature of pronghorn winter concentration areas and elk severe winter range in the UFO coupled with lack of qualities that give it special worth or distinctiveness, the proposed areas does not meet the importance criteria 1 or 2.

The nomination identifies the region as providing essential habitat linkage between the high elevations of Grand Mesa, the canyons of Dominguez Escalante National Conservation Area, and the high country of the Uncompahgre Plateau, which is accurate and meets relevance criteria 2. However, this is true of all BLM lands across the field office, which provide essential habitat linkage between lower elevations, typically on BLM lands and the higher elevations, regardless of whether or not the landscape is intact. Due to the fragmented nature of the area coupled with failure to meet land health standards, it does not meet importance criteria 3.

The nomination also identifies implementing IM 2023-005: Habitat Connectivity on Public Lands as satisfying importance criteria 3. BLM IM 2023-005 directs the BLM to develop an initial geospatial layer to support identification of habitat connectivity on BLM-managed lands. The results of that modeling effort are not yet available to incorporate into this evaluation.

Several PCAs were identified within or immediately adjacent to the ACEC area. The adjacent PCAs do not meet the relevance criteria because the values contained within them do not occur within the proposed ACEC. Four PCAs are within the proposed ACEC, including Deer Creek East (B2) Wells Gulch (B2), Alkali Creek (B2) and North Delta (B2) and meet importance criteria 2 for providing regional contribution to a resource.

Natural Hazards

Per the 2024 nomination report, this area contains natural hazards. The Adobe Badlands ACEC is generally made up of Mancos shale. The Gunnison Basin Selenium Task Force, using Natural Resource Conservation Service data, has noted that “previously non-irrigated Mancos shale derived soils have on average 34 times more soluble selenium than previously irrigated soils.” “More than half of the salt load originates in the Upper Colorado River Basin and a significant portion of that load can be related to Mancos Shale landscapes. Selenium, thought to originate from the Mancos Shale, has led to the non-compliance with the Clean Water Act...” However, the primary source of selenium loads to the Gunnison River in this region come from irrigated private lands. As such, the presence of selenium soils in and of themselves does not constitute a significant natural hazard.

3.1.1 Summary of Findings

Table 4: Adobe Badlands ACEC Relevance Findings

Relevance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. An important historic, cultural, or scenic value.	No	The proximity to Eagle Rock Shelter is insufficient to meet the criteria for the presence of a significant cultural resource. Lithic scatters are relatively common throughout the region.
2. Fish or wildlife resources.	Yes	Contains habitat for multiple BLM sensitive species: white-tailed prairie dog, burrowing owl, kit fox, and ferruginous hawk. The area contains habitat and/or Golden and Bald eagle nest sites. The area contains elk severe winter range and pronghorn winter concentration areas essential to species diversity.
3. Natural systems or processes.	Yes	Known populations of the endemic and federally listed Colorado hookless cactus (recommended for delisting in 2023) are present. CNHP considers salt desert shrubland in the area to be globally vulnerable and locally imperiled (G3/S2).

Relevance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
4. Natural hazards potentially impacting life and safety	No	The thousands of acres of seleniferous soils located in the proposed ACEC do not represent a significant natural hazard. The primary source of selenium loads to the Gunnison River come from irrigated and sub irrigated lands.

Table 5: Adobe Badlands ACEC Importance Findings

Importance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. Qualities of special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern.	No	The BLM sensitive white-tailed prairie dog, burrowing owl and ferruginous hawk are widespread throughout the region and are globally secure. Kit fox are extirpated from the area.
	No	The salt desert shrubland ecosystem is easily disturbed and difficult to restore and as a result has been degraded by persistent drought and historic grazing management. Land health evaluations show these lands are in a degraded condition and fragmented by historic and current land use.
2. National or more than local importance, subsistence value, or regional contribution of a resource, value or system, or process.	Yes	The area contains populations of the Colorado hookless cactus, a listed threatened species.
	No	Bald and Golden eagle nest sites and elk severe winter range are relatively common throughout the field office.
	Yes	The area overlaps with four CNHP B2 recommended PCAs and the existing Adobe Badlands ACEC.
3. Contributes to ecosystem resilience, landscape intactness, or habitat connectivity.	No	Due to the fragmented nature of the area coupled with failure to meet land health standards, it does not meet importance criteria 3. The area requires significant restoration to achieve land health standards in the future.

Determination: The Adobe Badlands potential ACEC meets relevance and importance criteria for one special status plant species, the federally listed Colorado hookless cactus.

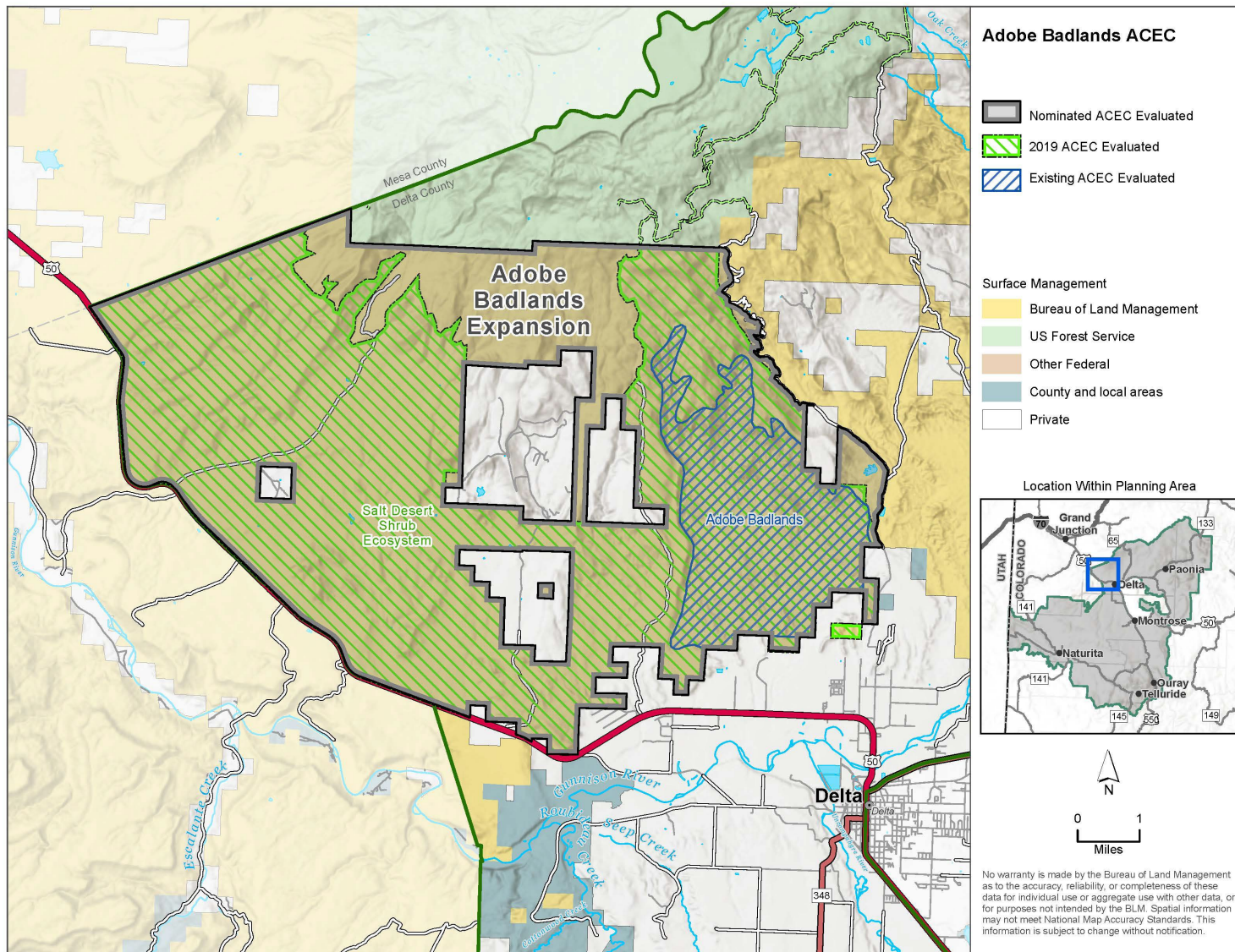


Figure 4: Adobe Badlands ACEC

3.2 BIG GAME WINTER RANGE ACECs

Nomination: Seven individual areas were nominated by CPW in 2024 during public scoping for the UFO RMP Amendment.

Legal Description:

Atkinson Mesa

New Mexico Principal Meridian

T. 48 N., R. 17 W., Secs. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21

T. 48 N., R. 18 W., Secs. 1, 2, 3, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 24

T. 49 N., R. 16 W., Secs. 19 and 30

T. 49 N., R. 17 W., Secs. 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, and 33

Chaffee Creek

New Mexico Principal Meridian

T. 46 N., R. 8 W., Secs. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 11

T. 47 N., R. 8 W., Secs. 21, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28, 33, 34, 35, and 36

Elephant Hill

6th Principal Meridian

T. 14 S., R. 90 W., Secs. 6 and 7

T. 14 S., R. 91 W., Secs. 1, 2, 3, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 21, and 22

Naturita Ridge

New Mexico Principal Meridian

T. 45 N., R. 15 W., Secs. 5, 6, 7, 8, 17, 18, 19, and 20

T. 45 N., R. 16 W., Secs. 1, 2, 3, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, and 27

T. 46 N., R. 15 W., Sec. 31

T. 46 N., R. 16 W., Secs. 35 and 36

Roubideau

New Mexico Principal Meridian

T. 49 N., R. 12 W., Secs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6

T. 49 N., R. 13 W., Secs. 1, 2, and 3

T. 50 N., R. 11 W., Secs. 18, 19, 20, 29, 30, and 31

T. 50 N., R. 12 W., Secs. 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, and 36

T. 50 N., R. 13 W., Secs. 13, 23, 24, 25, 26, 35, and 36

T. 51 N., R. 12 W., Secs. 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 33, 34, and 35

Sims Mesa

New Mexico Principal Meridian

T. 46 N., R. 9 W., Secs. 4, 5, and 8

T. 47 N., R. 9 W., Secs. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, and 34

T. 47 N., R. 10 W., Secs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, and 24

T. 48 N., R. 9 W., Secs. 18, 19, 20, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, and 35
T. 48 N., R. 10 W., Secs. 13, 14, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, and 36

Third Park

New Mexico Principal Meridian

T. 46 N., R. 14 W., Sec. 6

T. 46 N., R. 15 W., Secs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 10, 11, and 12

T. 47 N., R. 14 W., Secs. 19, 20, 21, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, and 33

T. 47 N., R. 15 W., Secs. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, and 36

T. 47 N., R. 16 W., Secs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 28, 29, 32, and 33

T. 47 N., R. 17 W., Secs. 1, 2, 12, and 13

T. 48 N., R. 16 W., Secs. 32, 33, 34, and 36

Size: 126,000 acres (private lands included in the nomination have been excluded from the evaluation).

General Location: Locations are distributed broadly across seven individual locations in the planning area in elevational transition zones between human populations and agricultural lands (the wildland urban interface) and higher elevation lands managed by the USFS. See **Figure 5**.

Three areas are located on the west end of Montrose County: Third Park is north of the town of Nucla on BLM lands intermingled with extensive private lands; Atkinson Mesa is northeast of Highway 141 from Atkinson Mesa extending west to the North Fork of Mesa Creek and the USFS boundary; Naturita Ridge is south of the town of Naturita between Highway 90 and Highway 141 south.

Two areas are located on the east side of the Uncompahgre Plateau: Sims Mesa is southwest of Montrose and north of Ridgway Reservoir, west of Highway 550, on BLM lands intermingled with extensive private lands; Roubideau is northwest of Montrose and encompasses the Camel Back WSA and lands northwest to the USFS boundary, including Potter Creek and Monitor Creek.

Two areas are located in proximity to State Wildlife Areas: Chaffee is northeast of the town of Ridgway, east of Highway 550, adjacent to the Billy Creek State Wildlife Area; Elephant Hill is southeast of the town of Paonia adjacent to McCluskey State Wildlife Area.

Some nominated ACEC boundaries significantly overlap other proposed ACECs that have been evaluated in this report, including the Roubideau ACEC (Chapter 3.12); the Sims-Cerro Gunnison Sage Grouse ACEC (Chapter 3.15); and the Elephant Hill ACEC (Chapter 3.6).

Evaluation Completed: Evaluated by the UFO IDT in March 2024.

Values Assessed:

- Fish and Wildlife: Big Game Crucial Winter Habitat, Special Status Species

Fish and Wildlife

The description of relevant and important values for areas overlapping other proposed or nominated ACECs evaluated in this report, and the findings for those values, remain the same. The evaluation of the

seven polygons submitted by CPW for the Big Game Winter Concentration ACECs focuses only on the values cited by CPW, which is primarily big game habitat, with some additional BLM special status species.

According to CPW wildlife collar data and classification flights, these areas contain high densities of wintering ungulates that is critical to species diversity and survival. Some areas provide excellent habitat connectivity with USFS lands. Individual areas also contain BLM sensitive wildlife species such as BLM sensitive species fish, Gunnison prairie dog, or Golden eagle. All species identified in the nomination for individual areas have been evaluated.

Due to the complexity of evaluating seven individual areas for ACEC criteria, and to reduce redundancy, the BLM evaluated each relevant and important value provided in the CPW nomination report below, and summarized areas with those values in **Table 6**. The occurrence of a BLM special status species meets ACEC relevance criteria 2. The CNHP Element Imperilment Rankings were used as a primary tool for evaluating qualities or circumstances that meet importance criteria. Species with G5/S4 or G5/S5 do not meet the importance criteria because they are considered secure on both a global and state level.

Big Game Crucial Winter Habitat

All areas contain deer and elk winter range, which, according to the CPW nomination report, is under threat by long-term drought conditions, increased recreation, land use changes, increased high intensity wildfire, and encroaching human fragmentation and development. Winter range in these regions is prone to adverse change, including increased prevalence of disease and increased abundance of non-native vegetation, leading to reduced carrying capacities on the landscape. Winter range on lower elevation private lands has decreased due to urban development. The three defined mule deer herds in these areas have experienced significant population decline over the last 30 years. In addition to the above challenges facing deer and elk herds, increased chronic wasting disease prevalence is also a factor.

Mule deer are G5/S4, which is globally secure and state apparently secure, elk are G5/S5 globally and state secure. Neither of these species is managed as BLM special status and when considered alone, these species do not meet relevance criteria. Big game severe winter range or winter concentration areas meet the relevance criteria because it is habitat essential for maintaining species diversity. However, this habitat is widespread and does not contain “more than locally important” values required to meet importance criteria. Due to the widespread nature of big game winter range in the UFO coupled with lack of qualities that give it special worth or distinctiveness, the proposed areas do not meet the importance criteria 1 or 2.

The nomination specifically identifies that the importance criteria 2 for more than local significance is met for all areas because they have an outsized impact on population level success of mule deer and elk. The nomination states “protecting local winter ranges helps ensure deer populations survive the harsh winter months and can recruit fawns in the following spring, allowing for population growth across the western U.S.” This rationale was supported by long term collar data from deer and elk and winter classification data, which show high densities of wintering big game during classification flights, and through species activity mapping of big game winter concentration areas and severe winter range. However, collar data is insufficient evidence to suggest these areas have an outsized impact on population level success of mule deer and elk. The nomination lacks information that suggests anything greater than local context (i.e. collar data and classification flights) of high densities of deer and elk.

The nomination identifies Elephant Hill as being extremely important for providing winter range for a significant portion of the North Fork Gunnison River mule deer herd, which does not highlight anything more than local significance for the North Fork Gunnison River mule deer herd. Further, the nomination identifies that these parcels are important because they meet the definition of winter concentration areas. Winter concentration areas are defined as that part of the winter range where densities are at least 200 percent greater than the surrounding winter range density in the average five winters out of ten. Meeting the definition of a Species Activity Mapping layer does not confer anything more than the expectation of the presence of high densities of mule deer on these lands.

The nomination identifies the juxtaposition of BLM parcels within parcels of CPW State Wildlife Areas and Nation Forest Lands and suggests that the additional protections on BLM lands will leverage existing protections on lands directly adjacent to the proposed Elephant Hill ACEC and Chaffee Creek ACEC. In general, the BLM considers these areas part of the Wildland Urban Interface, with habitat significantly fragmented by private land ownership and development.

The nomination also identifies implementing IM 2023-005: Habitat Connectivity on Public Lands as satisfying importance criteria 3. BLM IM 2023-005 directs the BLM to develop an initial geospatial layer to support identification of habitat connectivity on BLM-managed lands. The results of that modeling effort are not yet available to incorporate into this evaluation.

Secretarial Order 3362 (SO 3362) directs BLM to work in partnership with the states to enhance and improve the quality of big-game winter range and migration corridor habitat on Federal lands. In implementing SO 3362, each state developed a state-specific action plan. In the Colorado Big Game Action Plan (CPW 2022), CPW identified five landscape priority areas to guide agencies in determining the most important habitat for big game conservation and connectivity. In Colorado's action plan, five herds across the state were identified as priority herds. The Uncompahgre Plateau, encompassing the State's D19 deer and E20 elk herds, was identified as a landscape priority area, meeting importance criteria 3 for habitat connectivity.

Because big game habitat is ubiquitous throughout the field office, only areas within populations or herds identified under SO 3362 are considered as meeting importance criteria 3 for habitat connectivity. It is inappropriate for BLM to assign higher priority to herds outside of those identified in the Colorado Big Game Action Plan. Third Park, Atkinson Mesa, Sims Mesa, and Lower Roubideau occur in Uncompahgre Plateau priority landscape area. These four areas meet the importance criteria for habitat connectivity.

Bighorn Sheep

The nomination indicated bighorn sheep is a relevant and important value for some areas. The Lower Roubideau area has relevant and important bighorn sheep presence; these values are covered in greater detail in the evaluations of the Roubideau ACEC.

Gunnison Prairie Dog

Gunnison prairie dog (G5/S5) was identified in the nomination as a value in the Naturita Ridge area. The Gunnison prairie dog is a BLM sensitive species and meets relevance criteria. It does not meet importance criteria (1 or 2) because their habitat is common throughout the UFO, as evidenced by their state secure ranking, which means they are at very low or no risk of extirpation due to extensive range.

Special Status Species Fish

The nomination suggested special status fish species presence through the Species Activity Mapping layers for Aquatic Native Species Conservation Waters. However, no data was provided as to which species are present. All BLM sensitive fish species present in an area meet the relevance criteria 2. The nomination indicated that Third Park, Atkinson Mesa, and Chaffee Creek areas contain BLM sensitive fish species. The BLM utilized the BLM Fish Bearing Streams layer (BLM 2024b), which contains information on waterways that contain special status fish species to determine if special status species are present in these areas as no data was provided in the nomination.

Some special status fish were found to occur in the Third Park and Atkinson Mesa areas, including bluehead sucker (*Cantostomus discobolus*) (G4/S4) and flannelmouth sucker (*Catostomus latipinnis*) (G3/S3). Third Park and Atkinson Mesa meet the relevance criteria for special status species fish. The BLM Fish Bearing Streams layer did not record presence of special status species fish in the Chaffee Creek area. Therefore, Chaffee Creek does not meet relevance criteria for status species fish.

Third Park encompasses several miles of Tabeguache Creek; these waters are important movement corridors and spawning areas for three BLM sensitive fish species. Thus, Third Park meets importance criteria for special status species fish. In the Atkinson Mesa area are too small to be biologically relevant for ACEC nomination consideration. Therefore, Atkinson Mesa does not meet the importance criteria for special status fish species.

The nomination suggested a consideration of the Species Activity Mapping for CPW Aquatic Sportfish Management Waters as a consideration for relevance. However, CPW Aquatic Sportfish Management Waters is not focused on the conservation of native fish species or special status species, which makes the waters not relevant in ACEC consideration.

Special Status Birds

The nomination identifies the presence of Golden eagles (G5/S3) in the Elephant Hill area, which is a BLM sensitive species and meets relevance criteria 2. To meet the importance criteria, areas with eagle values must contain disproportionate value compared to the broader population of eagles (importance criteria 1 or 2). No information was provided to suggest particular cause for concern or anything greater than local context for the presence of Golden eagles. Therefore, Elephant Hill does not meet importance criteria for Golden eagles.

The presence of threatened or endangered species or occupied critical habitat present qualify for both relevance (criteria 1) and importance criteria (criteria 2). Relevance and importance criteria are supported for Sims Mesa, which has mapped Critical habitat for Gunnison sage-grouse (GUSG), a threatened species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Table 6: CPW Nomination Summary – Relevant Values Present

Name	Acres*	Big Game Critical Winter Range**	BLM Sensitive Species Wildlife/ Raptors	Threatened or Endangered Species	Aquatic Native Species Conservations Waters (Special Status Species Fish)	S0 3362: Uncompahgre Plateau Landscape Priority
Third Park	26,500	x	-	-	bluehead sucker flannelmouth sucker	x

Name	Acres*	Big Game Critical Winter Range**	BLM Sensitive Species Wildlife/ Raptors	Threatened or Endangered Species	Aquatic Native Species Conservations Waters (Special Status Species Fish)	S0 3362: Uncompahgre Plateau Landscape Priority
Atkinson Mesa	23,800	x	-	-	bluehead sucker flannelmouth sucker	x
Naturita Ridge	9,900	x	Gunnison prairie dog	-	-	-
Chaffee Creek	4,700	x	-	-	No known presence	-
Sims Mesa	25,300	x	-	GUSG critical habitat	-	x
Lower Roubideau	31,200	x	Bighorn sheep	-	-	x
Elephant Hill	4,500	x	Golden eagle	-	-	-

* Acres rounded to the nearest 100; private lands within the nominated area have been excluded

** Severe and/or winter concentration areas for mule deer and/or elk from Species Activity Mapping (SAM) layer

3.2.1 Summary of Findings

Table 7: Big Game Winter Range ACECs Relevance Findings

Relevance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. An important historic, cultural, or scenic value.	Yes	See evaluation for the Roubideau ACEC and the Shavano-Tabeguache ACEC.
2. Fish or wildlife resources.	Yes	All areas: big game crucial winter range habitat is present in all seven nominated areas and is important for species diversity.
	Yes	Roubideau area: desert bighorn sheep are present. (See evaluation for the Roubideau ACEC.)
	Yes	Elephant Hill area: Golden eagles are present.
	Yes	Sims Mesa area: GUSG, are present. (See evaluation for the Sims-Cerro Gunnison Sage-Grouse ACEC.)
	Yes	Naturita Ridge: Gunnison Prairie dog, are present.
	Yes	Third Park and Atkinson Mesa areas: three BLM special status fish species are present.
3. Natural systems or processes.	Yes	See evaluation for the Roubideau ACEC.
4. Natural hazards potentially impacting life and safety	No	No hazards potentially impacting life and safety were found.

