

Attachment 1—Backcountry Conservation Management: Criteria and Guidance

Purpose: The purpose of backcountry conservation management is to:

- 1) protect, conserve, restore, and enhance larger areas of generally intact and undeveloped BLM-managed lands that contain functional, unfragmented habitats and migration/movement corridors for recreationally-important fish and/or wildlife species, and
- 2) provide for high-quality wildlife-dependent recreation associated with those species, such as hunting, fishing, trapping, and wildlife watching in the portion of the area under consideration where management of wildlife and recreation can both be enhanced.

Identification Criteria: Areas that meet the criteria of “generally intact and undeveloped” and “habitat for recreationally-important fish and/or wildlife species” may be considered in the land use planning process for backcountry conservation management. Taken together, these criteria will provide a setting for functional wildlife habitat that supports high-quality wildlife-dependent recreation where appropriate.

1. Generally Intact and Undeveloped: An area meets the “generally intact and undeveloped” criteria if it contains ***both*** of the following:

- Few, if any, development features that reduce the effectiveness of an area for wildlife or diminish the recreation experience. Such features include major rights-of-way features (such as large above-ground transmission lines or pipelines), pump jacks, wind turbines, and associated infrastructure, but do not include abandoned homesteads and agricultural or wildlife improvements such as fencing, corrals, and water structures. The presence of a small number of isolated features such as fire towers, remote cabins, weather stations, wildlife improvements, corrals, or small transmission lines does not necessarily negate the classification of an area as generally intact and undeveloped.
- Generally low density of roads. The presence of primitive roads, motorized trails, or non-motorized trails does not generally prevent the classification of an area as generally intact and undeveloped.

2. Habitat for Recreationally-Important Fish and/or Wildlife Species: An area meets the “habitat for recreationally-important fish and/or wildlife habitat” criteria if it contains ***either or both*** of the following:

- Documented habitat and/or migration/movement corridors for recreationally-important species of fish and/or wildlife, such as: sportfish-bearing streams; sportfish spawning and rearing habitat; big game winter range, summer range, parturition (e.g. calving, fawning, lambing) areas, migration corridors and associated stopover areas; and migratory bird habitats.
- Recreationally-important wildlife habitat that has the potential to provide the public with high-quality wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities, such as hunting, fishing, trapping and wildlife viewing.

Consideration of Potential Areas for Backcountry Conservation: In considering, documenting and evaluating potential backcountry conservation management opportunities during land use planning:

- Consider and document the distribution and quality of priority habitat and migration/movement corridors for recreationally-important fish and wildlife species within the planning unit, utilizing current land health assessments and any available information from state fish and wildlife agencies, other federal agencies, non-federal partners, or other relevant sources.
- Consider existing development features within an area and the existing impact of those developments on fish and wildlife habitat quality, and wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities.
- Consider current land use practices and the overall condition of the lands.
- Consider the location, condition, and status of access associated with existing roads, primitive roads, and trails. Publicly, and sometimes administratively, inaccessible lands may be prime candidates for protecting priority habitat and migration/movement corridors for recreationally- important fish and wildlife species and should be considered through the planning process.
- Consider input from the state game and fish agencies, other federal, state, and tribal agencies, the public, or other relevant parties on areas important for dispersed, wildlife-dependent recreation.
- Evaluate the status, trends, threats, and opportunities for management of recreationally-important fish and wildlife populations and habitat, in collaboration with state fish and wildlife agencies.
- Consider and document the desired recreation activities, experiences, and benefits that depend on abundant fish and wildlife populations, such as hunting, fishing, trapping, wildlife viewing, and photography. Consider in this context state wildlife planning efforts.
- Identify current and desired Recreation Setting Characteristics.
- Consider and document, in collaboration with the state wildlife agencies, whether the lands can be effectively managed to protect or restore recreationally-important fish and wildlife habitat and migration/movement corridors.
- Identify the most effective boundaries for the desired goal and measurable objectives.

Addressing Backcountry Conservation Management in the Land Use Planning Processes:

BLM offices may consider both internal and external proposals for backcountry conservation. External proposals should include the following information in order to assist with the management consideration process. The following information can be submitted to the BLM or shared through public meetings associated with the plan assessment and/or scoping phase of the land use planning process:

- A map or other geographic information clearly identifying the area to be evaluated.
- A narrative description of the habitat and/or migration/movement corridors for recreationally-important fish and/or wildlife species within the geographic area, and an explanation of why the habitat should be considered for backcountry conservation, including the recreation activities for which the area should be managed. The proposal may also include evidence to support the nomination (for example, peer-reviewed scientific literature or technical reports).

Planning Assessment: Incorporate inventory and analysis of habitat and migration/movement corridors for recreationally-important fish and wildlife species, backcountry recreation opportunities, and undeveloped lands. Planning teams should work closely with state fish and wildlife agency representatives to fully consider state priorities for wildlife population management objectives, hunter/angler access needs, wildlife and habitat management recommendations, and research.

Scoping and Identification of Planning Issues: The step of scoping and identifying planning issues provides the public with an opportunity to propose areas for backcountry conservation management consideration.

Formulation of Resource Management Alternatives: Evaluate each area proposed for backcountry conservation management consideration in order to determine whether the area meets the identification criteria. When evaluating areas for a potential management for backcountry conservation, first consider what areas have the desired wildlife and fish habitat characteristics and then consider which areas will support the desired recreational activities. Once the BLM has identified which areas meet the identification criteria, consider the following plan components in one or more resource management alternative. For each geographic area being considered for backcountry conservation within one or more land use plan alternatives, identify the following (see Figure 1 for a conceptual depiction):

- Goal(s): For each geographic area, define a goal or goals that describe(s) the desired outcome for the habitat that supports recreationally-important fish and/or wildlife species. In addition, describe a goal(s) for the recreational opportunities associated with those species. If multiple areas being considered for backcountry conservation within an alternative are geographically adjacent to one another and share the same habitat goal(s), then the geographic areas should be merged and have the same goal(s) identified. Within each alternative, if any other goals overlap with the backcountry conservation goal(s) for a geographic area, then the other goals should be compatible with the backcountry conservation goals for the geographic area.
- Fish/Wildlife Objectives: For each geographic area under consideration, define specific, measurable, outcome-focused objectives that describe the desired habitat conditions for the recreationally-important fish and/or wildlife species. The measurable objective(s) should ensure that the intact and undeveloped character of the land and habitat will be protected from fragmentation and development, and improved, where possible, to better protect backcountry resources. Within each alternative, if any other objectives overlap with the fish/wildlife objective, then the other objectives should be compatible.
- Recreation Objective(s): Within those portions of each geographic area under consideration that can be compatibly-managed for wildlife dependent recreation, develop specific, measurable, outcome-focused objectives that define the recreation opportunities (i.e. activities, experiences and benefits derived from those experiences). The objective(s) should focus on protecting and enhancing high-quality wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities. Since some portions of the habitat within the backcountry area may be sensitive to human disturbance (e.g., calving or fawning habitat or cultural sites), it may not be appropriate to manage all portions of an area for enhanced recreation opportunities

using the BCA designation.

- *Designations:* Within those portions of each the geographic area under consideration that can be compatibly-managed for wildlife dependent recreation and consistent with the related recreation and fish/wildlife objectives, use the Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) designation process (MS-8320-1) to designate as Backcountry Conservation Areas (BCA) those areas that will be managed to maintain or enhance high-quality, wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities.
- *Resource use determinations:* Identify the resource use determinations, subject to valid existing rights, that support the goal(s), objective(s), and designation(s) of the areas under consideration for backcountry conservation. These may include compatible uses, such as grazing and vegetation management, that do not negatively impact the backcountry conservation objectives. Examples of resource use determinations that could apply to achieve the goal(s) and objective(s) of the backcountry conservation (subject to applicable program policies, regulations, and valid existing rights) include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - OHV designations to provide adequate public access while protecting habitat.
 - Right-of-way avoidance or exclusion areas.
 - Resource use determinations for fluid mineral development, such as leasing, closures or major constraints such as No Surface Occupancy stipulations.
 - Resource use determinations for mineral materials and/or non-energy leasable minerals.
 - Recommendations for locatable mineral withdrawals.
 - Disturbance caps on surface-disturbing activities.
- *Land tenure decisions:* Identify land tenure decisions (retention, acquisition, exchange) that support the backcountry conservation goal(s), objective(s), and designation(s). Consider retaining in federal ownership those lands within the area under consideration for backcountry conservation management. Also consider allowing for acquisition of key parcels or easements adjacent to or within the areas under consideration for backcountry conservation management in order to support conservation and connectivity of important fish and/or wildlife habitats and/or improved public access.
- *Monitoring and evaluation standards:* Identify indicators and intervals for monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the fish/wildlife and recreation objectives are being met.