Table 8: Big Game Winter Range ACEC Importance Findings

Importance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. Qualities of special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern.	No	All areas: big game crucial winter range on all seven nominated areas do not meet this criterion because this type of habitat is widespread throughout the planning area, and not unique or distinct. Greater than 50% of the planning area constitutes big game winter range.
	Yes	Sims Mesa area: habitat for this GUSG population has become relatively small and isolated from other GUSG populations, and the population is vulnerable to extirpation. (See evaluation for the Sims-Cerro Gunnison Sage-Grouse ACEC.)
	No	Naturita Ridge area: Gunnison prairie dog has a state secure ranking (S5), which means they are at very low or no risk of extirpation due to extensive range.
2. National or more than local importance, subsistence value, or regional contribution of a resource, value or system, or process.	No	All areas: big game crucial winter range all seven areas do not meet this criterion. High densities of deer collar data and classification data does not suggest more than locally significant qualities especially compared to any similar big game winter range.
	Yes	Roubideau area: desert bighorn sheep are present regionally important. See evaluation for the Roubideau ACEC.
	No	Elephant Hill area: Golden eagle are present but there is no information to suggest more than locally significant qualities compared to other areas with Golden eagles.
	No	Naturita Ridge area: Gunnison prairie dogs are present but there is no information to suggest these areas have more than locally significant qualities compared to any other prairie dog habitat.
3. Contributes to ecosystem resilience, landscape intactness, or habitat connectivity.	Yes	Third Park, Atkinson Mesa, Sims Mesa, and the Roubideau area: these are within the Uncompahgre Plateau priority landscape unit as identified Colorado's SO 3362 State Action Plan. The State Action Plan guides the BLM in determining priorities for landscape intactness and habitat connectivity for big game, therefore this criterion is met.

Importance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
	No	Chaffee Creek, Elephant Hill, and Naturita Ridge do not meet this criterion because they are outside the Uncompahgre Plateau priority landscape. It is inappropriate for the BLM to assign priority to herds other than those identified in SO 3362.
	Yes	Tabeguache Creek in the Third Park area is an important movement corridor and spawning areas for three BLM sensitive species fish. (See Shavano-Tabeguache ACEC.)
	No	The fish bearing stream segments in the Atkinson Mesa areas are too small to be biologically relevant.

Determination: The Third Park area meets relevance and importance criteria because it contains big game crucial winter range habitat in a priority landscape under SO 3362, and because it contains important movement corridor and spawning areas for three BLM sensitive fish species. The portion of this polygon containing relevant and important values for BLM sensitive fish species is also within the Shavano-Tabeguache ACEC. The Third Park area will henceforth be known as the Third Park Big Game Winter Range ACEC.

The Atkinson Mesa area meets relevance and importance criteria because it contains big game crucial winter range habitat in a priority landscape under SO 3362. The Atkinson Mesa area will henceforth be known as the Atkinson Mesa Big Game Winter Range ACEC.

The Sims Mesa area meets relevance and importance criteria because it contains GUSG, a threatened species, and because it is big game crucial winter range in a priority landscape under SO 3362. This area is entirely within the proposed Sims-Cerro Summit Gunnison Sage Grouse ACEC (see Chapter 3.14). Big game winter range is added as a relevant and important value for the proposed Sims-Cerro Summit ACEC. The area will henceforth continue to be known as the Sims-Cerro Summit Gunnison Sage Grouse ACEC.

The Roubideau area meets relevance and importance criteria because it contains big game crucial winter range habitat in a priority landscape under SO 3362, and habitat for desert bighorn sheep. The Roubideau area is almost entirely within the Roubideau ACEC. (Chapter 3.11) Big game winter range is added as a relevant and important value for the Roubideau ACEC. The Roubideau area will be known as the Roubideau ACEC.

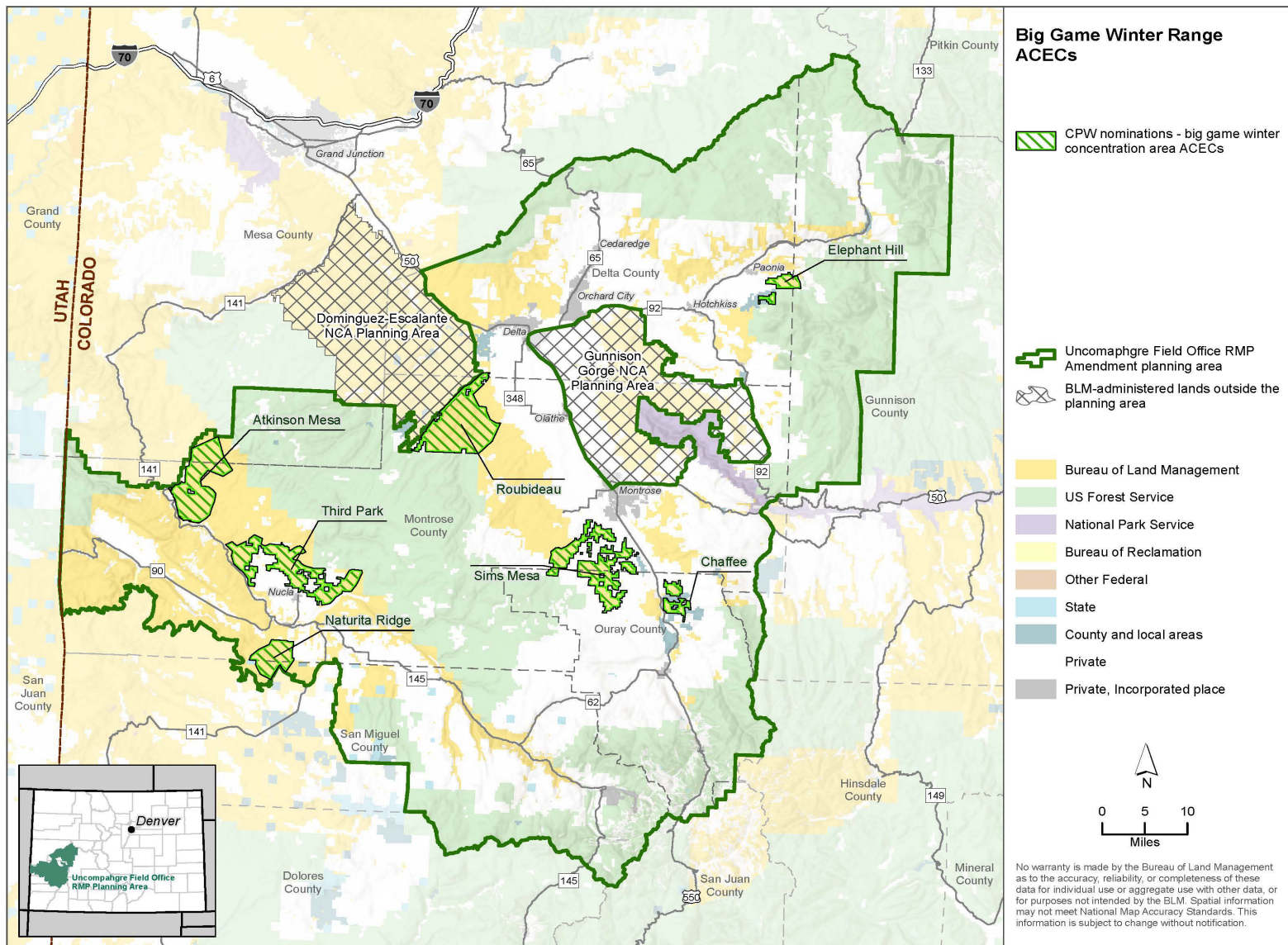


Figure 5: Big Game Winter Range ACEC

3.3 DOLORES RIVER RIPARIAN AND PARADOX CLIFFS ACEC

Nomination: This area was nominated by CPW in 2024 during public scoping for the UFO RMP Amendment.

Legal Description:

New Mexico Principal Meridian

T. 46 N., R. 17 W., Secs. 3, 4, 5, and 6

T. 47 N., R. 17 W., Secs. 6, 7, 19, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, and 34

T. 47 N., R. 18 W., Secs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 35, and 36

T. 48 N., R. 17 W., Secs. 6, 29, 30, and 31

T. 48 N., R. 18 W., Secs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, and 36

T. 48 N., R. 19 W., Secs. 14, 15, 16, 21, 22, 23, 26, 36, 51, 55, 59, and 60

T. 49 N., R. 17 W., Sec. 31

Size: 24,000 acres.

General Location: Montrose County, CO, from Bedrock downstream of the Dolores River to the confluence with the San Miguel River. North downstream of the Dolores River and Highway 141 to the UFO administrative boundary, including a portion of the North Fork of Mesa Creek. Upstream along the San Miguel River and Highway 141 to Atkinson Creek. From Carpenter Ridge south along Paradox Valley on the north side of Highway 90 to the west boundary of the existing Paradox Rock Art ACEC. See **Figure 6**.

Evaluation Completed: Evaluated by the UFO IDT in March 2024.

Values Assessed:

- Cultural: Archaeological Sites, Native American Significance, and Historic Sites
- Fish and Wildlife: BLM Special Status Species; Big Game Winter Range
- Natural Hazards: Soil Disturbance

Much of the nominated Dolores River Riparian and Paradox Cliffs ACEC is within an existing ACEC, as well as multiple ACECs analyzed in the 2019 Proposed RMP; these ACECs are analyzed in Chapter 3.5 East Paradox ACEC/Biological Soil Crust ACEC and Chapter 3.17 West Paradox ACEC. Therefore, the description of relevant and important values for soils, vegetation, and BLM special status plant and wildlife species, and the findings for those values apply to the Dolores River Riparian and Paradox Cliffs ACEC and are incorporated herein. In the nomination submission for the Dolores River Riparian and Paradox Cliffs ACEC, the proponent identified additional potentially relevant and important values, which are assessed below.

Cultural

The area is significant to Native American Tribes as ancestral homelands. Cultural sites such as important rock art panels including outstanding examples of Ancestral Puebloan-style petroglyphs, Formative Period and earlier occupations, features, and isolates, and settled village sites dating back more than five hundred to a thousand years.

In addition, the proposed ACEC includes the Hanging Flume, an historically important engineering marvel built at the end of the 19th century, which is still visible clinging to the sandstone walls above the San Miguel River and Dolores Rivers.

Fish and Wildlife

To support relevance criteria, the nomination report identified the following special status species or their habitat as occurring in the nominated ACEC: Golden eagle nests; Bald eagle nest sites, roost sites, and winter concentration area; peregrine falcon nests; pinyon jay habitat; sagebrush sparrow element occurrence and breeding range; burrowing owl breeding range; and potential GUSG habitat.

The nomination identifies Bald eagle (G5/S3) nest site, roost sites and winter concentration areas. Bald eagle are BLM sensitive species and meet relevance criteria 2. However, no rationale was provided as to why the presence of Bald eagles meet the importance criteria. The nomination did not identify how these raptor nests or roost sites are distinct, at-risk, or have more than locally significant qualities compared to other raptor nests or eagle concentration areas. Further, BLM lands have many occurrences of Bald eagle, so the mere presence of either species habitat or nests does not automatically meet importance criteria.

There are no known occurrences of GUSG within the identified nomination, so therefore this does not meet the relevance or importance criteria. Pinyon jay and sagebrush sparrow may contain general habitat or occurrences. However, both species are common throughout the field office and this location does not confer any particular cause for concern or constitute distinct or unique habitat meeting importance criteria.

Big Game Crucial Winter Habitat

The nomination identifies that the area contains desert bighorn sheep water source; elk highway crossing, migration corridors, resident population area, severe winter range, and winter concentration area; and mule deer concentration area, highway crossing, resident population area, severe winter range, and winter concentration area. Neither of these species is managed as BLM special status and when considered alone, these species do not meet relevance criteria. Big game severe winter range or winter concentration areas meet the relevance criteria because it is habitat essential for maintaining species diversity. However, this habitat is widespread and does not contain “more than locally significant qualities,” which are required to meet importance criteria. Due to the widespread nature of big game winter concentration areas and elk severe winter range in the UFO coupled with lack of qualities that give it special worth or distinctiveness, the proposed areas does not meet the importance criteria 1 or 2.

The nomination also identifies implementing IM 2023-005: Habitat Connectivity on Public Lands as satisfying importance criteria 3. BLM IM 2023-005 directs the BLM to develop an initial geospatial layer to support identification of habitat connectivity on BLM-managed lands. The results of that modeling effort are not yet available to incorporate into this evaluation.

The area overlaps partially with four areas identified by CNHP as B2 PCAs, including Dolores Canyon South, Uravan West, Paradox Valley North, and East Paradox Creek, which meet importance criteria 2 for providing regional contribution to a resource.

Natural Hazards

Per the nomination report, this region is susceptible to unintended consequences resulting from amplified human presence. The nomination claims that heightened foot traffic, recreational activities, and unrestricted access could induce adverse effects such as soil disturbance, compaction, and inadvertent damage to archaeological sites and culturally significant artifacts. However, human presence and activities in and around sensitive resources does not constitute a natural hazard.

3.3.1 Summary of Findings

Table 9: Dolores River Riparian and Paradox Cliffs ACEC Relevance Findings

Relevance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. An important historic, cultural, or scenic value.	Yes	The area contains important archaeological sites and rock art panels; the area is ancestral homelands for Ute Tribes.
2. Fish or wildlife resources.	Yes	The area contains habitat and/or Golden and Bald eagle nest sites, and big game winter range essential to species diversity.
3. Natural systems or processes.	Yes	See findings for East Paradox and West Paradox ACECs.
4. Natural hazards potentially impacting life and safety	No	General human presence and activity in and around other sensitive resources does not equate to a natural hazard posing a threat to human health and safety. These soils are not known to be sensitive to general use foot traffic.

Table 10: Dolores River Riparian and Paradox Cliffs ACEC Importance Findings

Importance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. Qualities of special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern.	Yes	Rock art panels are rare and vulnerable to damage.
2. National or more than local importance, subsistence value, or regional contribution of a resource, value or system, or process.	Yes	Archaeological sites and Native American ancestral homeland are nationally important.
	No	Bald and Golden eagle nest sites and big game winter range are relatively common throughout the field office.
	Yes	Overlaps with four areas identified by CNHP as B2 PCAs.
3. Contributes to ecosystem resilience, landscape intactness, or habitat connectivity.	No	The area is fragmented by private lands, state highways, county roads, and land uses and does not constitute an intact landscape.

Determination: The Dolores River Riparian and Paradox Cliffs nominated ACEC continues to meet all relevant and important values contained in the East Paradox ACEC (Chapter 3.5) and the West Paradox ACEC (Chapter 3.17). These values include two rare species of biological soil crusts, three special status plant species, peregrine falcon exemplary nesting and foraging habitat, and three special status fish species. In addition, the Dolores River Riparian and Paradox Cliffs ACEC contains relevant and important values for cultural resource (archaeological and historic sites).

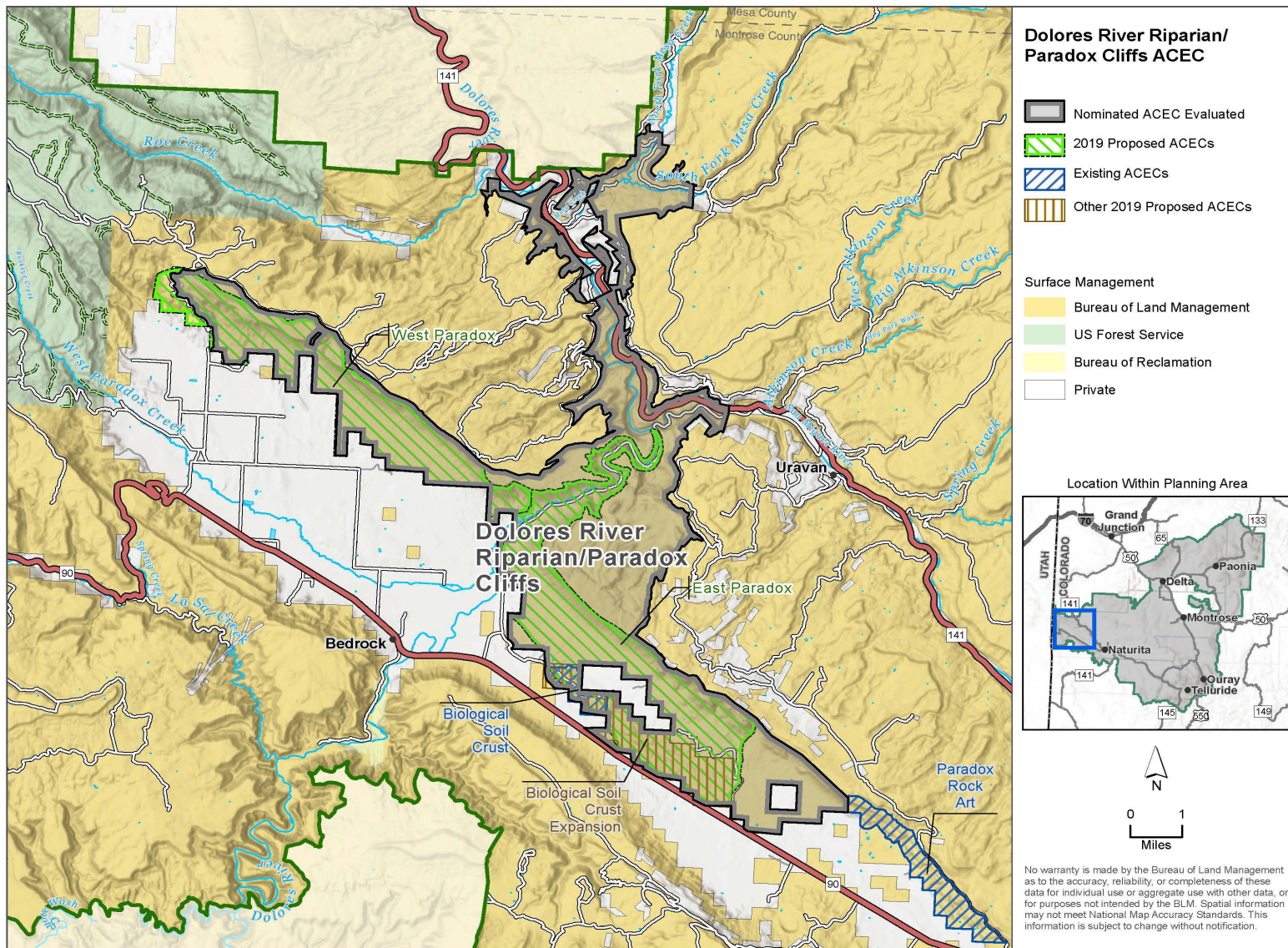


Figure 6: Dolores River Riparian and Paradox Cliffs ACEC

3.4 DOLORES SLICKROCK CANYON ACEC

Nomination: The area was nominated in 2010 by a member of the UFO IDT, and by CNHP during the UFO RMP Revision; it was a proposed ACEC under multiple alternatives in the 2019 Proposed RMP. The ACEC was analyzed as the Dolores River Slickrock Canyon ACEC under Alternative D; it was analyzed as the Coyote Wash ACEC and the Dolores Slickrock Canyon ACEC under Alternative B.

The Coyote Wash, Dolores River Slickrock Canyon, and Dolores Slickrock Canyon ACECs will henceforth be known simply as the Dolores Slickrock Canyon ACEC with multiple boundary options.

Legal Description:

New Mexico Principal Meridian

T. 46 N., R. 18 W., Sec. 6

T. 46 N., R. 19 W., Secs. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 37, 38, 39, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, and 49

T. 46 N., R. 20 W., Secs. 12 and 13

T. 47 N., R. 18 W., Secs. 19, 29, 30, and 31

T. 47 N., R. 19 W., Secs. 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 33, 34, 35, and 36

Size: The Dolores River Slickrock Canyon ACEC analyzed under Alternative D in the 2019 Proposed RMP is 9,900 acres. The Coyote Wash ACEC analyzed under Alternative B of the 2019 Proposed RMP is 2,100 acres. The Dolores Slickrock Canyon ACEC analyzed under Alternative B of the 2019 Proposed RMP is 10,700 acres.

General Location: Coyote Wash to approximately Bedrock, CO, within the Dolores River canyon, including La Sal Creek and La Sal Creek canyon. The south boundary of the ACEC is the UFO boundary with the Tres Rios Field Office (TRFO). The area encompasses all or the vast majority of the Dolores River Canyon WSA. See **Figure 7**.

Evaluation Completed: Evaluated by the UFO IDT in 2013; reevaluated by the UFO IDT in March 2024.

Values Assessed:

- Scenic
- Paleontological
- Cultural: Archaeological Sites
- Vegetation: Unique Communities and Special Status Plant Species
- Fish and Wildlife: Special Status Species

Scenic

The Dolores River canyon is a deep canyon with steep slopes characterized by vertical cliffs and massive, complex rock outcrops. The red rock cliffs feature horizontal sandstone banding, terracing effects, vertical walls, and cliff lines. The area is rated as VRI Class II, with a Scenic Quality Rating of A. It is currently managed as Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class I, which offers the highest level of protection to scenic values.

Paleontological

The Dolores River, La Sal Creek, and Coyote Wash have carved a spectacular deep canyon through Jurassic and Triassic sandstones. Steep vertical cliffs dominate the canyon sides, broken only where tributaries enter the canyon. Major geologic formations in the canyon are Wingate, Kayenta, Navajo, and Entrada sandstones. The Morrison Formation appears near the southern end. There are paleontological discovery sites within the unit. All of the sedimentary units listed above have a high or very high Potential Fossil Yield Classification, which notes their importance to host scientifically significant vertebrate fossils.

Cultural

The proposed ACEC has important rock art panels and archaeological sites, including several outstanding examples of Ancestral Puebloan-style petroglyphs, Formative Period and earlier occupations, features, and isolates, and settled village sites dating back more than five hundred to a thousand years.

Vegetation

This site includes the riparian zone and adjacent uplands along the Dolores River, from Slickrock Canyon north to Bedrock. There are excellent to good occurrences of the globally common coyote willow/mesic graminoids (*Salix exigua*/mesic graminoids). Typical vegetation along the river and creeks includes a band of coyote willow, mixed with giant reed at the water's edge between the low and high-water marks. La Sal Creek supports a critically imperiled plant association consisting of box elder and river birch. The largest population of the BLM Sensitive (G2/S1) Kachina daisy (*Erigeron kachinensis*) within Colorado occurs along drainages feeding into Coyote Wash and canyon.

The canyon bottoms support a nearly continuous occurrence of the riparian plant association known as New Mexico privet foothills riparian shrubland. The site supports two excellent (A-ranked) occurrences of a globally imperiled (G2/S1) New Mexico privet riparian shrub community (*Forestiera pubescens*) along the Dolores River. The New Mexico privet plant community is known only from the major rivers in the Four Corners area.

Coyote Wash is a steep-sided tributary canyon that joins the Dolores Canyon. Its flat sandy bottom has a small meandering stream that occasionally floods. There are a few hanging garden communities (*Aquilegia micrantha* – *Mimulus eastwoodiae*), imperiled to vulnerable on a global scale (G2G3/S2S3), containing small populations of the globally vulnerable (G3/S1) Eastwood monkeyflower (*Mimulus eastwoodiae*). When evaluated in the 2013 ACEC report, Eastwood Monkeyflower (*Mimulus eastwoodiae*) was a G3/S1 BLM Sensitive species. Eastwood Monkeyflower is no longer a BLM Sensitive species and populations are considered to be secure on BLM lands in Colorado.

The proposed ACEC also has a good (B-ranked) occurrence of the Naturita milkvetch (*Astragalus naturitensis*), a BLM Sensitive species and considered to be imperiled to vulnerable both globally and in Colorado (G3/S3). Uplands in this area have pinyon-juniper woodlands, sagebrush, or barren sandstone cliffs where Naturita milkvetch occurs.

Fish and Wildlife

The Dolores River throughout the length of the site supports populations of roundtail chub (*Gila robusta*), which is a BLM sensitive species and globally vulnerable (G3/S2). Other BLM sensitive species present include the bluehead sucker (*Cantostomus discobolus*) (G4/S4) and the flannelmouth sucker

(*Catostomus latipinnis*) (G3/S3). Populations of the chub are at the upstream margin of the species' range and comprise the majority of occurrences for this species. The La Sal Creek tributary harbors exemplary populations of flannelmouth suckers, bluehead suckers, and roundtail chub; this is one of many documented spawning tributaries for these species within the Dolores River Basin.

Additionally, desert bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*) are present in southwest Colorado and occupy the canyon country of the Dolores River and its tributaries, downstream of McPhee Reservoir near the town of Dolores, Colorado. Desert bighorn sheep are considered globally secure (G4/S4). Desert bighorn sheep are a BLM sensitive species given the species sensitivity to management related activities. Desert bighorn are at potential risk of contact with domestic sheep allotments and concern for disease transfer of *Pasturella hemolytica* and/or *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae*, diseases that are primary concern for health and persistence of bighorn sheep populations. Further, the desert bighorn sheep have reliance on habitats represented on BLM-administered lands and the majority of occupied habitat occurs on BLM-administered lands. This population of desert bighorn sheep is designated by CPW as a Tier 1 bighorn population, which means it should be given the highest priority for inventory, habitat protection and improvement, disease prevention and research (CPW 2020).

Other animal species with conservation significance that occur within the proposed ACEC are the recently delisted nesting peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*).

The area overlaps with two CNHP B2 PCAs, including La Sal Creek and Dolores Canyon Slickrock to Bedrock, which meet importance criteria 2 for providing regional contribution to a resource.

3.4.1 Summary of Findings

Table 11: Dolores Slickrock Canyon ACEC Relevance Findings

Relevance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. An important historic, cultural, or scenic value.	Yes	BLM has rated the area as VRI Class II, Scenic Quality A.
	Yes	There are significant vertebrate fossil localities within the unit.
	Yes	The area contains important archaeological sites and rock art panels.
2. Fish or wildlife resources.	Yes	Multiple BLM sensitive species present including three BLM sensitive fish, desert bighorn sheep, and peregrine falcon.
3. Natural systems or processes.	Yes	Several BLM sensitive plants including Kachina daisy (G2/S1) and Naturita milkvetch (G3/S3) are present. The canyon bottoms support rare New Mexico privet riparian shrubland communities (G2/S1) and hanging gardens (G2G3/S2S3).
4. Natural hazards potentially impacting life and safety	No	No hazards potentially impacting life and safety were found.

Table 12: Dolores Slickrock Canyon ACEC Importance Findings

Importance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. Qualities of special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern.	No	The high scenic values in this area are common in the context of the greater landscapes and river canyons in southwestern Colorado and eastern Utah.
	Yes	There are several paleontological discovery sites of state and national significance; bone beds and scientifically significant vertebrate fossils have been recorded.
	Yes	Rock art panels are rare and vulnerable to damage.
2. National or more than local importance, subsistence value, or regional contribution of a resource, value or system, or process.	Yes	Archaeological sites are nationally important.
	Yes	Several globally vulnerable plant communities and state rare plants are at risk from invasive species that threaten native ecosystems.
	Yes	Three BLM sensitive fish species are present and are globally and state vulnerable. Desert bighorn sheep are present and regionally important.
	No	General peregrine falcon habitat is relatively common throughout the region and habitat is not more than locally important or exemplary.
	Yes	The area is within an existing WSA. The area overlaps with two CNHP B2 PCAs.
3. Contributes to ecosystem resilience, landscape intactness, or habitat connectivity.	Yes	The area represents an intact landscape with extensive BLM contiguous lands. The area includes important connectivity habitat for desert bighorn sheep and movement corridors for three BLM sensitive species fish.

Determination: The Dolores Slickrock Canyon potential ACEC meets relevance and importance criteria for paleontological resources, archaeological resources, two special status plant species, two types of rare riparian plant communities, desert bighorn sheep, three special status fish species, and intact landscapes and habitat connectivity.

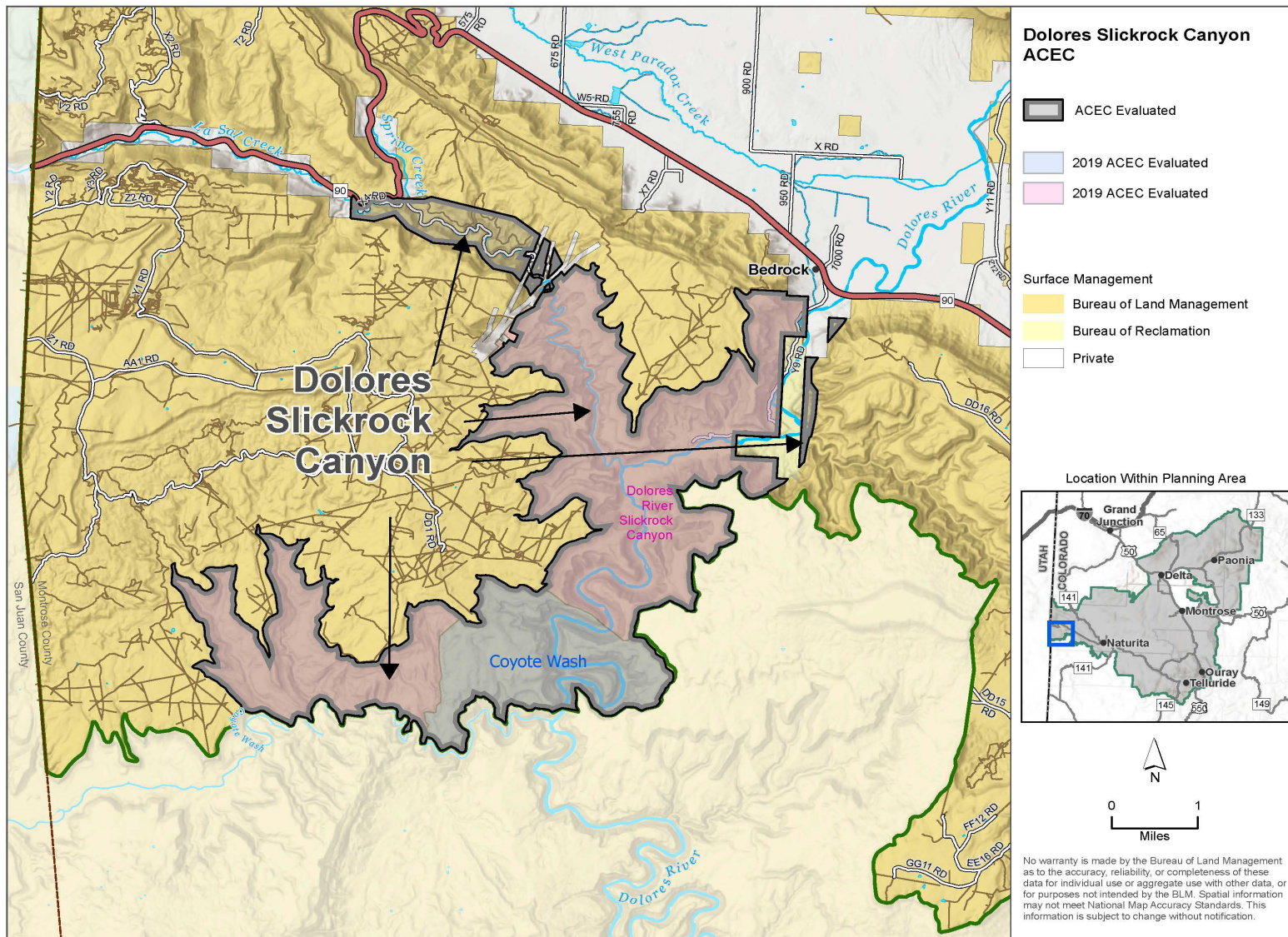


Figure 7: Dolores Slickrock Canyon ACEC

3.5 EAST PARADOX/BIOLOGICAL SOIL CRUST ACEC

Nomination: The East Paradox ACEC was nominated in 2010 by the UFO IDT during the UFO RMP Revision; it was a proposed ACEC under Alternative B of the 2019 Proposed RMP/Final EIS. The area encompasses a separate ACEC, the Biological Soil Crust ACEC, which was analyzed under Alternative D of the 2019 Proposed RMP. It also encompasses the existing Biological Soil Crust ACEC, designated in the 2020 ARMP.

The existing Biological Soil Crust ACEC and the Biological Soil Crust ACEC analyzed under Alternative D of the 2019 Proposed RMP will continue to be known as the Biological Soil Crust ACEC with multiple boundary options. The East Paradox ACEC will continue to be called East Paradox ACEC due to additional relevant and important values (special status wildlife) not found in the Biological Soil Crust ACEC.

Legal Description:

New Mexico Principal Meridian

T. 46 N., R. 17 W., Secs. 5 and 6

T. 47 N., R. 17 W., Secs. 19, 29, 30, 31, and 32

T. 47 N., R. 18 W., Secs. 1, 2, 3, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 35, and 36

T. 48 N., R. 18 W., Secs. 25, 35, and 36

Size: The existing Biological Soil Crust ACEC is 400 acres. The expanded area analyzed under Alternative D of the 2019 Proposed RMP is 1,900 acres. The East Paradox ACEC is 7,400 acres.

General Location: Montrose County, CO, from the west rim of the Dolores River canyon to about six miles east of Dolores River, and from highway 90 to the north rim of Paradox Valley. See **Figure 8**.

Evaluation Completed: Evaluated by the UFO IDT in 2013; reevaluated by the UFO IDT in March 2024.

Values Assessed:

- Cultural: Archaeological Sites, Native American Significance
- Soils: Unique Biological Soil Crust
- Vegetation: Unique Vegetation Communities and Special Status Plant Species
- Fish and Wildlife: Special Status Species

Cultural

The area is significant to Native American Tribes as ancestral homelands. The East Paradox ACEC contains cultural sites such as important rock art panels including outstanding examples of Ancestral Puebloan-style petroglyphs, Formative Period and earlier occupations, features, and isolates, and settled village sites dating back more than five hundred to a thousand years.

Soils

The East Paradox Creek site is located west of Naturita, Colorado and north of Highway 90 as it travels through Paradox Valley. Geologic strata includes the Hermosa, Moenkopi, Cutler, Kayenta, and Chinle formations, and Quaternary alluviums. The site is underlain by multiple soils, including Mikim (ustic

torriorthents, fine-loamy, mesic, mixed calcareous soils), Palmer (ustollic haplargids, coarse-loamy, mixed, mesic soils), and Zyme (ustic torriorthents, clayey, montmorillontic calcareous, mesic shallow soils) compositions. Dark red soils apparently derived from the Chinle Formation provide habitat for the Paradox Valley lupine. The soils differ notably from those at the other major lupine location near Naturita.

Well-developed biological soil crusts (BCS) occur between plants. Highly gypsiferous soils derived from the Paradox Formation tend to support a higher-than-normal density and diversity of BSC. During the spring of 2009, the BLM conducted a BSC inventory in the Paradox Valley. The inventory was conducted approximately within T47N, R18W, sections 22, 23, 26, and 27 immediately southeast of the Dolores River and resulted in documentation of the occurrence of two BSC species (*Lecanora gypsicola* and *Gypsoplaca macrophylla*) considered somewhat rare and typically found only on gypsiferous soils. The identification of these species meets the descriptions outlined in interagency Technical Reference 1730-2 Biological Soil Crusts: Ecology and Management (US DOI 2001).

Vegetation

The proposed East Paradox ACEC supports the best-known occurrence of Paradox Valley lupine, a globally imperiled (G2/S2) BLM Sensitive species found only in Colorado. There are two excellent (A-ranked) occurrences of Paradox breadroot (*Pediomelum aromaticum*), a BLM sensitive species considered to be globally vulnerable and rare in Colorado (G3/S2). The location is also the type locality for the Paradox catseye (*Cryptantha paradoxa*). Paradox catseye is endemic to gypsiferous soils and somewhat rare only found in eastern Utah, western Colorado, and one site in northwest New Mexico.

Fish and Wildlife

The East Paradox area supports occurrences of a number of wildlife species with conservation significance, the rarest of which are the roundtail chub (*Gila robusta*), bluehead sucker (*Cantostomus discobolus*) (G4/S4) and the flannelmouth sucker (*Catostomus latipinnis*) (G3/S3). All three are BLM sensitive fish species.

East Paradox ACEC has a high density of nesting raptors on the cliffs east of the Dolores River. Peregrine falcons (*Falco peregrinus anatum*) use the abundant sheer cliff habitat for nesting as the cliffs provide protection from elements and predators. The nearby open water in proximity to quality nesting habitat may enhance their foraging opportunities making the habitat exemplary. The area also contains nesting Golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*), a BLM sensitive species.

The area is within the CNHP East Paradox B2 PCA, which meets importance criteria 2 for providing regional contribution to a resource.

3.5.1 Summary of Findings

Table 13: East Paradox ACEC Relevance Findings

Relevance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. An important historic, cultural, or scenic value.	Yes	The area contains important archaeological sites and rock art panels; the area is ancestral homelands for Ute Tribes.
2. Fish or wildlife resources.	Yes	The area supports three BLM sensitive fish species. Peregrine falcon (BLM sensitive species) and Golden eagle nest in the area. (East Paradox ACEC only)
3. Natural systems or processes.	Yes	The area supports biological soil crust containing two significant and rare lichen species found only in gypsiferous soil ecosystems.
	Yes	Two BLM sensitive species, Paradox Valley lupine (G2/S2) and Paradox breadroot (G3/S2), are present. The area is type locality for Paradox catseye.
4. Natural hazards potentially impacting life and safety	No	No hazards potentially impacting life and safety were found.

Table 14: East Paradox ACEC Importance Findings

Importance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. Qualities of special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern.	Yes	Rock art panels are rare and vulnerable to damage.
	Yes	The biological soil crusts found in this area are fragile, easily damaged, and heal slowly.
	Yes	Criteria for peregrine falcon is supported by exemplary nesting and foraging habitat (East Paradox ACEC only).
2. National or more than local importance, subsistence value, or regional contribution of a resource, value or system, or process.	Yes	Archaeological sites and Native American ancestral homeland are nationally important.
	Yes	Paradox Valley lupine grows only in Colorado. The type locality for Paradox catseye is both scientifically unique and irreplaceable. The special status species plants that occur here have national significance due to their limited range.
	Yes	The area is within a CNHP-recommended B2 PCA.

Importance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
3. Contributes to ecosystem resilience, landscape intactness, or habitat connectivity.	Yes	East Paradox area only: the Dolores River is important connectivity habitat for three BLM sensitive species fish.
	No	Biological Soil Crust area only: the area is fragmented by private lands, state highways, county roads, and land uses and does not constitute an intact landscape.

Determination: The 7,400-acre East Paradox potential ACEC meets relevance and importance criteria for cultural resources, two rare species of biological soil crusts, three special status plant species, peregrine falcon exemplary nesting and foraging habitat, and three special status fish species including habitat connectivity for those species.

The 400-acre existing and 1,900-acre potential expansion for the Biological Soil Crust ACEC meets relevance and importance for two rare species of biological soil crusts, and three special status plant species.

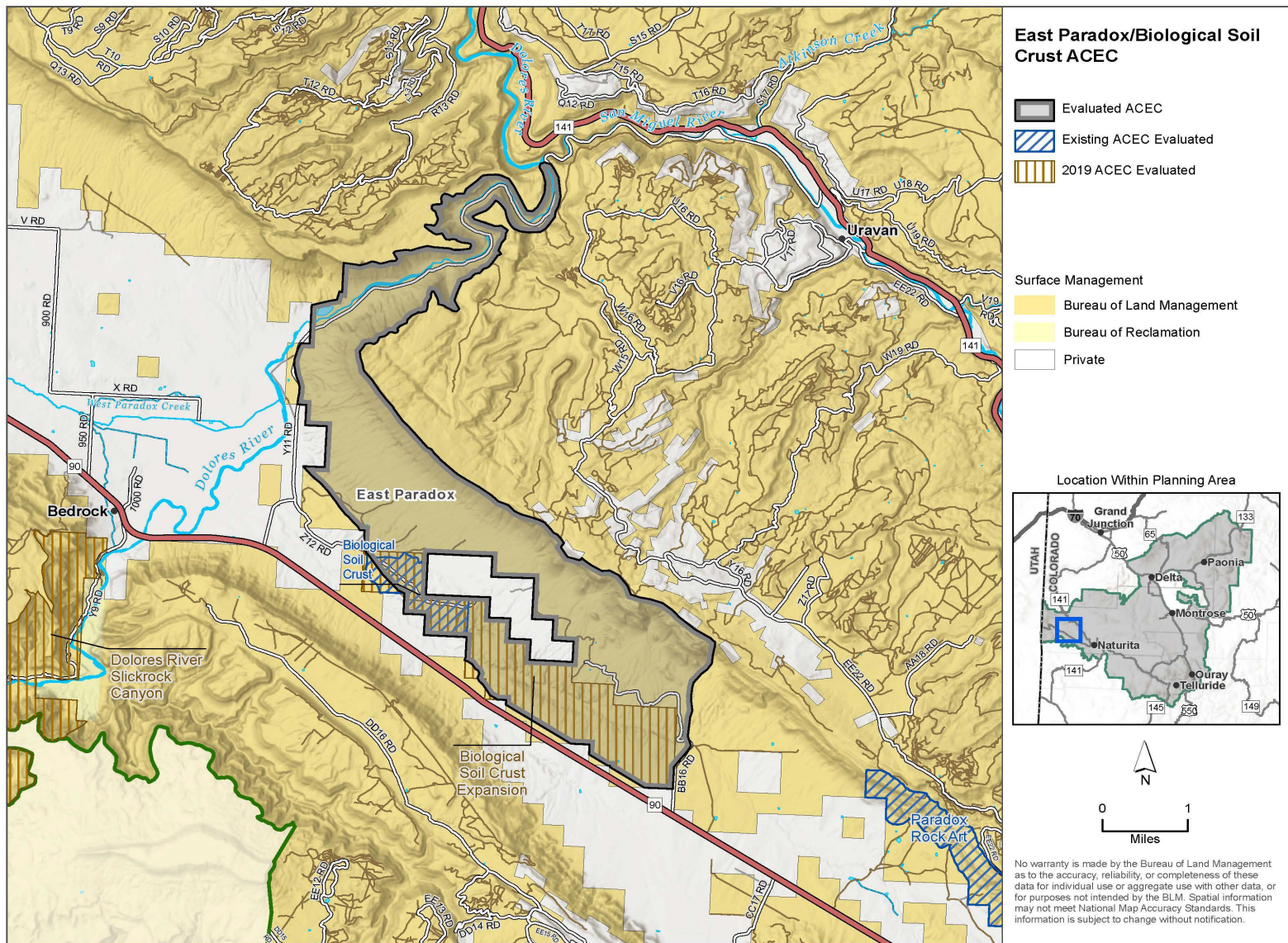


Figure 8: East Paradox/Biological Soil Crust ACEC

3.6 ELEPHANT HILL ACEC

Nomination: The area was nominated in 2024 by WSCC and CWP during scoping for the UFO RMP Amendment.

Legal Description:

6th Principal Meridian

T. 14 S., R. 90 W., Secs. 6 and 7

T. 14 S., R. 91 W., Secs. 1, 2, 3, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 21, and 22

Acres: 12,120 acres

Location: Southeast of the Town of Paonia on public lands west of and adjacent to the McCluskey and Roeber State Wildlife Areas. See **Figure 9**.

Evaluation Completed: Evaluated by the UFO IDT in March 2024.

Values Assessed:

- Cultural: Archaeological Sites
- Vegetation: Special Status Plant Species
- Fish and Wildlife: Special Status Species; Big Game Winter Range
- Hydrologic Resources: Wetlands and Surface Waters

Cultural

Per the external nomination report, the landscape is interwoven with archaeological sites, artifacts, and cultural landmarks that provide a tangible connection to the past, offering insights into the lifestyles, practices, and beliefs of the indigenous peoples. However, the cultural resources identified within the proposed ACEC area are common throughout the entire region.

Vegetation

The nomination report indicated the presence of Ute Ladies' Tresses (*Spiranthes diluvialis*) in the area. There are no documented historic occurrences of Ute Ladies' Tresses present in any of the parcels nominated. Further, the persistent wetland habitat required for the species is not present. The wetland habitat that may have been capable of supporting the species has been highly altered by the development of springs and wetlands that has occurred for domestic water sources.

There are three small mapped populations of Colorado Desert-parsley (*Lomatium concinnum*) within the nominated ACEC. There is one population on the Roeber parcel totaling 1.8 acres and two populations on the McDonald Mesa parcel totaling approximately 7.1 acres.

In reference to the McDonald Mesa and Roeber/McCluskey parcel the CNHP PCA reports the following: "This site consists of low adobe foothills east of McDonald Creek. Much of the area has been disturbed, with several roads and a major power line, and is quite weedy" (CNHP 2024b). These conclusions are corroborated in BLM land health ratings of not meeting land health standards for upland plant and

animal communities. The landscape and vegetation are fragmented by numerous utility corridors, private land, and unauthorized uses such as off route travel and dumping.

Fish and Wildlife

To support relevance criteria, the nomination report identified the following special status species or their habitat as occurring in the nominated ACEC: Golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) nests and breeding range; GUSG habitat; Bald eagle roost sites, winter concentration area, and winter forage; burrowing owl breeding range; cutthroat trout presence; roundtail chub presence; lynx summer and winter predictive range; black-footed ferret element occurrence; northern leopard frog element occurrence; aquatic native species conservation waters; aquatic sportfish management waters; American pike (it is assumed the nomination was referring to American pika). Each are discussed in more detail below.