For each backcountry conservation management alternative being considered in a LUP revision or amendment, BLM offices should document relevant LUP components within the Fish and Wildlife Section and Recreation Sections of the LUP Chapter 2.

First, identify geographic area that meets backcountry conservation management criteria:

- Generally intact and undeveloped
- Supports recreationally-important fish/wildlife habitat

Establish plan components (goal(s), objective(s), designation(s), resource use determination(s), etc.) to preserve backcountry conservation management characteristics.

Then, identify area(s) that compatibly support dispersed, wildlife dependent recreation

Establish recreation goal(s) and objective(s). Using SRMA designation process, establish **Backcountry Conservation Areas (BCA)** and establish resource use determination(s) to support the designation(s).

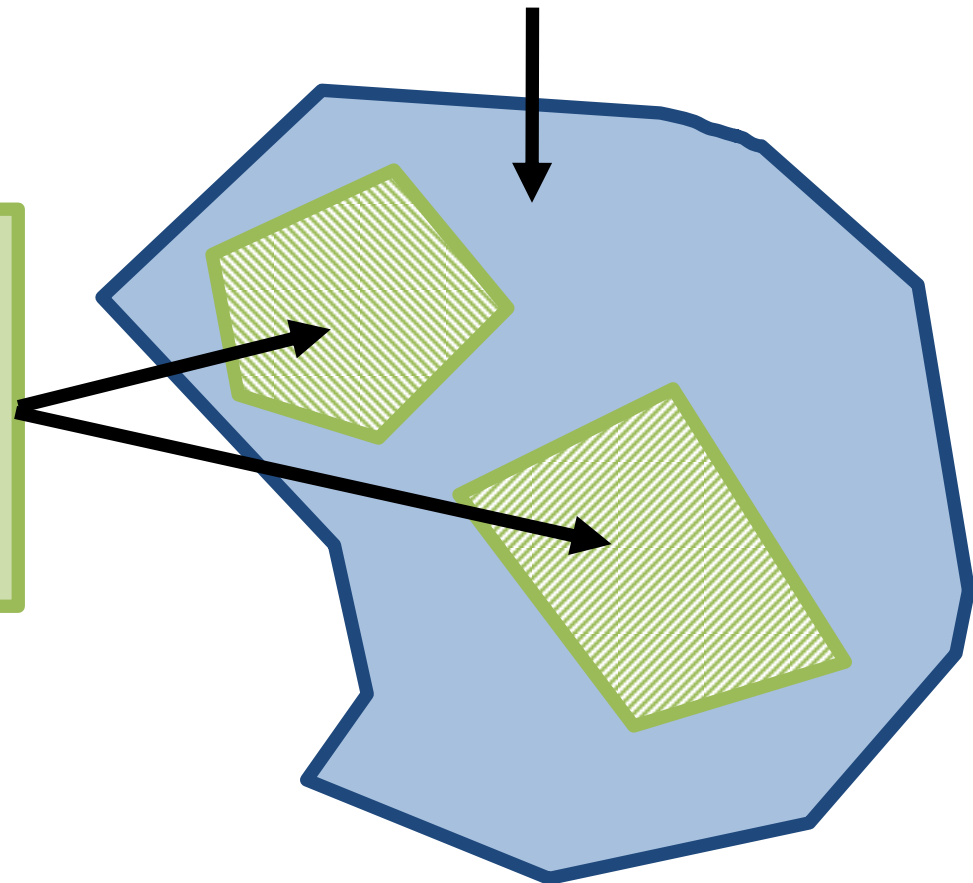


Figure 1: Conceptual depiction of Backcountry Conservation Management