The nomination identifies the presence Golden eagle (G5/S3) nests and breeding range and Bald eagle (G5/S2) roost sites, winter concentration areas and winter forage. Golden eagle and Bald eagle are BLM sensitive species and meet relevance criteria 2. Both are BLM sensitive species and meet relevance criteria 2.

The nomination identifies GUSG habitat presence in a small portion of the nomination. The identified GUSG habitat is mapped unoccupied critical habitat, and this area does not contain the necessary habitat requirements to support GUSG. Therefore, this does not meet the relevance criteria. Further, the area is too small to be biologically relevant to GUSG to manage as an ACEC.

The nomination identifies burrowing owl breeding range. Burrowing owl breeding range indicates burrowing owl may be present. However, there are no known confirmed nest occurrences on BLM within the ACEC, and the nomination does not identify any known nest sites. Therefore, the nomination does not meet relevance for burrowing owl.

The nomination identifies lynx predictive summer and winter presence, which is derived from a habitat model. No known occurrences of lynx occur within the proposed ACEC. The presence of modeled habitat does not confer relevance or importance for ACEC designation consideration.

The nomination identifies black-footed ferret occurrence; however, this area is not known to retain black-footed ferrets or their habitat.

Northern leopard frog (G5/S3) occurrence is identified, which is likely and meets relevance criteria 2.

This nomination identifies the range of northern river otter overall and winter range and American pika overall range; simply being within range of species does not confer relevance and importance.

The ACEC nomination indicates the area contains cutthroat trout and roundtail chub, however the proposed area does not contain valuable populations of these two BLM sensitive fish species or any others. The ACEC nomination indicates that the area contains CPW Native Species Conservation Waters. Although a Conservation Water adjacent to the ACEC, it is not within the boundaries. The ACEC nomination indicates the area contains CPW Aquatic Sportfish Management Waters; their management is not focused on the conservation of native fish species and does not meet relevance criteria.

The nomination argues that the amphibian species richness, bird species richness, mammal species richness, reptile species richness, imperiled species richness, ecological connectivity, ecological intactness, ecological system diversity, ecological system rarity, sagebrush cover influence the relevance and importance of the ACEC nomination. However, the data provided to support species richness is largely inaccurate. As outlined above, many of the species are not known to derive any special use of the area or are simply within the range of the species habitat. None of the wildlife species that potentially occur within the area have more than locally significant qualities.

The nomination report summarized indicators of ACEC relevance and importance criteria to highlight ecological values and to argue that the proposed ACEC has high diversity relative to the surrounding landscape. The indicators used to assess relevance and importance are derived from generalized species occurrence data. Occurrences are generalized at 49 miles squared, which is not a biologically relevant scale to determine if relevance or importance criteria are met. When BLM used internal data sources as part of this evaluation, many of the species that contributed to the species richness ratings provided by the nomination report, such as Great Basin Spadefoot, do not occur within the proposed ACEC.

As identified in the narrative for each species above the only special status species that meets the relevance criteria are the presence of Golden eagle and Bald eagle nests and northern leopard frog. The nomination did not identify how these habitats are distinct, at-risk, or have more than locally significant qualities compared to other areas where these species are common. BLM lands have many occurrences of these species, so the mere presence of habitat does not automatically meet importance criteria.

Big Game Crucial Winter Habitat

The nomination identifies including conservation of a vital link for big game migration corridors. The nomination identifies elk migration corridors, production area, severe winter range, summer concentration area, and winter concentration area; and mule deer concentration area, highway crossing, limited use area, resident population area, severe winter range, winter range, and winter concentration area. Neither of these species is managed as BLM special status and when considered alone, these species do not meet relevance criteria. Big game severe winter range or winter concentration areas meet the relevance criteria because it is habitat essential for maintaining species diversity. However, this habitat is widespread and does not contain “more than locally important” values required to meet importance criteria. Due to the widespread nature of big game winter range in the UFO coupled with lack of qualities that give it special worth or distinctiveness, the proposed areas does not meet the importance criteria 1 or 2.

The nomination also identifies implementing IM 2023-005: Habitat Connectivity on Public Lands as satisfying importance criteria 3. BLM IM 2023-005 directs the BLM to develop an initial geospatial layer to support identification of habitat connectivity on BLM-managed lands. The results of that modeling effort are not yet available to incorporate into this evaluation.

Two CNHP-recommended PCAs were identified within the area. The McDonald Mesa PCA does not meet the relevance criteria because it is ranked as a B3 PCA; a B3 biodiversity ranking does not confer an important regional contribution to a resource. The Cottonwood Creek Road B2 PCA overlaps a small portion of the area; however, the portion of overlap is a relatively small percentage of the overall area proposed for ACEC designation and does not meet importance criteria 2.

Hydrologic Resources

The area drainage network consists of many ephemeral drainages and two perennial drainages, McDonald and Renolds creeks. There are a few local expressions of groundwater. Riparian areas are limited to wetlands that have not been officially delineated. Many of the springs within this area have been developed and are a source of domestic and municipal water.

3.6.1 Summary of Findings

Table 15: Elephant Hill ACEC Relevance Findings

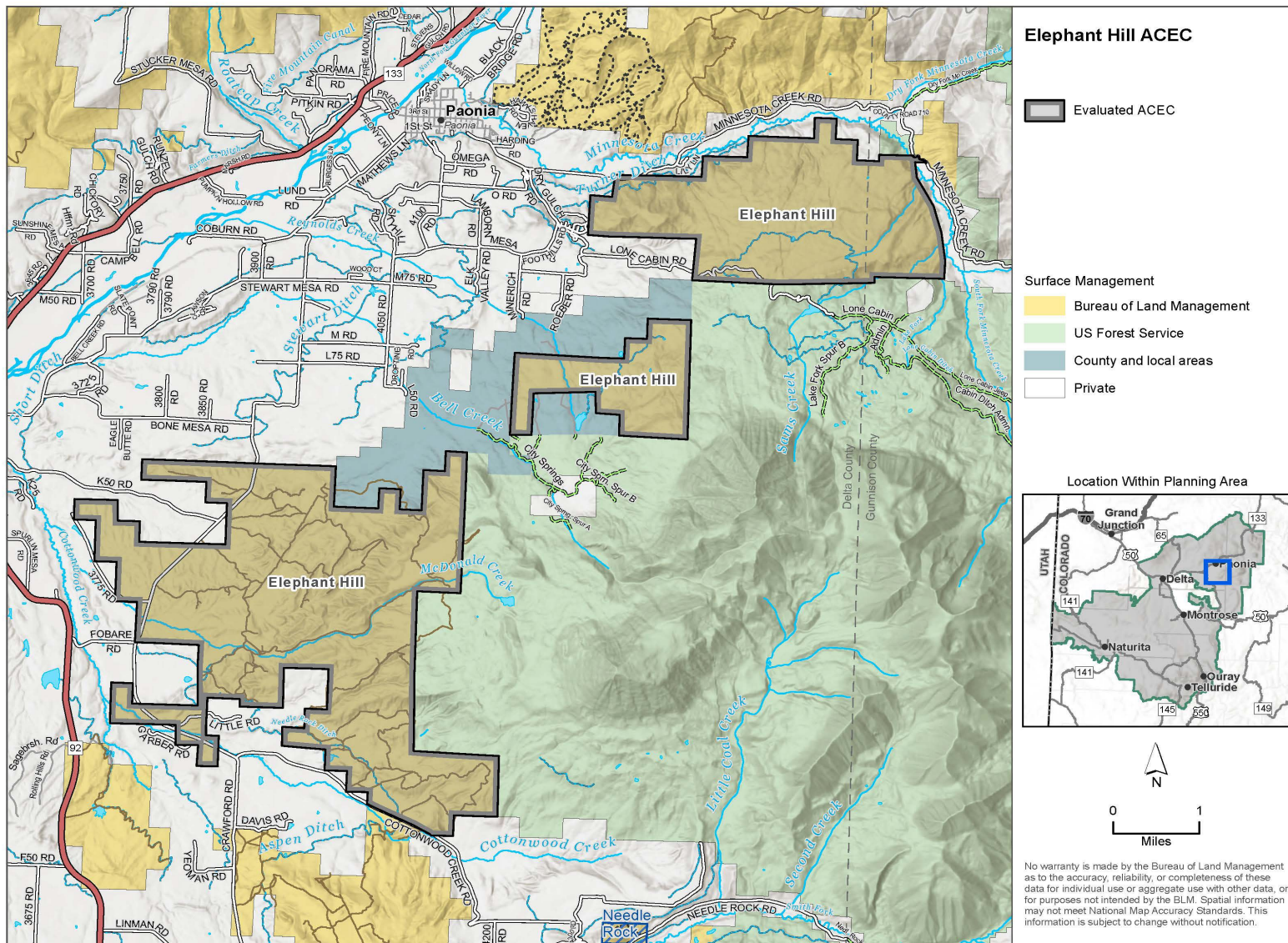
Relevance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. An important historic, cultural, or scenic value.	No	The known cultural resources within the area are common throughout the region
2. Fish or wildlife resources.	Yes	The following species are present: Golden eagle nesting, potential northern leopard frog presence and big game severe winter range important to species diversity.
3. Natural systems or processes.	Yes	The area has three small populations of the BLM sensitive Colorado Desert-parsley.
	No	The concentrations of springs in this area occurs commonly throughout the field office and across this type of geological formation. Many springs have been developed for domestic source water.
4. Natural hazards potentially impacting life and safety	No	No hazards potentially impacting life and safety were found.

Table 16: Elephant Hill ACEC Importance Findings

Importance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. Qualities of special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern.	No	The cultural values within the nominated ACEC are generally found within the entire geographic area and are no more or less significant than the surrounding area.
2. National or more than local importance, subsistence value, or regional contribution of a resource, value or system, or process.	No	Isolated occurrences of one special status plant species is not more than locally important or contributing to species diversity.
	No	Golden eagle, northern leopard frog, and big game winter range are relatively common throughout the field office.
	No	Overlaps one CNHP B3 PCA; a B3 biodiversity ranking is not more than locally significant. A small overlap with one CNHP B2 PCA is insufficient to meet the criteria.

Importance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
3. Contributes to ecosystem resilience, landscape intactness, or habitat connectivity.	No	The vegetation communities in the area are highly degraded by recreation routes, illegal dumping, and extensive invasive species dominance. Much of the area is not meeting Colorado public land health standards for upland vegetation.

Determination: This area does not meet the criteria for ACEC designation because none of the criteria for relevant and important values are met. It will not be considered for designation.



3.7 FAIRVIEW SOUTH ACEC/RNA

Nomination: The Fairview South BLM Expansion ACEC is an existing ACEC. It was first designated in the 1980's and expanded in the 2020 ARMP. The Fairview South CNHP Expansion ACEC was nominated in 2010 by CNHP, WSERC, Western Colorado Congress, and Craig Grother during the UFO RMP Revision; it was a proposed ACEC under Alternative B of the 2019 Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

The Fairview South CNHP Expansion ACEC and the existing Fairview South BLM Expansion ACEC will henceforth be known simply as the Fairview South ACEC with multiple boundary options.

Legal Description:

New Mexico Principal Meridian

T. 48 N., R. 8 W., Secs. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 30

T. 48 N., R. 9 W., Secs. 1, 12, 13, 14, 24, and 25

T. 49 N., R. 8 W., Sec. 33

Size: The former ACEC was 210 acres; the existing ACEC is 610-acres. The proposed expansion is 4,250 acres.

General Location: Approximately four to eight miles southeast of Montrose, Colorado both east and west of the South Canal. **See Figure 10.**

Evaluation Completed: Evaluated by the UFO IDT in 2013; reevaluated by the UFO IDT in March 2024.

Values Assessed:

- Vegetation: Special Status Plant Species
- Fish and Wildlife: Special Status Species

Vegetation

The Dry Cedar Creek area is the southern part of the Uncompahgre Badlands, consisting of adobe hills derived from Mancos Shale. The area is mostly BLM land and is fragmented by roads, canals, and powerlines. The area supports occurrences of the federally endangered clay-loving buckwheat, including areas of seedling generation (which is a rare occurrence). The site contains excellent (A-ranked) and good (B-ranked) occurrences of BLM Sensitive Colorado desert parsley (*Lomatium concinnum*), which is classified by CNHP as globally imperiled (G2G3/S2S3). The area also contains excellent (A-ranked) and fair (C-ranked) occurrences of the globally vulnerable (G3/S3) adobe beardtongue (*Penstemon retrorsus*) and an unranked occurrence of the globally imperiled (G2/S2) and BLM sensitive good-neighbor bladderpod (*Lesquerella vicina*).

The South Canal area has gentle to steep adobe hills derived from Mancos Shale. The South Canal, along with an adjacent service road, runs through the site. The area has a mix of private and BLM ownership. This site contains an excellent occurrence of the federally endangered clay-loving wild buckwheat and a good (B-ranked) occurrence of the globally vulnerable (G3/S3) adobe beardtongue. Additional vegetation consists of desert shrub communities, with greasewood in the bottoms and shadscale and mat saltbush on hillsides.

Since designation, additional dense populations of clay-loving wild buckwheat have been discovered to the south of this tract. In addition, increasing pressures from development are impacting this species on BLM-administered and private lands. Identified threats to the buckwheat are related to human development, including residential development on private lands and an existing designated utility corridor. Much of the historic habitat in the area has been or may be developed in the future. Habitat for the species is becoming restricted to predominantly BLM lands. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is currently evaluating the area for Critical Habitat designation for clay-loving wild buckwheat.

The area is within the South Canal CNHP PCA, which is ranked as B1. There is some overlap with the Dry Cedar Creek B2 PCA. This meets importance criteria 2 for regional contribution to a resource.

Fish and Wildlife

The area provides habitat for the BLM Sensitive white-tailed prairie dog (*Cynomys leucurus*), which is ranked G4/S4.

3.7.1 Summary of Findings

Table 17: Fairview South ACEC Relevance Findings

Relevance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. An important historic, cultural, or scenic value.	No	No important historic, cultural, or scenic values were found.
2. Fish or wildlife resources.	Yes	The area contains white-tailed prairie dog habitat, a BLM sensitive species (G4/S4)
3. Natural systems or processes.	Yes	The area supports populations of federally endangered clay-loving wild buckwheat. The area also has occurrences of three BLM sensitive species, including Colorado desert Parsley (G2G3/S2S3), adobe beardtongue (G3/S3), and good neighbor bladderpod (G2/S2).
4. Natural hazards potentially impacting life and safety	No	No hazards potentially impacting life and safety were found.

Table 18: Fairview South ACEC Importance Findings

Importance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. Qualities of special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern.	No	White-tailed prairie dog are both globally and state apparently secure. This does not meet the importance criteria because the species are at a low risk of extinction or elimination due to an extensive range and/or many populations or occurrences.
	Yes	The area contains adobe soils and supports four special status plant species, including populations of three BLM sensitive species. The area contains significant populations of federally endangered clay-loving wild buckwheat, which is endemic to the area, including areas of seedling generation (which is a rare occurrence).
2. National or more than local importance, subsistence value, or regional contribution of a resource, value or system, or process.	No	The presence of white-tailed prairie dog habitat is relatively common at a regional level.
	Yes	A portion of the proposed area is within an existing ACEC designation. The area is within a CNHP-recommended B2 PCA and a B1 PCA.
3. Contributes to ecosystem resilience, landscape intactness, or habitat connectivity.	No	Due to the fragmented nature of the area, residential development, and a designated utility corridor, the area does not represent an intact landscape and is considered part of the Wildland Urban Interface.

Determination: The Fairview South existing and potential expanded ACEC meets relevance and importance for four special status plant species including three BLM sensitive species and the federally endangered clay-loving wild buckwheat.

3.8 LA SAL CREEK ACEC

Nomination: The area was nominated in 2010 by CNHP during the UFO RMP Revision; it was a proposed ACEC under Alternative B of the 2019 Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

Legal Description:

New Mexico Principal Meridian

T. 46 N., R. 19 W., Secs. 37, 38, and 39

T. 47 N., R. 18 W., Secs. 19, 30, and 31

T. 47 N., R. 19 W., Secs. 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 33, 34, 35, and 36

Size: 10,500 acres

General Location: In Montrose County, from the south rim of La Sal Creek to Paradox Valley, and from the east rim of the Dolores River canyon to about Spring Creek. The nominated ACEC partially overlaps with the 10,700-acre proposed Dolores Slickrock Canyon ACEC (**Chapter 3.2**) and the Dolores River Canyon WSA but is geographically distinct to the extent that it can be considered a unit separate from the Dolores Slickrock Canyon ACEC. See **Figure 11**.

Evaluation Completed: Evaluated by the UFO IDT in 2013; reevaluated by the UFO IDT in March 2024.

Values Assessed:

- Scenic
- Vegetation: Unique Vegetation Communities and Special Status Plant Species
- Fish and Wildlife: Special Status Species

Scenic

The La Sal Creek canyon is a deep canyon with steep slopes characterized by vertical cliffs and massive, complex rock outcrops. The red rock cliffs feature horizontal sandstone banding, terracing effects, vertical walls, and cliff lines. The area is rated as VRI Class II and IV, with a Scenic Quality Rating of A, B, and C. It is currently managed as Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class I, II, III, and IV.

Vegetation

La Sal Creek cuts an entrenched canyon that meanders through red Triassic and Jurassic sandstones and siltstones. The narrow floodplain supports a critically imperiled plant association consisting of box elder and river birch rated as G1/G2 and S1 plant associations. In the narrow band of riparian vegetation, box elder accounts for as much as 70 percent cover, with river birch providing 25 to 60 percent cover. Only a few other small occurrences of this community are known. New Mexico privet, coyote willow, red-osier dogwood, giant reed, and wild rose are also common. Although there are some introduced pasture grasses, including Kentucky bluegrass, there is no tamarisk along the upper part of the creek.

Eroding shale slopes support populations of rare plants: Paradox breadroot (*Pedimelum aromaticum*), a G3/S2 BLM sensitive species; and Paradox Valley lupine (*Lupinus crassus*), a G2/S2, BLM sensitive

species. Upland vegetation consists of pinyon-juniper woodland with dwarf and true mountain mahogany, cliffrose, Gambel oak, yucca, cacti, and rabbitbrush. A good-sized population of Paradox breadroot, with several hundred plants, was found on a dry bench overlooking La Sal Creek.

Fish and Wildlife

La Sal Creek harbors exemplary populations of three BLM sensitive species: bluehead sucker (*Cantostomus discobolus*) (G4/S4), flannelmouth sucker (*Catostomus latipinnis*) (G3/S3), and roundtail chubs (*Gila robusta*) (G3/S2). This is one of few spawning tributaries for these species within the Dolores River Basin. Bluehead suckers are considered a resident population in the colder waters of the upper watershed.

Additionally, desert bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*) are present in southwest Colorado and occupy the canyon country of the Dolores River and its tributaries, downstream of McPhee Reservoir near the town of Dolores, Colorado. Desert bighorn sheep are considered globally secure (G4/T4). Desert bighorn sheep are a BLM sensitive species given the species sensitivity to management related activities. Desert bighorn are at potential risk of contact with domestic sheep allotments and concern for disease transfer of *Pasturella hemolytica* and/or *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae*, diseases that are primary concern for health and persistence of bighorn sheep populations. Further, the desert bighorn sheep have reliance on habitats represented on BLM-administered lands and the majority of occupied habitat occurs on BLM-administered lands. This population of desert bighorn sheep is designated by CPW as a Tier 1 bighorn population, which means it should be given the highest priority for inventory, habitat protection and improvement, disease prevention and research (CPW 2020).

Other animal species with conservation significance that occur within the proposed ACEC are the recently delisted nesting peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), which is globally secure but regionally imperiled.

The area is within two CNHP-recommended B2 PCAs, Dolores Canyon Slickrock to Bedrock and La Sal Creek, which meet importance criteria 2 for regional contribution to a resource.

3.8.1 Summary of Findings

Table 19: La Sal Creek ACEC Relevance Findings

Relevance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. An important historic, cultural, or scenic value.	Yes	BLM has rated a portion of the area as VRI Class I, Scenic Quality A.
2. Fish or wildlife resources.	Yes	Multiple BLM sensitive species are present including desert bighorn sheep, peregrine falcon, and exemplary populations of three BLM sensitive fish species.
3. Natural systems or processes.	Yes	Two BLM sensitive plant species, Paradox breadroot (G3/S2) and Paradox Valley lupine (G2/S2) are found in the area. The canyon bottoms support rare New Mexico privet riparian shrubland communities (G2/S1).
4. Natural hazards potentially impacting life and safety	No	No hazards potentially impacting life and safety were found.

Table 20: La Sal Creek ACEC Importance Findings

Importance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. Qualities of special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern.	No	The high scenic values in this area are common in the context of the greater landscapes and river canyons in southwestern Colorado and eastern Utah.
	Yes	Several globally vulnerable plant communities and state rare plants are at risk from invasive species that threaten native ecosystems.
2. National or more than local importance, subsistence value, or regional contribution of a resource, value or system, or process.	Yes	Three BLM sensitive fish species are present and are globally and state vulnerable. Desert bighorn sheep are present and regionally important.
	No	Peregrine falcon habitat is relatively common throughout the region and habitat is not more than locally important or exemplary.
	Yes	A portion of the area is within an existing WSA. The area is within two CNHP-recommended B2 PCAs.
3. Contributes to ecosystem resilience, landscape intactness, or habitat connectivity.	Yes	The area is important connectivity habitat for desert bighorn sheep and exemplary populations of three BLM sensitive species fish.

Determination: The La Sal Creek potential ACEC meets relevance and importance criteria for two special status plant species, two types of rare plant communities, desert bighorn sheep, three special status fish species, and intact landscapes and habitat connectivity.

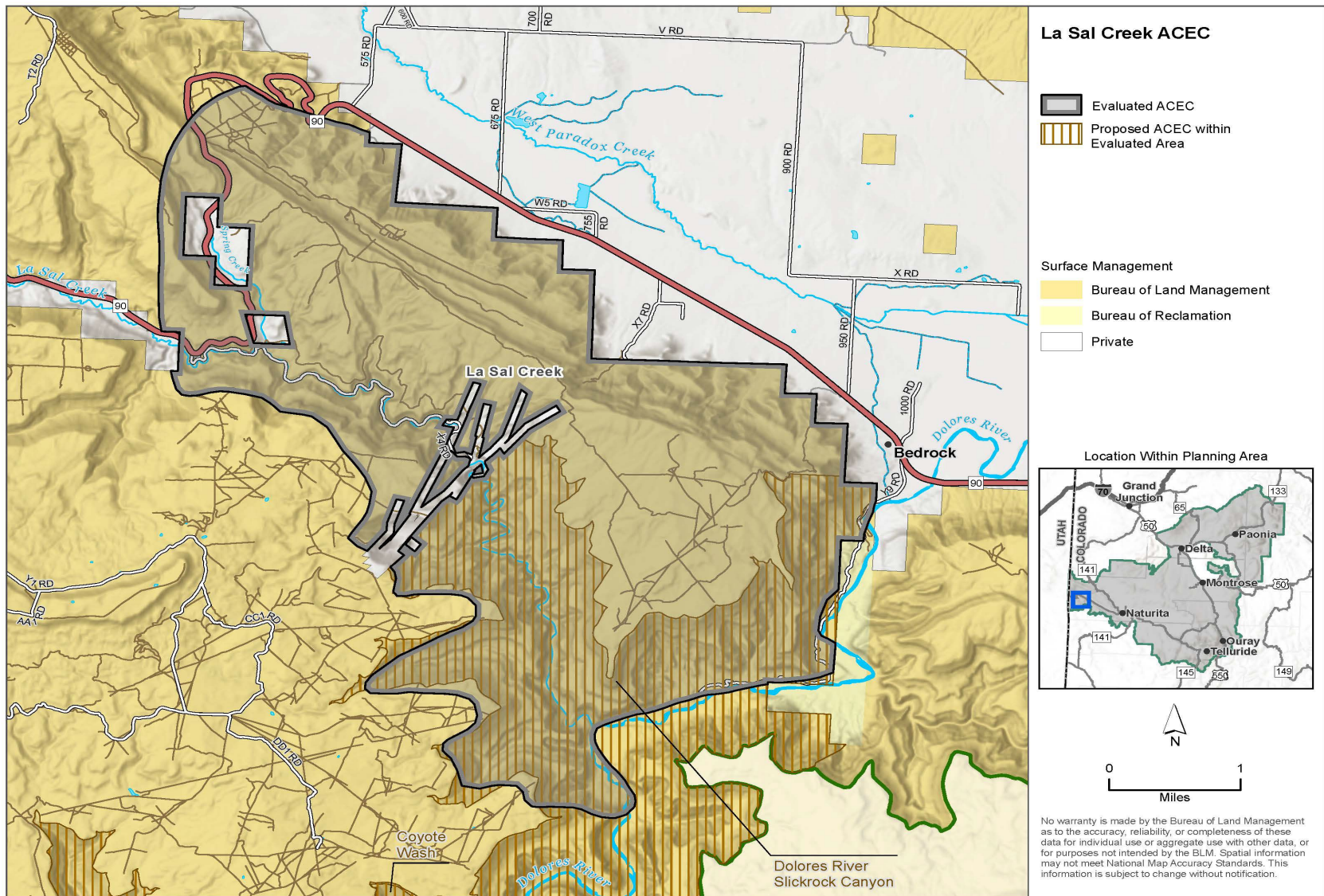


Figure 11: La Sal Creek ACEC

3.9 LOWER UNCOMPAHGRE PLATEAU ACEC

Nomination: The area was nominated in 2010 by WSERC and WSCC during the UFO RMP Revision; it was a proposed ACEC under Alternative B of the 2019 Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

Legal Description:

New Mexico Principal Meridian

T. 49 N., R. 10 W., Secs. 6, 7, 8, 17, 18, 19, 20, 29, 30, 31, and 32

T. 49 N., R. 11 W., Secs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 35, and 36

T. 49 N., R. 12 W., Secs. 1, 2, and 3

T. 50 N., R. 11 W., Secs. 19, 20, 21, 22, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, and 36

T. 50 N., R. 12 W., Secs. 23, 24, 25, 26, 34, 35, and 36

Size: 31,900 acres

General Location: East side of Uncompahgre Plateau, from about Dry Creek to the east boundary of the Camel Back WSA. See **Figure 12**.

Evaluation Completed: Evaluated by the UFO IDT in 2013; reevaluated by the UFO IDT in March 2024.

Values Assessed:

- Cultural: Archaeological Sites
- Fish and Wildlife: Big Game Crucial Winter Habitat

Archaeological

The proposed ACEC contains important rock art and archaeological sites from three different transitional time periods of occupation not represented elsewhere. The area was a central part of the ancestral home of the Ute Indians and has numerous traditional cultural and sacred sites of interest to modern Utes. The area has numerous scattered significant archaeological sites that include Archaic to historic Ute occupation dating to the 1880s (including the Harris site, rock art sites, and wickiups). The archaeological sites are nationally significant.

Fish and Wildlife

The area contains winter habitat for mule deer and elk. Mule deer are G5/S4, which is globally secure and state apparently secure, elk are G5/S5 globally and state secure. Neither of these species is managed as BLM special status and when considered alone, these species do not meet relevance criteria. Big game severe winter range or winter concentration areas meet the relevance criteria because it is habitat essential for maintaining species diversity. However, this habitat is widespread and does not contain “more than locally important” values required to meet importance criteria. Due to the widespread nature of big game winter range in the UFO coupled with lack of qualities that give it special worth or distinctiveness, the proposed areas does not meet the importance criteria 1 or 2.

The nomination also identifies implementing IM 2023-005: Habitat Connectivity on Public Lands as satisfying importance criteria 3. BLM IM 2023-005 directs the BLM to develop an initial geospatial layer

to support identification of habitat connectivity on BLM-managed lands. The results of that modeling effort are not yet available to incorporate into this evaluation.

Secretarial Order 3362 (SO 3362) directs BLM to work in partnership with the states to enhance and improve the quality of big-game winter range and migration corridor habitat on Federal lands. In implementing SO 3362, each state developed a state-specific action plan. In the Colorado Big Game Action Plan (CPW 2022), CPW identified five landscape priority areas to guide agencies in determining the most important habitat for big game conservation and connectivity. In Colorado's action plan, five herds across the state were identified as priority herds. The Uncompahgre Plateau was identified as a landscape priority area, meeting importance criteria 3 for habitat connectivity.

3.9.1 Summary of Findings

Table 21: Lower Uncompahgre Plateau ACEC Relevance Findings

Relevance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. An important historic, cultural, or scenic value.	Yes	The area contains important archaeological sites, including three different transitional time periods of occupation not represented elsewhere.
2. Fish or wildlife resources.	Yes	Big game crucial winter range habitat is present and important for species diversity.
3. Natural systems or processes.	No	No noteworthy natural systems or processes were found.
4. Natural hazards potentially impacting life and safety	No	No hazards potentially impacting life and safety were found.

Table 22: Lower Uncompahgre Plateau ACEC Importance Findings

Importance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. Qualities of special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern.	Yes	The archaeological sites are irreplaceable if damaged.
2. National or more than local importance, subsistence value, or regional contribution of a resource, value or system, or process.	Yes	The archaeological sites are nationally significant.
3. Contributes to ecosystem resilience, landscape intactness, or habitat connectivity.	Yes	The area is within the Uncompahgre Plateau priority landscape unit as identified Colorado's SO 3362 State Action Plan. The State Action Plan guides the BLM in determining priorities for landscape intactness and habitat connectivity for big game.
	Yes	The area represents an intact landscape with extensive BLM contiguous lands. The area includes important connectivity habitat for desert bighorn sheep and movement corridors for three BLM sensitive species fish.

Determination: The Lower Uncompahgre Plateau potential ACEC meets relevance and importance criteria for cultural resources, big game crucial winter range within a state identified priority for habitat connectivity, and intact landscapes.

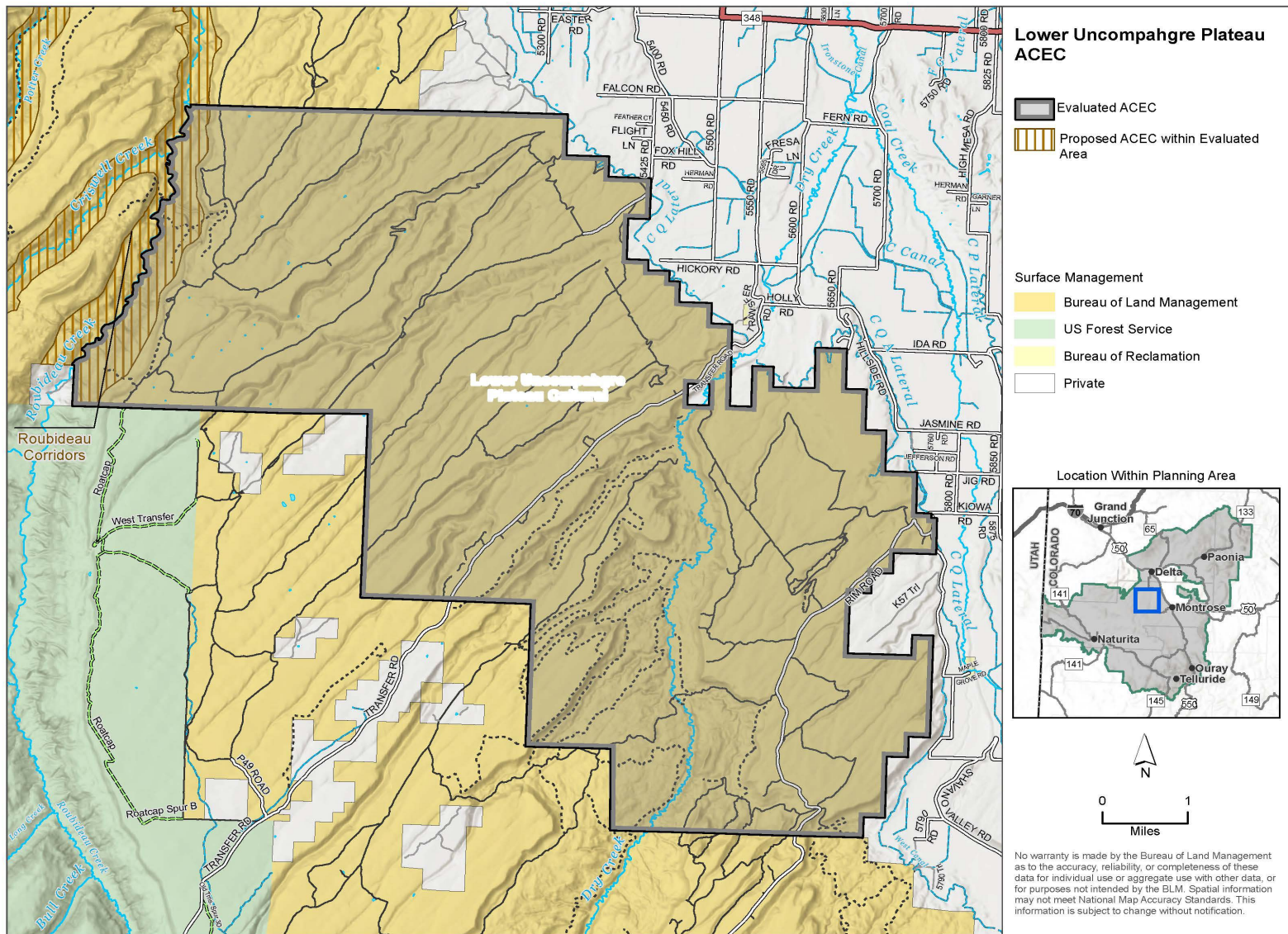


Figure 12: Lower Uncompahgre Plateau ACEC

3.10 NEEDLE ROCK ACEC/ONA

Nomination: This ACEC was first designated in the 1980's and was redesignated in the 2020 ARMP.

Legal Description:

6th Principal Meridian

T. 15 S., R. 91 W., Sec. 27

Size: 100 acres.

General Location: In Delta County, Colorado approximately four miles northeast of the town of Crawford, north of the Smith Fork River, and south of Missouri Flats. It is entirely within the Needle Rock WSA. See **Figure 13**.

Evaluation Completed: Evaluated by the UFO IDT in 2013; reevaluated by the UFO IDT in March 2024.

Values Assessed:

- Scenic
- Geologic: Rare Feature

Scenic

The area is rated as Scenic Quality Class A, VRI I, and managed as VRM Class II.

Geologic

A spectacular volcanic formation rises almost 1,000 feet above the Smith Fork River Valley. The structure was formed in the Miocene when intruding magma hardened to form a plug (also known as a neck). Over millions of years, the surrounding sedimentary rock eroded, leaving behind the resistant igneous core. The site is managed to protect scientific and scenic qualities that are vulnerable to damage from human use.

3.10.1 Summary of Findings

Table 23: Needle Rock ACEC Relevance Findings

Relevance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. An important historic, cultural, or scenic value.	Yes	The area is within Scenic Quality A, VRI I.
2. Fish or wildlife resources.	No	No noteworthy fish or wildlife resources were found.
3. Natural systems or processes.	Yes	The area contains a rare example of a geologic feature.
4. Natural hazards potentially impacting life and safety	No	No noteworthy natural hazards potentially impacting life and safety were found.

Table 24: Needle Rock ACEC Importance Findings

Importance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. Qualities of special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern.	Yes	Needle Rock geologic feature is an outstanding example of a rare volcanic neck.
2. National or more than local importance, subsistence value, or regional contribution of a resource, value or system, or process.	Yes	The Needle Rock geologic feature is a regionally iconic symbol for the North Fork of the Gunnison community.
3. Contributes to ecosystem resilience, landscape intactness, or habitat connectivity.	No	The area is a small parcel of BLM land surrounded by extensive private land.

Determination: The Needle Rock existing ACEC meets relevance and importance criteria for scenic values and a rare geologic feature.

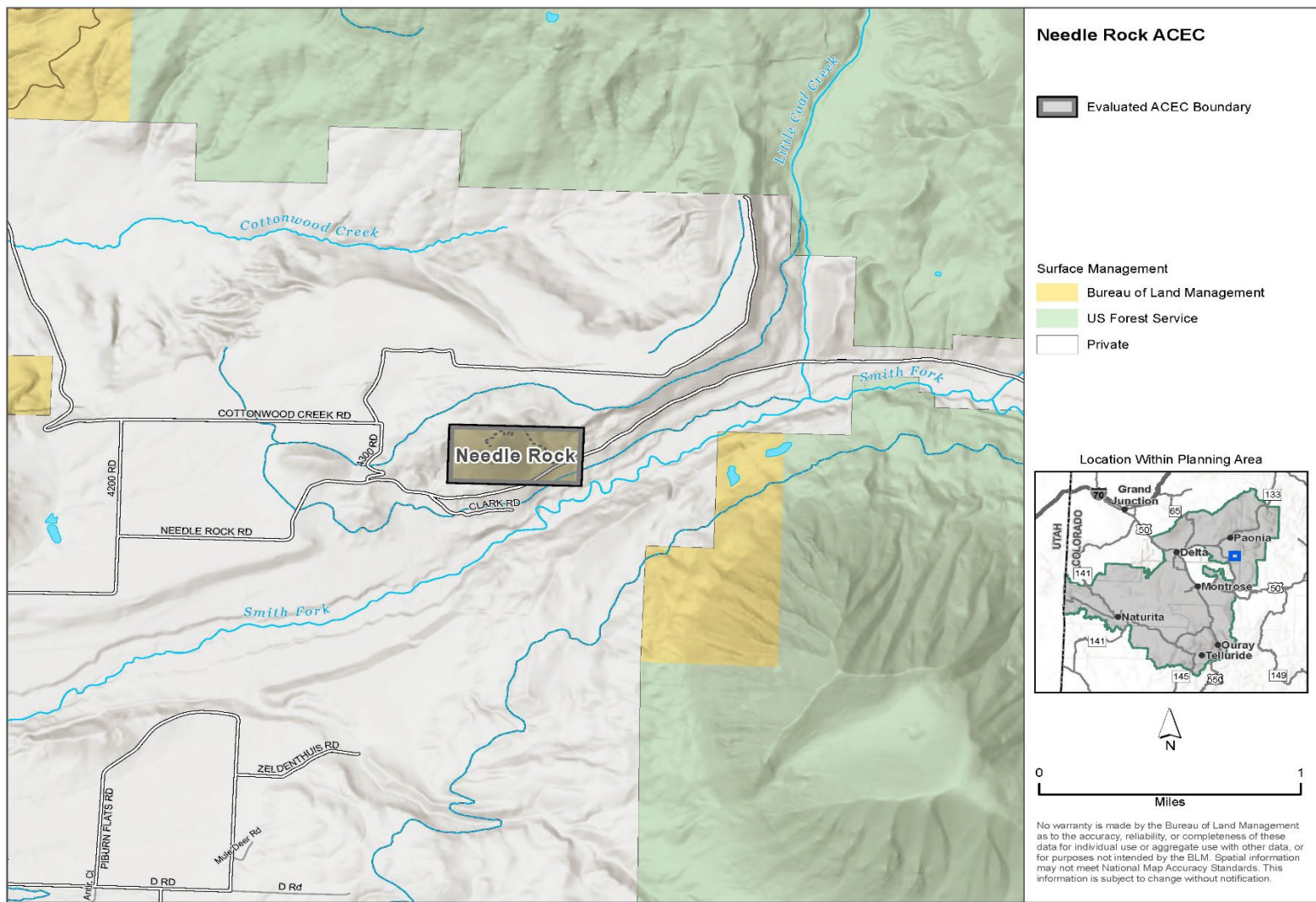


Figure 13: Needle Rock ACEC

3.11 PARADOX ROCK ART ACEC

Nomination: The area was nominated by WSERC and WSCC in 2010 during the UFO RMP Revision. It was designated in the 2020 ARMP.

Legal Description:

New Mexico Principal Meridian

T. 46 N., R. 16 W., Sec. 18

T. 46 N., R. 17 W., Secs. 1, 2, 3, 11, 12, and 13

Size: 1,100 acres

General Location: Montrose County, on the north slope of Paradox Valley, approximately nine miles west of Nucla, CO. See **Figure 14**.

Evaluation Completed: Evaluated by the UFO IDT in 2013; reevaluated by the UFO IDT in March 2024

Values Assessed:

- Cultural: Archaeological Sites

Cultural

The proposed ACEC contains important rock art panels and archaeological sites, including several outstanding examples of Ancestral Puebloan-style petroglyphs, Formative Period and earlier occupations, features, and isolates, and settled village sites dating back more than five hundred to a thousand years.

3.11.1 Summary of Findings

Table 25: Paradox Rock Art ACEC Relevance Findings

Relevance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. An important historic, cultural, or scenic value.	Yes	Important cultural sites are in the area.
2. Fish or wildlife resources.	No	No noteworthy fish or wildlife resources were found.
3. Natural systems or processes.	Yes	The area contains one occurrence of Paradox Valley lupine.
4. Natural hazards potentially impacting life and safety	No	No hazards potentially impacting life and safety were found.

Table 26: Paradox Rock Art ACEC Importance Findings

Importance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. Qualities of special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern.	Yes	Rock art panels are rare and vulnerable to damage.
2. National or more than local importance, subsistence value, or regional contribution of a resource, value or system, or process.	Yes	Archaeological sites are nationally important.
3. Contributes to ecosystem resilience, landscape intactness, or habitat connectivity.	No	The area is fragmented by private lands.

Determination: The Paradox Rock Art existing ACEC meets relevance and importance criteria for cultural resource values.

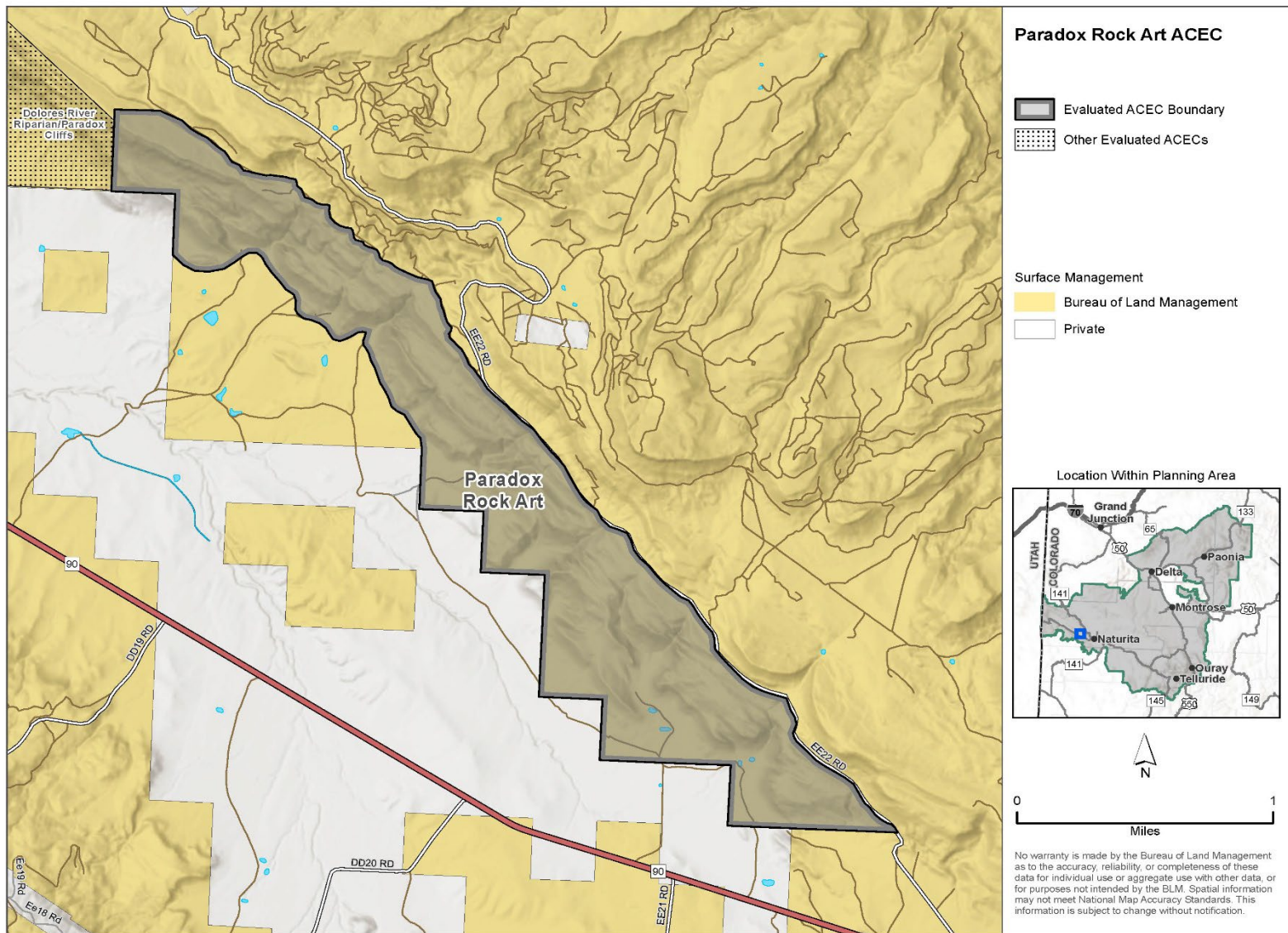


Figure 14: Paradox Rock Art ACEC

3.12 ROUBIDEAU ACEC

Nomination: The area was nominated in 2010 by Jim Riddel during the UFO RMP Revision. It was a proposed ACEC (Roubideau-Potter-Monitor ACEC) under Alternative B and Alternative D (Roubideau Corridors ACEC) of the 2019 Proposed RMP. The area was nominated for expansion (called Roubideau Canyons ACEC) by WSCC and CWP in 2024 during public scoping for the UFO RMP Amendment.

The Roubideau-Potter-Monitor, Roubideau Corridors, and Roubideau Canyons ACECs will henceforth be known simply as the Roubideau ACEC with multiple boundary options.

Legal Description:

New Mexico Principal Meridian

T. 49 N., R. 12 W., Secs. 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6

T. 49 N., R. 13 W., Secs. 1, 2, and 3

T. 50 N., R. 12 W., Secs. 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, and 36

T. 50 N., R. 13 W., Secs. 23, 24, 25, 26, 35, and 36

T. 51 N., R. 12 W., Secs. 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 33, 34, and 35

Size: The Roubideau Corridors ACEC analyzed under Alternative D in the 2019 Proposed RMP is 8,700 acres. The Roubideau-Potter-Monitor ACEC analyzed under Alternative B of the 2019 Proposed RMP is 20,400 acres. The Roubideau Canyons 2024 nomination is 26,300 acres.

General Location: Approximately ten miles southwest of Delta, CO, and eleven miles west of Olathe, CO. The area includes Roubideau and Potter creeks, as well as lands between and adjacent to the creeks. The area contains all of the Camel Back WSA. See **Figure 15**.

Evaluation Completed: Evaluated by the UFO IDT in 2013; reevaluated by the UFO IDT in March 2024.

Values Assessed:

- Cultural: Archaeological Sites and Historical Sites
- Vegetation: Riparian Vegetation and Special Status Plant Species
- Fish and Wildlife: BLM Sensitive Species and Big Game Crucial Winter Habitat

Cultural

Archeological and historical sites are prevalent in this area, including a rare collection of Ute wikiups, as well as petroglyphs perhaps 6,000 years old.

Several historic structures are found along Roubideau Creek such as sheep herder cabins more than 100 years old, including an historic inscription in Roubideau Canyon that may date back to the American Revolution.

Vegetation

Roubideau, Potter, and Monitor creeks offer equally valuable biological resources and wildness, and together form a single canyon system of three branches. These areas have intact riparian systems that are considered to have high biodiversity (G3/S3 plant associations), supporting good and excellent examples of narrowleaf cottonwood/skunkbrush riparian forests, montane and lower montane riparian forests with blue spruce, Douglas fir, narrowleaf cottonwood and red-osier dogwood. The canyons also have foothill riparian shrublands characterized by river birch and coyote willow. The area contains habitat for Grand Junction milkvetch (*Astragalus linifolius*), a BLM sensitive plant. The area also contains occurrences of Colorado hookless cactus (*Sclerocactus glaucus*), a threatened species recommended for delisting in 2023.

Fish and Wildlife

The 2024 nomination report identified Golden eagle nests and breeding range and burrowing owl breeding range. Golden eagle (G5/S3) are BLM sensitive species and meet relevance criteria 2. However, no rationale was provided as to why the presence of these species meet the importance criteria. The nomination did not identify how this habitat is distinct, at-risk, or may have more than locally significant qualities compared to other raptor nests or breeding range. Further, BLM lands have many occurrences of Golden eagle, so the mere presence of either species habitat or nests does not automatically meet importance criteria.

The 2024 nomination further identifies burrowing owl, a BLM sensitive species, breeding range. Burrowing owl breeding range indicates Burrowing owl may be present however there are no known confirmed nest occurrences on BLM within the ACEC and the nomination does not identify any known nest sites. Therefore, the nomination does not meet relevance for burrowing owl.

The area contains BLM sensitive peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*), which meet relevance criteria 2. However, there is no evidence that the habitat is distinct, at-risk, or may have more than locally significant qualities compared to other raptor nests that would meet importance criteria.

Roubideau, Potter, and Monitor Creeks support viable populations of three BLM sensitive species fish: bluehead sucker (*Cantostomus discobolus*) (G4/S4), flannelmouth sucker (*Catostomus latipinnis*) (G3/S3), and roundtail chub (*Gila robusta*) (G3/S2). Recent pit tag arrays have also documented the endangered razorback sucker (*Xyrauchen texanus*) occupying these stream systems during spawning season, which is suggestive of reproductive activity in the system. This complex of intermittent creeks serves as important spawning grounds and migration corridors for tens of thousands of these fish, allowing them to segregate from most of the invasive fish species in the lower parts of the drainage.

The area contains habitat for BLM sensitive northern leopard frog (*Rana pipiens*), which meets relevance criteria 2. This habitat meets importance criteria 2 because of excellent qualities compared to other amphibian habitat, largely due to largely intact riparian vegetation.

Desert bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelson*) occupy the canyons in the area. Desert bighorn sheep are considered globally secure (G4/S4). Desert bighorn sheep are a BLM sensitive species given the species sensitivity to management related activities. Desert bighorn are at potential risk of contact with domestic sheep allotments and concern for disease transfer of *Pasturella hemolytica* and/or *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae*, diseases that are primary concern for health and persistence of bighorn sheep populations. Further, the desert bighorn sheep have reliance on habitats represented on BLM-

administered lands and the majority of occupied habitat occurs on BLM-administered lands. This population of desert bighorn sheep is designated by CPW as a Tier 1 bighorn population, which means it should be given the highest priority for inventory, habitat protection and improvement, disease prevention and research (CPW 2020).

Big Game Crucial Winter Habitat

The canyons form important movement corridors from the desert and Gunnison River to the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) lands on the Uncompahgre Plateau. With a depth of 750 to 1,000 feet from the rim to the creeks, the area is geographically configured to offer a sense of isolation for wildlife and human visitors.

The area contains winter habitat for mule deer and elk. Mule deer are G5/S4, which is globally secure and state apparently secure, elk are G5/S5 globally and state secure. Neither of these species is managed as BLM special status and when considered alone, these species do not meet relevance criteria. Big game severe winter range or winter concentration areas meet the relevance criteria because it is habitat essential for maintaining species diversity. However, this habitat is widespread and does not contain “more than locally important” values required to meet importance criteria. Due to the widespread nature of big game winter range in the UFO coupled with lack of qualities that give it special worth or distinctiveness, the proposed areas does not meet the importance criteria 1 or 2.

The nomination also identifies implementing IM 2023-005: Habitat Connectivity on Public Lands as satisfying importance criteria 3. BLM IM 2023-005 directs the BLM to develop an initial geospatial layer to support identification of habitat connectivity on BLM-managed lands. The results of that modeling effort are not yet available to incorporate into this evaluation.

Secretarial Order 3362 (SO 3362) directs BLM to work in partnership with the states to enhance and improve the quality of big-game winter range and migration corridor habitat on Federal lands. In implementing SO 3362, each state developed a state-specific action plan. In the Colorado Big Game Action Plan (CPW 2022), CPW identified five landscape priority areas to guide agencies in determining the most important habitat for big game conservation and connectivity. In Colorado’s action plan, five herds across the state were identified as priority herds. The Uncompahgre Plateau was identified as a landscape priority area, meeting importance criteria 3 for habitat connectivity.

3.12.1 Summary of Findings

Table 27: Roubideau ACEC Relevance Findings

Relevance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. An important historic, cultural, or scenic value.	Yes	The area has sites important to Native Americans. It contains historic cabins and evidence of early settlement.

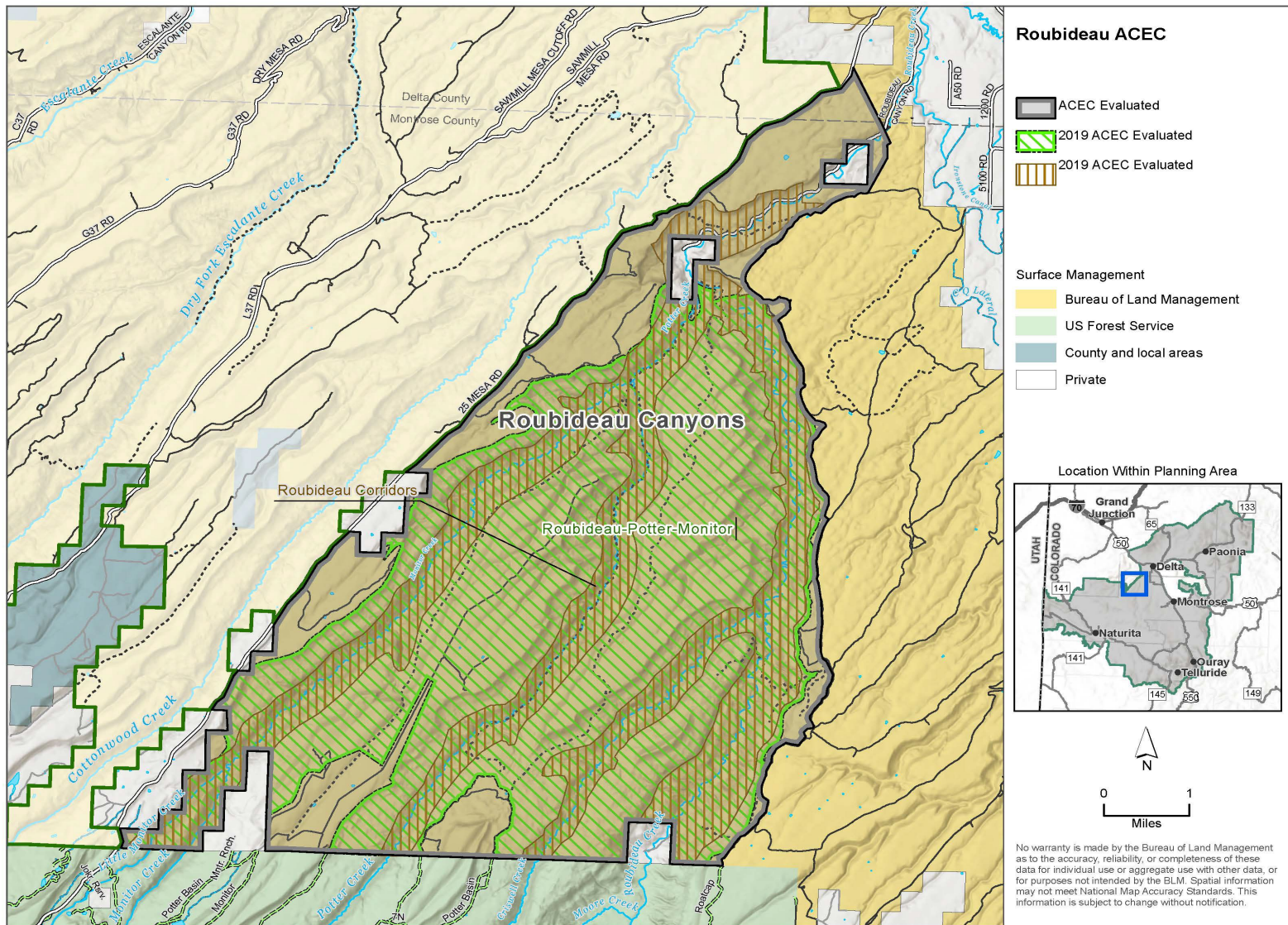
Relevance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
2. Fish or wildlife resources.	Yes	Multiple BLM sensitive species are present including Golden eagle habitat or nest sites, peregrine falcon, three BLM sensitive fish species, northern leopard frog, and desert bighorn sheep.
	Yes	Big game crucial winter range habitat is present and important for species diversity.
3. Natural systems or processes.	Yes	Intact riparian systems and high-quality riparian vegetation occur along the creeks. Two special status plant species are present, including federally threatened Colorado hookless cactus.
4. Natural hazards potentially impacting life and safety	No	No hazards potentially impacting life and safety were found.

Table 28: Roubideau ACEC Importance Findings

Importance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. Qualities of special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern.	Yes	The archaeological sites are fragile and irreplaceable if damaged.
	Yes	Area riparian vegetation has a CNHP rating of G3/S3 for very high biodiversity (statewide and global significance).
2. National or more than local importance, subsistence value, or regional contribution of a resource, value or system, or process.	Yes	The cultural and historic sites are of national importance.
	Yes	Vegetation provides good and excellent examples of native riparian communities with overall global significance.
	Yes	Three BLM sensitive fish species and northern leopard frog are present and are globally and state vulnerable. Desert bighorn sheep are present and regionally important.
	No	Golden eagle and peregrine falcon nest sites and big game winter range are relatively common throughout the field office.
	Yes	A portion of the area is within a WSA.

Importance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
3. Contributes to ecosystem resilience, landscape intactness, or habitat connectivity.	Yes	The area is within the Uncompahgre Plateau priority landscape unit as identified Colorado's SO 3362 State Action Plan. The State Action Plan guides the BLM in determining priorities for landscape intactness and habitat connectivity for big game.
	Yes	The area is important connectivity habitat for desert bighorn sheep and exemplary populations of three BLM sensitive species fish.
	Yes	The area is predominantly roadless and the habitat is not substantially fragmented. The area is adjacent to the USFS Roubideau Special Management Area.
	Yes	The hydrologic systems are largely intact.

Determination: The Roubideau potential ACEC meets relevance and importance criteria for archaeological and historic resources, two special status plant species including federally listed Colorado hookless cactus, globally significant riparian plant communities, desert bighorn sheep, big game crucial winter range within a state identified priority herd, northern leopard frogs, three special status fish species, and is an intact and relatively undisturbed landscape.



3.13 SAN MIGUEL GUNNISON SAGE-GROUSE ACEC

Nomination: The area was nominated in 2010 by San Miguel County, WSERC, and WSCC during the UFO RMP Revision; it was a proposed ACEC under Alternative B of the 2019 Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

Legal Description:

New Mexico Principal Meridian

T. 43 N., R. 12 W., Sec. 6

T. 43 N., R. 14 W., Secs. 2, 6, 7, 8, and 17

T. 44 N., R. 12 W., Secs. 30 and 31

T. 44 N., R. 14 W., Secs. 31 and 32

Size: 500 acres.

General Location: Scattered parcels of BLM lands beginning about seven miles southeast of, and about nine miles southwest of, Norwood, CO. The eastern most parcel of the proposed ACEC overlaps with the existing San Miguel River ACEC. See **Figure 16**.

Evaluation Completed: Evaluated by the UFO IDT in 2013; reevaluated by the UFO IDT in March 2024.

Values Assessed:

- Fish and Wildlife: Threatened and Endangered Species

Fish and Wildlife

The proposed ACEC is located on several small parcels of BLM land containing designated critical habitat (500 acres) for GUSG, as designated by USFWS. It should be noted that determining the historic range of GUSG is problematic for many reasons, most notably because of widespread loss of sagebrush habitats, which preceded scientific study of the species. Additionally, GUSG have been extirpated from many areas for which no useful zoological records or specimens exist.

GUSG currently occur in what have previously been considered eight widely scattered and isolated populations in Colorado and Utah. In Colorado, the seven GUSG population areas are: Cerro Summit-Cimarron-Sims Mesa, Crawford, Dove Creek, Gunnison Basin, Piñon Mesa, Poncha Pass, and San Miguel Basin. The San Miguel Basin population exhibits a patchy distribution of GUSG. As a result, there are six separate “subpopulations” identified within San Miguel Basin: Dry Creek Basin; Hamilton Mesa; Miramonte Reservoir; Gurley Reservoir; Beaver Mesa; and Iron Springs.

The San Miguel Gunnison Sage Grouse proposed ACEC area incorporates the northern end of what is considered part of the San Miguel (Miramonte Reservoir) population of GUSG. The core of this population is found on the BLM TRFO to the south, but small portions of mapped critical occupied habitat exist in this proposed ACEC. Historically, Dove Creek- Monticello, San Miguel, Crawford, and Piñon Mesa all had much more sagebrush habitat and probably larger GUSG populations that were somewhat connected through more contiguous areas of sagebrush habitat. An estimated 20 percent loss of sagebrush habitat between the late 1950s and the early 1990s and fragmentation of sagebrush habitat in southwestern Colorado is thought to have led to the current isolation of these populations.

The protection of the small BLM portions of occupied habitat adjacent to private, state and USFS lands being managed for GUSG provide additional protection for the species.

3.13.1 Summary of Findings

Table 29: San Miguel Gunnison Sage-Grouse ACEC Relevance Findings

Relevance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. An important historic, cultural, or scenic value.	No	No noteworthy historic, cultural, or scenic values were found.
2. Fish or wildlife resources.	Yes	Much of the historic and occupied habitat and leks are on private and state lands in the area. Concentrated nesting and brood rearing habitat exist on BLM lands in limited small areas near Miramonte Reservoir.
3. Natural systems or processes.	No	No noteworthy natural systems or processes were found.
4. Natural hazards potentially impacting life and safety	No	No hazards potentially impacting life and safety were found.

Table 30: San Miguel Gunnison Sage-Grouse ACEC Importance Findings

Importance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. Qualities of special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern.	Yes	GUSG habitat has been fragmented by human uses. Habitat for this GUSG population has become relatively small and isolated from other GUSG populations, and the population is vulnerable to extirpation.
2. National or more than local importance, subsistence value, or regional contribution of a resource, value or system, or process.	Yes	The GUSG is a federally threatened species.

Determination: The San Miguel Gunnison Sage Grouse potential ACEC meets relevance and importance criteria for the federally listed Gunnison sage-grouse.

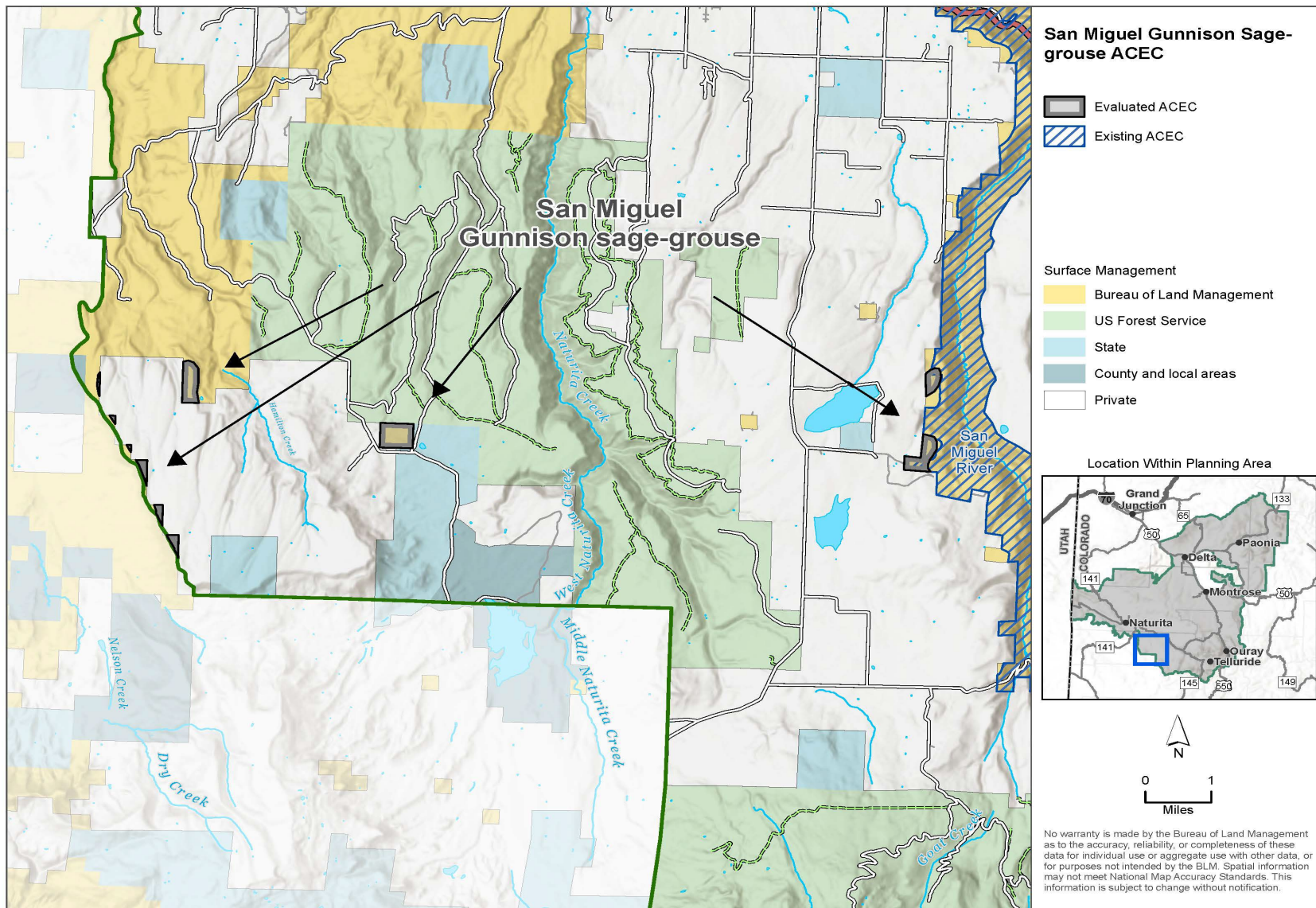


Figure 16: San Miguel Gunnison Sage Grouse ACEC

3.14 SAN MIGUEL RIVER ACEC

Nomination: The San Miguel River is an existing ACEC. It was nominated for expansion in 2010 by Trout Unlimited and a member of the BLM IDT during the UFO RMP Revision; it was a proposed ACEC (San Miguel River Expansion ACEC) under Alternative B of the 2019 Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

The San Miguel River Expansion ACEC and the existing San Miguel River ACEC will henceforth be known simply as the San Miguel River ACEC with multiple boundary options.

Legal Description:

New Mexico Principal Meridian

T. 42 N., R. 10 W., Sec. 4

T. 43 N., R. 10 W., Secs. 7, 8, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 26, 27, 28, 29, 32, and 33

T. 43 N., R. 11 W., Secs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 24

T. 43 N., R. 12 W., Secs. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 21, 27, 28, and 34

T. 44 N., R. 11 W., Secs. 13, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, and 35

T. 44 N., R. 12 W., Secs. 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 17, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, and 35

T. 45 N., R. 12 W., Secs. 18, 19, 20, 28, 29, 30, and 33

T. 45 N., R. 13 W., Secs. 1, 2, 3, 11, 12, 13, and 24

T. 46 N., R. 13 W., Secs. 19, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, and 33

T. 46 N., R. 14 W., Secs. 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 23, 24, and 25

Size: The existing San Miguel River ACEC is 21,500 acres. The proposed expansion analyzed under Alternative B of the 2019 Proposed RMP/Final EIS is 35,300 acres.

General Location: San Miguel River and adjacent lands, from approximately Deep Creek to the powerline about one-half mile upstream of Montrose County Road 90, including Saltado Creek, Beaver Creek, and a portion of Leopard Creek. See **Figure 17**.

Evaluation Completed: Evaluated by the UFO IDT in 2013; reevaluated by the UFO IDT in March 2024.

Values Assessed:

- Scenic: National and State Scenic Byways
- Vegetation: Riparian Vegetation
- Fish and Wildlife: Special Status Species, Migratory Birds

Scenic

The Unaweep Tabeguache Scenic and Historic Byway (Colorado Scenic and Historic Byway) follows the river downstream from Placerville. The San Juan Skyway (a National Scenic Byway and All-American Road) follows the river upstream from Placerville. It is a VRI Class II with a Scenic Quality Rating of A and is managed as VRM Class I, II, and III. The portions managed as VRM III are due to an existing designated utility corridor.

Vegetation

The proposed expansion would extend protection to additional areas that have been recognized by CNHP as having high biodiversity significance. The San Miguel River at Cottonwood Creek hosts skunkbrush/coyote willow riparian shrubland, narrowleaf cottonwood/skunkbrush riparian woodland, and coyote willow/mesic graminoid riparian shrubland, all of which are good to excellent examples of these community types.

Fish and Wildlife

The original ACEC was designated as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by Audubon Society. This site represents one of the finest protected Southwest Canyon Riparian Habitat in the United States. It provides breeding sites for a wide variety of species and primary migratory routes for nearly all of the west's songbirds. More than 300 bird species have been observed at the site. Western yellow billed cuckoo, a threatened species under ESA and a population of rare black phoebes inhabit the area.

BLM Sensitive fish species are present within the area, including the Colorado River cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii pleuriticus*), a BLM sensitive species. This area supports additional BLM sensitive species, including the bluehead sucker (*Catostomus discobolus*) (G4/S4) and the flannelmouth sucker (*Catostomus latipinnis*) (G3/S3). The upstream portion is regularly de-watered by the Conservation Corps irrigation ditch (essential to irrigated fields in the towns of Nucla and Naturita), which has resulted in the loss of thousands of fish per incidence.

The area provides a Canada lynx (threatened species) movement corridor.

3.14.1 Summary of Findings

Table 31: San Miguel River ACEC Relevance Findings

Relevance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. An important historic, cultural, or scenic value.	Yes	The ACEC has scenic values, with a VRI Class II, Scenic Quality A rating. The area is within both the Unaweep Tabeguache Scenic and Historic Byway and the San Juan Skyway.
2. Fish or wildlife resources.	Yes	Supports multiple BLM sensitive species including multiple migratory and songbirds and Canada lynx movement corridors. Three BLM sensitive fish species are present.
3. Natural systems or processes.	Yes	There are exemplary and highly diverse riparian communities supported by the naturally functioning San Miguel River. An important wetland area is also in the proposed ACEC.
4. Natural hazards potentially impacting life and safety	No	No hazards potentially impacting life and safety were found.

Table 32: San Miguel River ACEC Importance Findings

Importance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. Qualities of special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern.	Yes	The area has national and state designated scenic and historic byways.
	Yes	The area has high biodiversity significance at a global level.
2. National or more than local importance, subsistence value, or regional contribution of a resource, value or system, or process.	Yes	Exemplary and extensive riparian communities, now rare in Colorado, are vulnerable to invasive species that threaten native ecosystems.
	Yes	The area is designated as an Important Bird Area of national significance.
	Yes	Three BLM sensitive fish species are present and are globally and state vulnerable.
	Yes	The proposed ACEC is largely an existing ACEC.
3. Contributes to ecosystem resilience, landscape intactness, or habitat connectivity.	Yes	The area provides movement corridors for sensitive fish species, migratory birds, and Canada lynx.

Determination: The San Miguel River potential ACEC meets relevance and importance criteria for globally significant riparian vegetation communities, migratory bird habitat, and three special status fish species. The area provides movement corridors for fish, migratory birds, and Canada lynx.

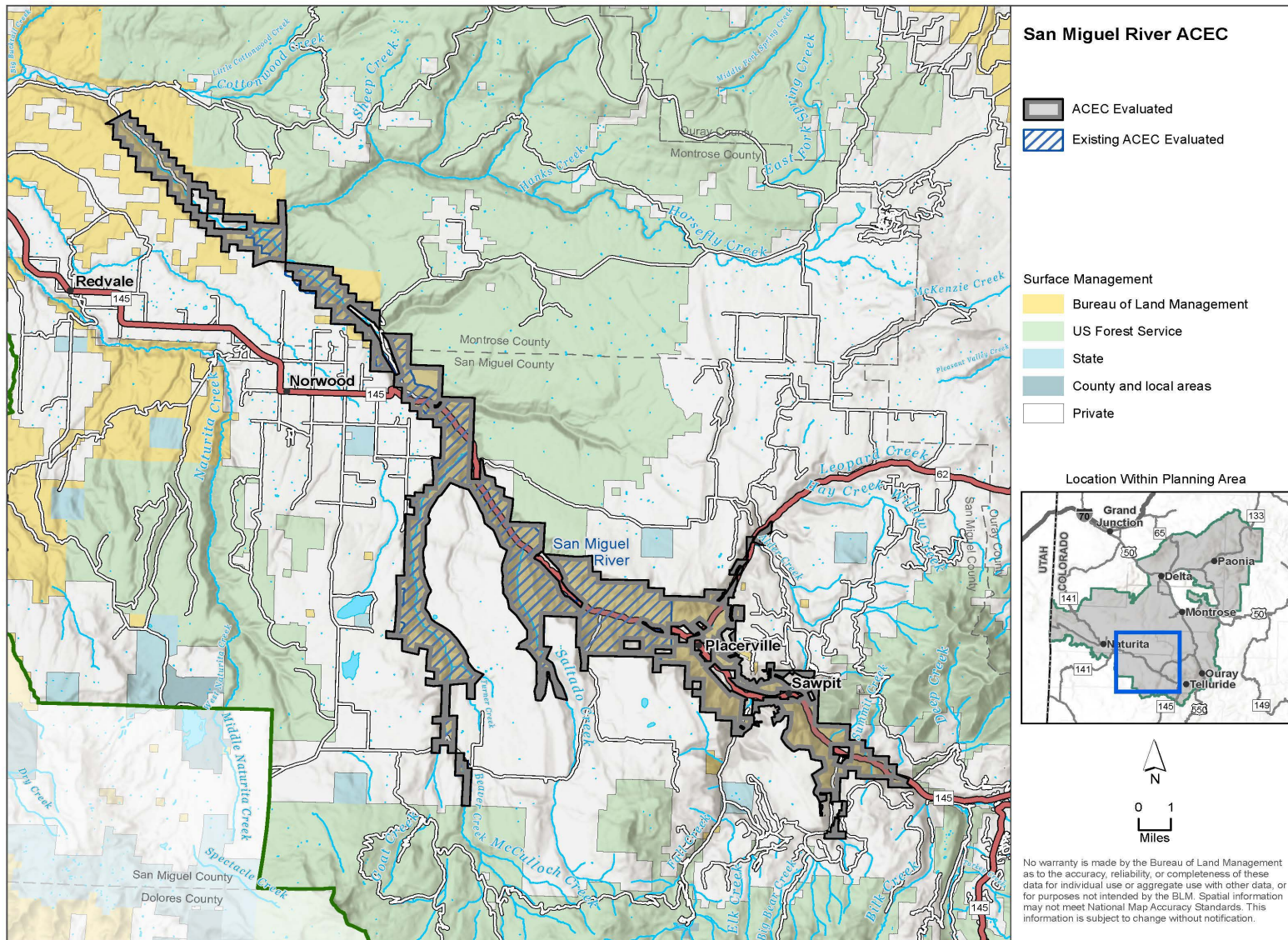


Figure 17: San Miguel River ACEC

3.15 SIMS-CERRO GUNNISON SAGE-GROUSE ACEC

Nomination: The area was nominated in 2010 by Art Goodtimes during the UFO RMP Revision; it was a proposed ACEC under Alternative B of the 2019 Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

Legal Description:

New Mexico Principal Meridian

T. 46 N., R. 9 W., Secs. 4, 5, and 8

T. 47 N., R. 9 W., Secs. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, and 34

T. 47 N., R. 10 W., Secs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 24

T. 48 N., R. 6 W., Sec. 6

T. 48 N., R. 7 W., Secs. 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6

T. 48 N., R. 9 W., Secs. 18, 19, 20, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, and 35

T. 48 N., R. 10 W., Secs. 13, 14, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 33, 34, 35, and 36

T. 49 N., R. 6 W., Sec. 31

T. 49 N., R. 7 W., Secs. 30, 31, and 32

Size: 25,500.

General Location: The proposed ACEC is located on a large parcel of BLM land southeast of Montrose, approximately five to thirteen miles south of Montrose, CO, east of Spring Creek and on BLM lands on both sides of Happy Canyon, Dolores Canyon, and Horsefly Canyon; and on smaller pieces of BLM lands about 15 miles east of Montrose on both sides of highway 50 near Cerro Summit. See **Figure 18**.

Evaluation Completed: Evaluated by the UFO IDT in 2013; reevaluated by the UFO IDT in March 2024.

Values Assessed:

- Scenic
- Fish and Wildlife: Threatened and Endangered Species and Big Game Crucial Winter Habitat

Scenic

The Cimarron Valley is a wide valley with panoramic vistas featuring foothills of scrub oak and sage flats. The Cimarron Ridge in the distance showcases jagged peaks and dense forest. This area is especially beautiful during fall foliage, which showcase a variety of vibrant and contrasting colors. The area is rated as VRI Class II, with a Scenic Quality Rating of A and B, depending on location. It is currently managed as VRM Class II and III. The Class III areas contain portions of the Westwide Energy Corridor.

Fish and Wildlife

GUSG currently occur in what have previously been considered eight widely scattered and isolated populations in Colorado and Utah. In Colorado, the seven identified GUSG population areas are: Cerro Summit-Cimarron-Sims Mesa, Crawford, Dove Creek, Gunnison Basin, Piñon Mesa, Poncha Pass, and San Miguel Basin. The Cerro Summit- Cimarron-Sims Mesa population exhibits a patchy distribution of GUSG. As a result, there are two subpopulations identified within Cerro Summit-Cimarron-Sims Mesa: Cerro Summit-Cimarron; and Sims Mesa.

This proposed ACEC area includes the BLM lands within the Sims Mesa subpopulation, and a very small portion of the Cerro Summit- Cimarron subpopulation that is within the planning area. An estimated 20 percent loss of sagebrush habitat between the late 1950s and early 1990s and fragmentation of sagebrush habitat in southwestern Colorado is thought to have led to the current isolation of these populations. The protection of the small BLM portions of occupied/historic habitat provides additional protection for the species.

The Sims Mesa subpopulation has not been considered occupied since 2004. The last bird counted during an annual lek count was in 2002 and a single bird was documented in the winter of 2004. Winter snow track surveys in 2012 – 2013 and 2013 – 2014 yielded no results. Therefore, the Sims Mesa subpopulation area is considered “vacant/unknown”. It is still managed to protect and improve dispersal movements and habitat connectivity, and it is within designated critical habitat (USFWS, 2020). Habitat in this area comprises small patches of sagebrush fragmented by pinyon-juniper woodlands, residential or recreational development, and agricultural fields. There is little evidence to suggest that there is a functioning population of GUSG on Sims Mesa, bisected land ownership coupled with numerous anthropogenic disturbances from rights-of-ways, public and private roads, unregulated dispersed camping, and housing development all collectively reduce habitat effectiveness on Sims Mesa.

The Cerro Summit-Cimarron area is in Montrose County and Gunnison County approximately 15 miles east of Montrose, Colorado. Habitat in this area includes sagebrush fragmented by oakbrush and irrigated pastures. Primary land use within this area includes livestock grazing, hay production, and recreation. BLM has no active leks in the Cerro Summit- Cimarron subpopulation and one lek is currently active in the Cerro Summit population. The three-year-average high male count (HMC) for this population area ranged between 0 and 12 between 2000 and 2022. The 3-year average population estimates based on the HMC have ranged between 2 and 57 from 2000 to 2022. The HMCs and corresponding population estimates have generally been declining since 2017. Anthropogenic disturbances exist for the Cerro Summit lands within the proposed ACEC. US Highway 50 and the Westwide Energy Corridor bisects both BLM parcels, and substantial portions of the parcels are within ecological sites that cannot support sagebrush habitat types critical for GUSG. As a result, suitable habitat on Cerro Summit occurs as relatively small and disconnected patches that are not ideal for GUSG life processes. In addition, BLM conducted habitat assessment for GUSG on the ecological sites that can support sagebrush on Sims and Cerro between 2015 and 2016 and found that approximately 30 percent of the lands assessed were suitable during the breeding season, 52 percent were suitable during the summer season, and 7 percent were considered suitable for winter season.

The Final Recovery Plan for GUSG identified the recovery vision for all 8 populations of GUSG. The recovery vision for the Cerro Summit Cimarron Sims Mesa (CSCSM) population describes improved and maintained habitats. As such, the CSCSM population within the proposed ACEC does not have a demographic target to achieve recovery (i.e. delisting). The recovery goals for the CSCSM populations are based on habitat factors, due to low condition of demographic factors in those populations (USFWS 2020).

Big Game Crucial Winter Habitat

The area contains winter habitat for mule deer and elk. Relevance criteria 2 for fish and wildlife resources includes habitat for endangered, sensitive, or threatened species or habitat essential for maintaining species diversity. Mule deer are G5/S4, which is globally secure and state apparently secure,

elk are G5/S5 globally and state secure. Neither of these species is managed as BLM special status and when considered alone, these species do not meet relevance criteria. Big game severe winter range or winter concentration areas meet the relevance criteria because it is habitat essential for maintaining species diversity.

The resource must have substantial significance and value to meet importance criteria 1. Big game crucial winter habitat is widespread throughout the region and does not contain more than locally significant qualities that would meet importance criteria 2. Due to the widespread nature of mule deer and elk winter range in the planning area coupled with a lack of qualities that make it rare or distinct, the proposed areas do not meet the importance criteria for more than locally significant qualities.

Secretarial Order 3362 (SO 3362) directs BLM to work in partnership with the states to enhance and improve the quality of big-game winter range and migration corridor habitat on Federal lands. In implementing SO 3362, each state developed a state-specific action plan. In the Colorado Big Game Action Plan (CPW 2022), CPW identified five landscape priority areas to guide agencies in implementing SO 3362. In Colorado's action plan, five herds across the state were identified as priority herds. The Uncompahgre Plateau (West-Central Colorado) was identified as a landscape priority area that encompasses Colorado's D19 deer herd and E-20 elk herd. The Sims Mesa portion of this ACEC is within the Uncompahgre Plateau landscape priority under SO 3362 and meets importance criteria 3 for important habitat connectivity,

3.15.1 Summary of Findings

Table 33: Sims-Cerro Gunnison Sage-Grouse ACEC Relevance Findings

Relevance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. An important historic, cultural, or scenic value.	Yes	BLM has rated the area as VRI Class II and III, Scenic Quality A and B.
2. Fish or wildlife resources.	Yes	These locations have USFWS Critical Habitat, mapped as Occupied and Unoccupied critical habitat for GUSG. Small patch size and disconnected land ownership, anthropogenic disturbances, and limited habitat suitability all act to limit occupation by GUSG.
	Yes	Big game crucial winter range habitat is present and important for species diversity.
3. Natural systems or processes.	Yes	No noteworthy natural systems or processes were found.
4. Natural hazards potentially impacting life and safety	No	No hazards potentially impacting life and safety were found.

Table 34: Sims-Cerro Gunnison Sage-Grouse ACEC Importance Findings

Importance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. Qualities of special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern.	Yes	GUSG habitat has been fragmented by human uses. Habitat for this GUSG population has become relatively small and isolated from other GUSG populations, and the population is vulnerable to extirpation.
2. National or more than local importance, subsistence value, or regional contribution of a resource, value or system, or process.	Yes	The GUSG is a federally threatened species.
3. Contributes to ecosystem resilience, landscape intactness, or habitat connectivity.	No	Both Sims Mesa and Cerro are highly fragmented landscapes surrounded by extensive private land, state highways, county roads, and designated utility corridors. They are considered part of the Wildland Urban Interface.
	Yes	Sims Mesa area: the area is within the Uncompahgre Plateau priority landscape unit as identified Colorado's SO 3362 State Action Plan. The State Action Plan guides the BLM in determining priorities for landscape intactness and habitat connectivity for big game.

Determination: The Sims-Cerro Gunnison Sage-Grouse potential ACEC meets relevance and importance criteria for federally listed Gunnison sage-grouse and, in the Sims Mesa area, big game crucial winter range within a state identified priority habitat area.

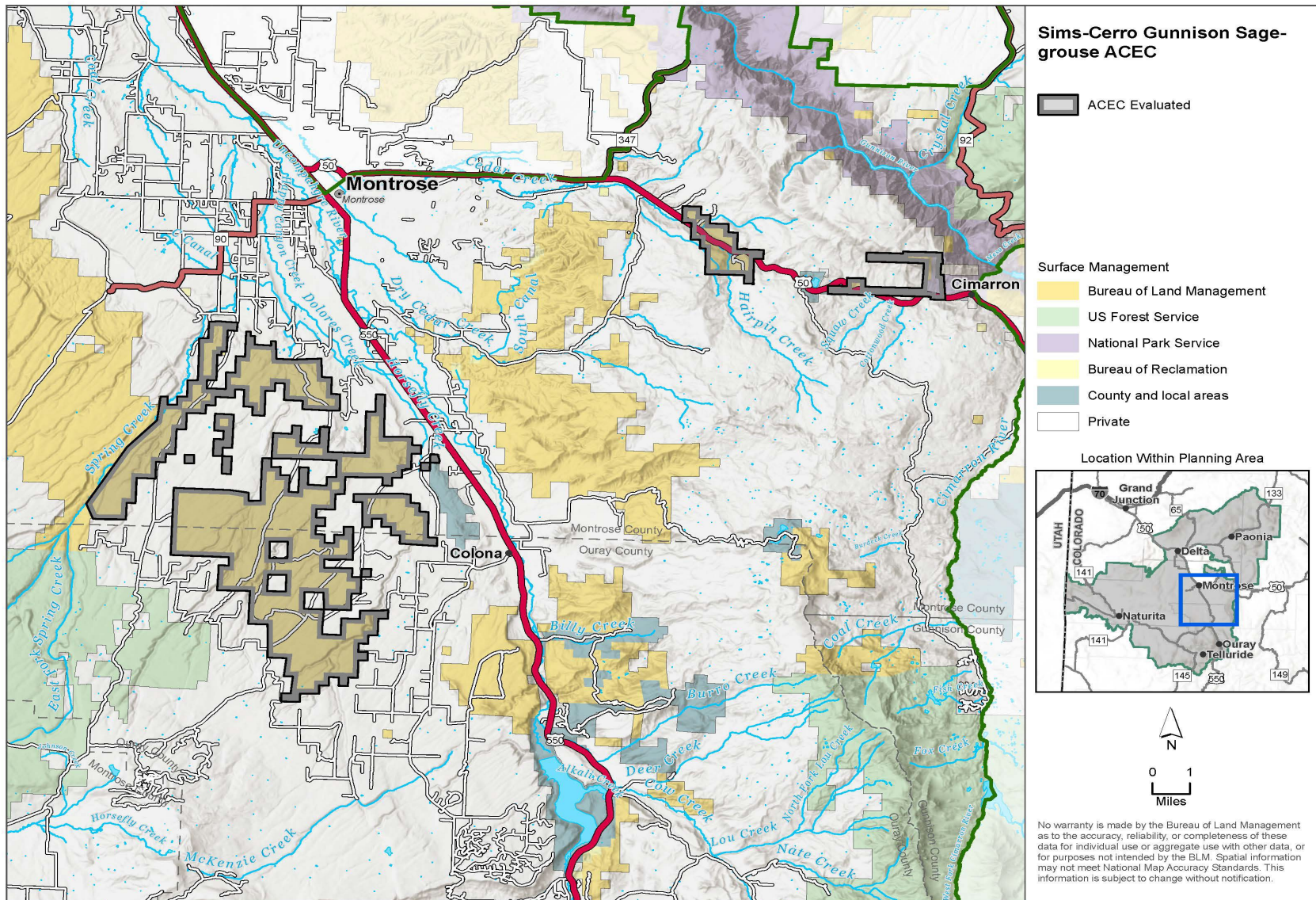


Figure 18: Sims-Cerro Summit Gunnison Sage-Grouse ACEC

3.16 SHAVANO-TABEGUACHE ACEC

Nomination: The original Tabeguache Creek ACEC was designated in the 1980s (and not re-designated in the 2020 ARMP due to the overlapping congressionally designated Tabeguache Special Management Area). The area was nominated for an expanded ACEC in 2010 by WSERC and WSCC during the UFO RMP Revision; it was a proposed ACEC (Tabeguache Pueblo and Tabeguache Caves ACEC) under Alternative B of the 2019 Proposed RMP. The area was nominated for expansion (Shavano-Tabeguache ACEC) by WSCC and CWP in 2024 during public scoping for the UFO RMP Amendment.

The Shavano-Tabeguache ACEC and the Tabeguache Pueblo and Tabeguache Caves ACECs will henceforth be known simply as the Shavano-Tabeguache ACEC with multiple boundary options.

Legal Description:

New Mexico Principal Meridian

T. 47 N., R. 15 W., Secs. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 16, 17, 18, 20, and 21

T. 47 N., R. 16 W., Secs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13

T. 47 N., R. 17 W., Secs. 1 and 2

T. 48 N., R. 15 W., Secs. 19, 20, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, and 48

T. 48 N., R. 16 W., Secs. 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, and 36

T. 48 N., R. 17 W., Secs. 24, 25, 26, 27, 34, 35, and 36

Size: The Tabeguache-Pueblo and Tabeguache Caves ACEC analyzed under Alternative B of the 2019 Proposed RMP is 26,400 acres. The 2024 nominated Shavano-Tabeguache ACEC is 32,800 acres.

General Location: Montrose County, approximately six miles north of Nucla, CO, from the Uncompahgre National Forest to about two miles east of old Uravan; along Tabeguache Creek and Spring Creek, and areas in between. The nominated ACEC includes the previously designated 600-acre Tabeguache Creek ACEC/ONA; a portion of the nominated ACEC is within the congressionally designated Tabeguache Special Management Area and is managed similarly to designated wilderness under that designation. See **Figure 19**.

Evaluation Completed: Evaluated by the UFO IDT in 2013; reevaluated by the UFO IDT in March 2024.

Values Assessed:

- Cultural: Archaeological Sites and Native American Significance
- Vegetation: Special Status Plant Species
- Fish and Wildlife: Big Game Crucial Winter Habitat
- Natural Hazards

Cultural

Tabeguache Pueblo and Tabeguache Caves are important both to the prehistory of the region and to the history of archaeology in Colorado, being some of the earliest explored and described archaeological sites in the state. There is some evidence of farming (corn production). In addition to their historic interest, both Tabeguache Pueblo and Tabeguache Caves still contain intact archaeological deposits dating to the Formative period, or Ancestral Puebloan people.

Vegetation

After review of both BLM and CNHP element occurrence records there are no known populations of San Rafael milkvetch (*Astragalus rafaelsensis*) within the nominated ACEC, as described in the ACEC nomination report. There is one occurrence of Payson lupine (*Lupinus crassus*) within the nominated ACEC boundary.

Fish and Wildlife

To support relevance criteria, the 2024 nomination report identified the following species or their habitat as occurring in the nominated ACEC: Golden eagle breeding range; GUSG habitat; burrowing owl breeding range; Townsend's big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii*) (G4/S2); Fringed myotis (*Myotis thysanodes*) (G4/S3) sites; and northern river otter overall and winter range. Each are discussed in more detail below.

The following species are within range but not considered further for relevance criteria: Golden eagle, GUSG habitat, Burrowing owl, Northern river otter. All of these species may be present within the ACEC nomination, however the proposed ACEC does not contain documented occurrences for these species. Being within the range of a species does not confer relevance.

The 2024 nomination identifies Townsend's big-eared bat and fringed myotis as occurring within the ACEC. The BLM utilizes acoustic monitors to determine bat presence across the field office at 36 different spatially balanced locations according to the North American Bat Monitoring protocol. Townsend's big-eared bat are present at 50 percent of the sites monitored, and Fringed Myotis have been observed at 83 percent of the sites monitored. These species are special status BLM species and meet the relevance criteria. However, their presence is widespread and common throughout the UFO as evidenced by the monitoring data and therefore the presence of these species do not meet the importance criteria.

The 2024 nomination argues that the amphibian species richness, bird species richness, mammal species richness, reptile species richness, imperiled species richness, ecological connectivity, ecological intactness, ecological system diversity, ecological system rarity, sagebrush cover influence the relevance and importance of the ACEC nomination. However, the data provided to support species richness is largely inaccurate. As outlined above, many of the species are not known to derive any special use of the area or are simply within the range of the species habitat. None of the wildlife species that potentially occur within the area have more than locally significant qualities.

Tabeguache Creek, a CPW designated Aquatic Native Species Conservation Water, supports BLM sensitive fish species including roundtail chub (*Gila robusta*) (G3/S2), bluehead sucker (*Cantostomus discobolus*) (G4/S4), and the flannelmouth sucker (*Catostomus latipinnis*) (G3/S3), all of which are BLM sensitive species and therefore meet the relevance criteria. As indicated by the CPW designation, Tabeguache Creek is an important movement corridor required for the conservation of these species. The 2024 ACEC nomination also indicates the area contains CPW Aquatic Sportfish Management Waters. While it does contain such waters, their management is not focused on the conservation of native fish species and do not meet relevance criteria.

Big Game Crucial Winter Habitat

The area contains winter habitat for mule deer and elk. Mule deer are G5/S4, which is globally secure and state apparently secure, elk are G5/S5 globally and state secure. Neither of these species is managed as BLM special status and when considered alone, these species do not meet relevance criteria. Big game severe winter range or winter concentration areas meet the relevance criteria because it is habitat essential for maintaining species diversity. However, this habitat is widespread and does not contain “more than locally important” values required to meet importance criteria. Due to the widespread nature of big game winter range in the UFO coupled with lack of qualities that give it special worth or distinctiveness, the proposed areas does not meet the importance criteria 1 or 2.

The nomination also identifies implementing IM 2023-005: Habitat Connectivity on Public Lands as satisfying importance criteria 3. BLM IM 2023-005 directs the BLM to develop an initial geospatial layer to support identification of habitat connectivity on BLM-managed lands. The results of that modeling effort are not yet available to incorporate into this evaluation.

Secretarial Order 3362 (SO 3362) directs BLM to work in partnership with the states to enhance and improve the quality of big-game winter range and migration corridor habitat on Federal lands. In implementing SO 3362, each state developed a state-specific action plan. In the Colorado Big Game Action Plan (CPW 2022), CPW identified five landscape priority areas to guide agencies in determining the most important habitat for big game conservation and connectivity. In Colorado’s action plan, five herds across the state were identified as priority herds. The Uncompahgre Plateau was identified as a landscape priority area, meeting importance criteria 3 for habitat connectivity.

The area overlaps partially with the San Miguel River at Tabeguache CNHP B2 PCA, which meets importance criteria 2 for regional contribution to a resource.

Natural Hazards

According to the 2024 nomination report, this region is susceptible to unintended consequences resulting from amplified human presence. The report states that heightened foot traffic, recreational activities, and unrestricted access may induce adverse effects such as soil disturbance, compaction, and inadvertent damage to archaeological sites and culturally significant artifacts. However, much of the area is remote. These soils are not known to be sensitive to general use foot traffic. Human presence and activities in and around sensitive resources does not constitute a natural hazard.

3.16.1 Summary of Findings

Table 35: Shavano-Tabeguache ACEC Relevance Findings

Relevance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. An important historic, cultural, or scenic value.	Yes	Contains important archaeological sites that show a relationship between the Fremont and Ancestral Puebloan cultures.
2. Fish or wildlife resources.	Yes	Townsend’s big-eared bat and fringed myotis, BLM special status species, are present.
	Yes	Big game crucial winter range habitat is present and important for species diversity.

Relevance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
3. Natural systems or processes.	No	An isolated occurrence of one BLM sensitive plant species does not meet relevance criteria.
4. Natural hazards potentially impacting life and safety	No	General human presence and activity in and around other sensitive resources does not equate to a natural hazard posing a threat to human health and safety.

Table 36: Shavano-Tabeguache ACEC Importance Findings

Importance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. Qualities of special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern.	Yes	The archaeological sites are fragile and irreplaceable if damaged
2. National or more than local importance, subsistence value, or regional contribution of a resource, value or system, or process.	Yes	Archaeological sites are nationally important.
	No	Townsend's big-eared bat and fringed myotis are relatively common throughout the planning area.
	Yes	The area overlaps with a B2 PCA.
3. Contributes to ecosystem resilience, landscape intactness, or habitat connectivity.	Yes	Waters within the proposed ACEC are important movement corridors and spawning areas for three BLM sensitive fish species. The proposed ACEC includes CPW Aquatic Native Species Conservation Waters.
	Yes	The area is within the Uncompahgre Plateau priority landscape unit as identified Colorado's SO 3362 State Action Plan. The State Action Plan guides the BLM in determining priorities for landscape intactness and habitat connectivity for big game.

Determination: The Shavano-Tabeguache potential ACEC meets relevance and importance criteria for archaeological resources, three BLM sensitive fish species, and big game crucial winter range within a state identified priority area.

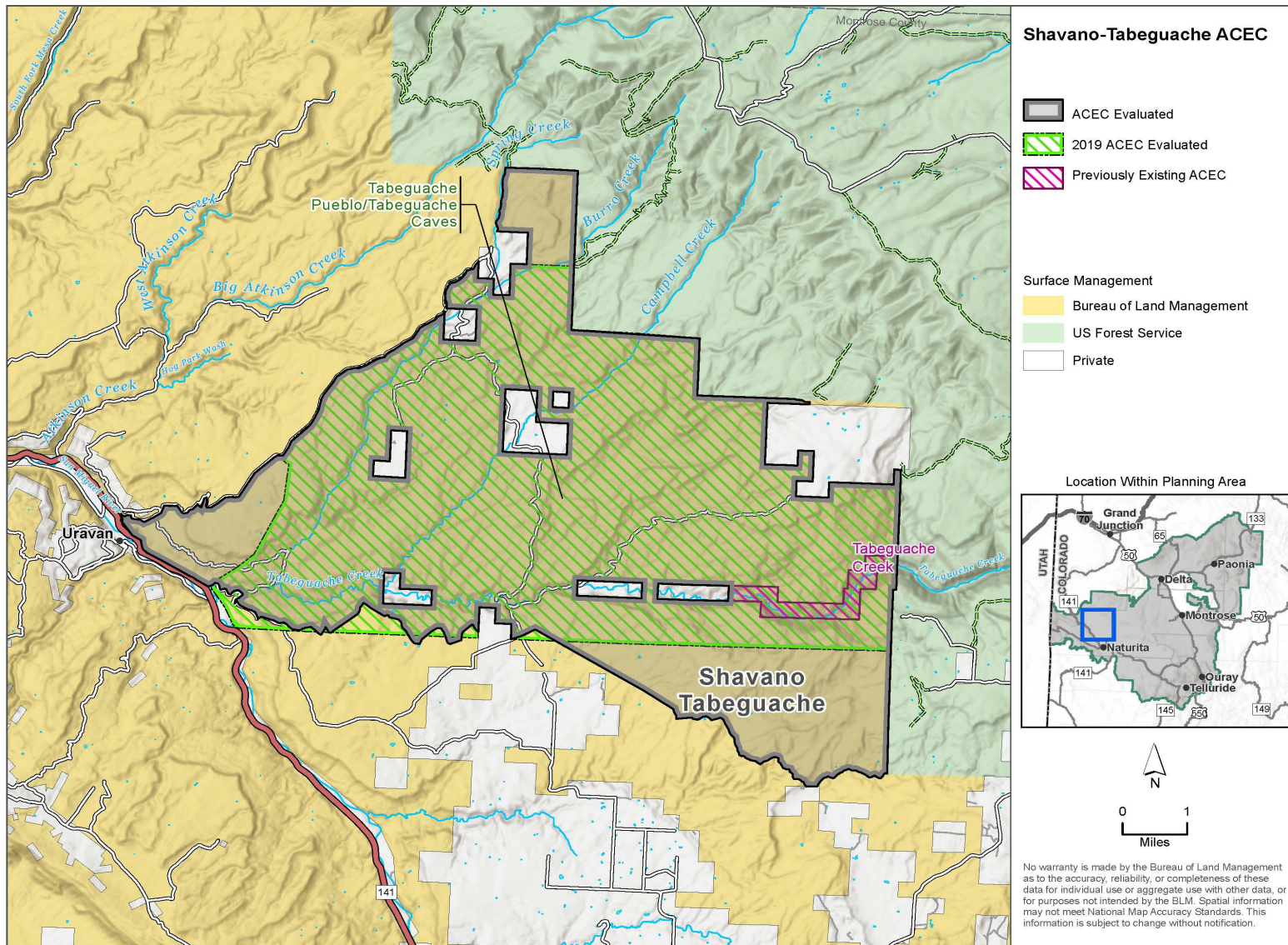


Figure 19: Shavano-Tabeguache ACEC

3.17 WEST PARADOX PROPOSED ACEC

Nomination: The area was nominated in 2010 by a member of the UFO IDT during the UFO RMP Revision; it was a proposed ACEC under Alternative B of the 2019 Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

Legal Description:

New Mexico Principal Meridian

T. 47 N., R. 18 W., Secs. 3, 4, and 5

T. 48 N., R. 18 W., Secs. 29, 30, 31, 32, and 33

T. 48 N., R. 19 W., Secs. 14, 15, 16, 17, 21, 22, 23, 26, 36, 55, 59, and 60

Size: 5,200 acres

General Location: Montrose County, CO, from the west rim of the Dolores River canyon to the west end of Paradox Valley, and up to Montrose County Rd Q13. See **Figure 20**.

Evaluation Completed: Evaluated by the UFO IDT in 2013; reevaluated by the UFO IDT in March 2024.

Values Assessed:

- Vegetation: Unique Vegetation Communities and Special Status Plant Species
- Fish and Wildlife: Special Status Species

Vegetation

The West Paradox Valley site is located on the north side of Paradox Valley and west of the Dolores River, on dark red soils derived from the Chinle Formation. This site contains an excellent (A-ranked) occurrence and historical occurrences of Paradox Valley lupine (*Lupinus crassus*), a BLM sensitive and globally imperiled (G2/S2) species. It also contains Paradox breadroot (*Pediomelum aromaticum*), which is also BLM sensitive, and a globally vulnerable (G3/S2) plant. Paradox Valley lupine and Paradox breadroot are both locally common in the bottoms and on the sides of draws at the base of the south-facing slopes, with thousands of individuals of both species and a variety of ages represented.

Other vegetation consists of Utah juniper woodland, with galleta (*Genus Pleuraphis*) and snakeweed (*Genus Gutierrezia*). The plant community is in good condition, with few exotic species present. The boundary is drawn to encompass known occupied sites of Paradox Valley lupine and Paradox breadroot, while allowing adequate additional habitat for the plants to move or expand their range over time.

Fish and Wildlife

The proposed area includes cliff faces on the canyon rim, which support peregrine falcons (*Falco peregrinus anatum*).

The area overlaps the Paradox Valley North CNHP B2 PCA, which meets importance criteria 2 for regional contribution to a resource.

3.17.1 Summary of Findings

Table 37: West Paradox Proposed ACEC Relevance Findings

Relevance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. An important historic, cultural, or scenic value.	No	No noteworthy historic, cultural, or scenic values were found
2. Fish or wildlife resources.	Yes	The area supports peregrine falcon, a BLM sensitive species.
3. Natural systems or processes.	Yes	The area supports two BLM sensitive species: Paradox lupine and Paradox breadroot.
4. Natural hazards potentially impacting life and safety	No	No hazards potentially impacting life and safety were found.

Table 38: West Paradox Proposed ACEC Importance Findings

Importance	Criteria Present?	Rationale
1. Qualities of special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern.	Yes	Paradox lupine and Paradox breadroot are BLM Sensitive species; they are globally imperiled and globally vulnerable, respectively.
2. National or more than local importance, subsistence value, or regional contribution of a resource, value or system, or process.	No	Peregrine falcon are present. They are globally secure and State imperiled (G4/S3). The occurrence has locally important qualities, but it is not exemplary or unique compared to other peregrine nest occurrences and habitat throughout the planning area.
	Yes	CNHP has recommended a portion of the area as a B2 PCA.
3. Contributes to ecosystem resilience, landscape intactness, or habitat connectivity.	No	The area is entirely bounded on the southwest side by private land. The BLM maintains only one access point (a county road) within the proposed ACEC.

Determination: The West Paradox potential ACEC meets relevance and importance criteria for two sensitive plant species.

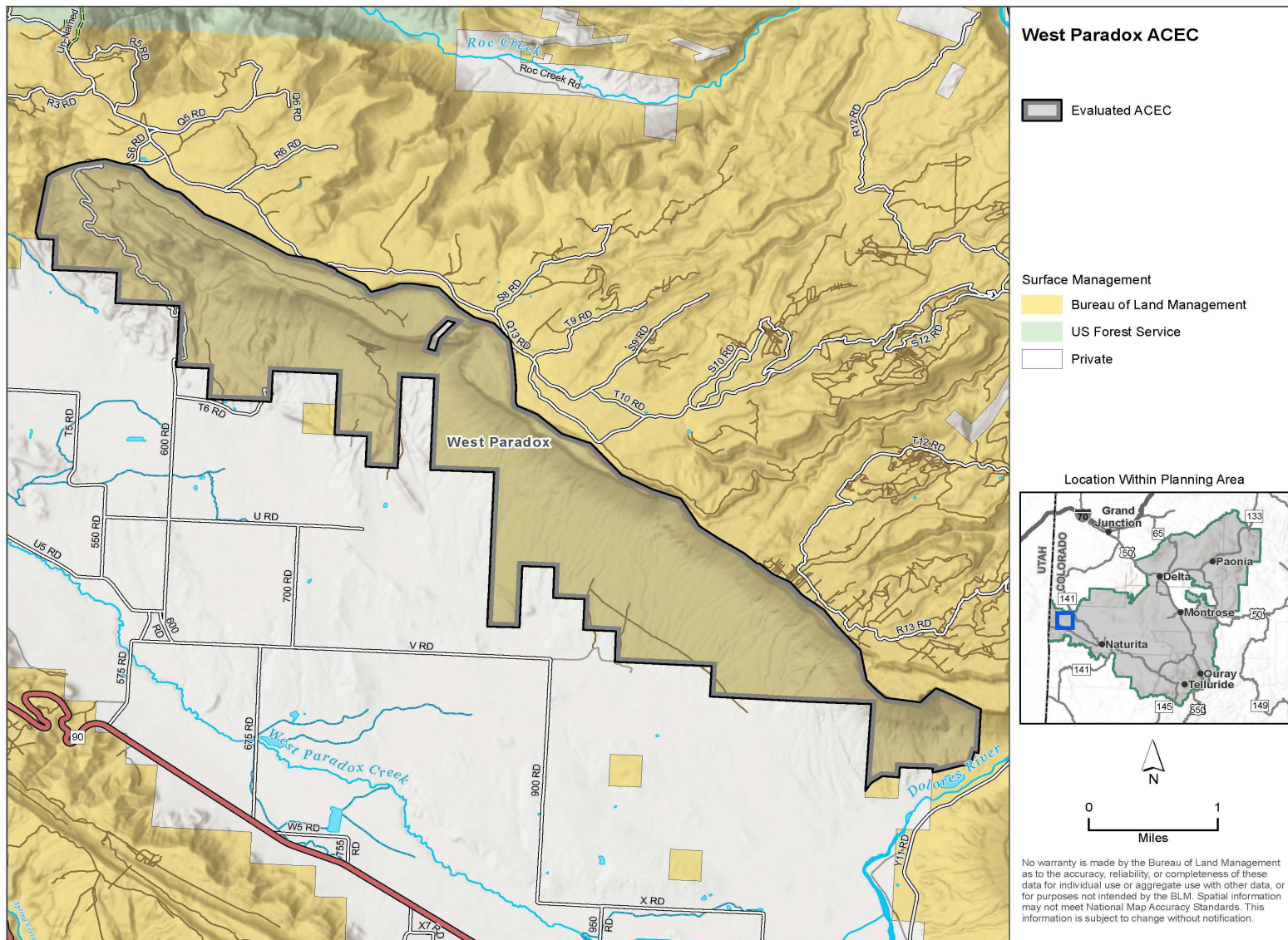


Figure 20: West Paradox ACEC

4 UNCOMPAHGRE FIELD OFFICE INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM

The following Uncompahgre Field Office Staff participated in determining the relevance and importance of the nominated and existing ACECs.

Table 39: List of Evaluators

Name	Title
Beresford, Vincent	Geologist
Browne, Tanner	GIS Specialist
Franz, Edd	Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area Manager
Harris, Gwen	Wildlife Biologist
Holsinger, Ken	Ecologist
Hyatt, Kevin	Hydrologist
Kilbane, Caroline	Recreation Planner
Latta, Emily	Wildlife Biologist
LoSasso, Angela	Project Manager, Writer, Editor
Morin, Bambi	Realty Specialist
Price, Collin	Archaeologist
Stranathan, Thane	Rangeland Management Specialist
Sukharnikova, Tatyana	Recreation Planner
Vicencio, Ken	Supervisory Rangeland Management Specialist

5 LITERATURE CITED

- Bureau of Land Management (BLM). 1985. San Juan/San Miguel Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision. September 1985.
- _____. 1989. Uncompahgre Basin Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision. July 1989.
- _____. 2009a. Paleontological Resources Sampling Survey. Prepared for the Uncompahgre Field Office, Montrose, CO. August 2009.
- _____. 2009b. Visual Resource Inventory. Prepared for the Uncompahgre Field Office, Montrose, CO. September 2009.
- _____. 2013. Evaluation of Existing and Proposed Areas of Critical Environmental Concern for the Uncompahgre Planning Area. Accessed April 2024 at:
https://eplanning.blm.gov/public_projects/2026528/200601567/20101074/251001074/ACEC%20Report%20Final%2001152013.pdf.
- _____. 2019. Uncompahgre Field Office Proposed Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement. Accessed April 2024 at:
https://eplanning.blm.gov/public_projects/lup/62103/175697/214066/Uncompahgre_Proposed_RMP_Final_EIS_-_Volume_I.pdf.
- _____. 2020a. Deer Basin-Midway, Petrie Mesa, Point Creek Land Health Evaluation. Montrose, CO.
- _____. 2020b. Uncompahgre Field Office Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan. Accessed April 2024 at:
https://eplanning.blm.gov/public_projects/lup/62103/20017137/250023044/UFO_ROD-ARMP_ePlanning_OPT.pdf.
- _____. 2023a. BLM Colorado Sensitive Species List. Accessed April 2024 at:
https://www.blm.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2023-09/BLM%20CO%20Sensitive%20Species%20List_2023.pdf
- _____. 2023b. Uncompahgre Field Office AIM Land Use Compliance Report. Montrose, CO.
- _____. 2024a. Manual Section 1613, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. Washington, DC. August 7, 2024.
- _____. 2024b. BLM Colorado State Office, BLM Fish Bearing Streams Geospatial Layer, Accessed on April 20, 2024.
- _____. 2024c. BLM Colorado State Office, Colorado National Heritage Program Species Rankings Geospatial Layer, Accessed April 2024.
- _____. 2024d. BLM Colorado State Office, Species Activity Mapping Geospatial Layer, Accessed April 2024.

- Colorado National Heritage Program (CNHP). 2024a. Heritage Network Ranking System. Accessed April 2024 at: <https://cnhp.colostate.edu/ourdata/help/heritage/>.
- _____. 2024b. CNHP Potential Conservation Area Reports. Accessed April 2024 at: <https://cnhp.colostate.edu/ourdata/pca-reports/>.
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW). 2020. Desert Bighorn Sheep Herd Management Plan: Data Analysis Unit DBS-61: Dolores River, September 2020.
- _____. 2022. Colorado Big Game Action Plan for Implementation of Department of the Interior Secretarial Order 3362: Improving Habitat Quality in Western Big-Game Winter Range and Migration Corridors. Accessed April 2024 at: <https://wafwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Colorado2022SAP.pdf>
- _____. 2023. Colorado Parks and Wildlife. Recommendations to Avoid and Minimize Impacts to Wildlife from Land Use Development in Colorado. July 2023.
- _____. 2024. Species Activity Mapping Data. Accessed April 2024 at: <https://hub.arcgis.com/content/190573c5aba643a0bc058e6f7f0510b7/about>.
- United States Department of the Interior. 2001. Biological Soil Crusts: Ecology and Management: Technical Reference 1730-2. United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, National Science and Technology Center Information and Communications Group. 2001.
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service. 2020. Final Recovery Plan for Gunnison Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus Minimus*). 36 pages. October 23 , 2020.
- Western Slope Conservation Center. 2024. ACEC Nomination Report for Adobe Badlands, Elephant Hill, Dolores River Riparian and Paradox Cliffs, Shavano-Tabeguache, and Roubideau Canyons ACECs. Submitted by Western Slope Conservation Center on behalf of Colorado Wildlands Project, Conservation Lands Foundation, Center for Biological Diversity, Dolores River Boating Advocates, High Country Conservation Advocates, Great Old Broads for Wilderness, Rocky Mountain Wild, Sheep Mountain Alliance, the Pew Charitable Trusts, The Wilderness Society, Wilderness Workshop, Western Colorado Alliance, and Western Watersheds Project.

This page intentionally left blank