

Questions and Answers on the Public Input Period for the Vermilion Cliffs and Pariette Cactus Potential ACEC Evaluations

Why is BLM evaluating these two potential ACECs?

BLM committed to these ACEC evaluations in a Settlement Agreement the District Court of Utah approved in May 2017. The approved settlement can be read here: <https://on.doi.gov/2g3UOKm>.

Where can I find BLM's previous ACEC evaluations for the Vermilion Cliffs potential ACEC?

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) originally evaluated the Vermilion Cliffs potential ACEC during the development of the [Kanab Resource Management Plan \(RMP\)](#). The area was nominated by Citizens of Kane County during scoping for the RMP. The analysis is summarized in three ACEC Evaluation reports. In December 2005, BLM released the [Draft Evaluation Report for ACECs within the Kanab RMP](#), and included an analysis of the Vermilion Cliffs Potential ACEC (BLM 2005). [Appendix H of the Draft RMP/Draft Environmental Impact Statement \(DEIS\)](#) also contained ACEC Evaluations (BLM 2007). BLM's final analysis of ACECs for the Kanab RMP is documented in [Appendix 14 of the Proposed RMP/Final Environmental Impact Statement \(FEIS\)](#) (BLM 2008).

What is the status of BLM's new visual resources information for the Vermilion Cliffs area?

In 2011, the Kanab Field Office completed field data collection across the majority of the field office to update the Visual Resource Inventory, using the process established in [BLM Manual H-8410-1 – Visual Resource Inventory](#).

While the full Visual Resources Inventory for the entire KFO has not been finalized, [visual resource information for units overlapping the Vermilion Cliffs potential ACEC](#) has been updated. This new information describes the current existing environment and will be used in the ACEC reevaluation for scenic resources.

The Vermilion Cliffs potential ACEC intersects four scenic quality rating units (SQRUs) – the Kanab Creek, John R. Flat, Canyons and Kanab units. Canyons, John R. Flat and Kanab Creek SQRUs are rated as Class B scenery. Kanab SQRU is rated as Class C scenery. The table below summarizes the scenic quality rating for pertinent units.

Scenic Quality Rating Unit Summary

Unit Number and Name	Landform	Vegetation	Water	Color	Adjacent Scenery	Scarcity	Cultural Modification	Score	Rating	Explanation
2 Canyons	3.5	2	0	4	2	3	0	14.5	B	Numerous irregular canyons with Pinyon-juniper vegetation as well as some riparian areas. Unit contains many shallow cuts and cliffs in the upper elevations.
3 John R. Flat	2.5	3	0	2.5	3.5	1.5	0	13	B	Rolling mesa top with extensive Pinyon-juniper cover and sagebrush. Unit contains some steep and distinct landforms i.e. Cutler Point and Grand Staircase landforms
4 Kanab Creek	3.5	3.5	1.5	4	1	3.5	-0.5	16.5	B	Substantial canyons with steep angular to vertical walls and areas of horizontal banding with blocky formations. Vegetation is dominated by Pinyon-juniper and riparian ecology.
29 Kanab	2	2	0	2	3.5	1	0	10.5	C	Area surrounding Kanab.

Why didn't BLM designate the Vermilion Cliffs area as an ACEC in the 2008 Kanab Resource Management Plan?

Rationale included in the Kanab RMP (BLM, KFO PRMP/FEIS, 2008, p. 4-114) explaining the reasons the Vermilion Cliffs potential ACEC was not designated as an ACEC is summarized below:

“The potential Vermilion Cliffs ACEC is not designated under the Proposed RMP. Managing 13,000 acres (56 percent) of the potential ACEC as VRM Class II would protect much of the R&I scenic and cultural values from irreparable damage. Managing 9,200 acres (39 percent) of the potential ACEC as VRM Class III would allow for some degree of change to the landscape, allowing for the introduction of visual intrusions into the area. ROWs would be allowed in VRM Class III and IV areas (10,400 acres), which could lead to surface disturbance in localized areas over the short term. Collocating ROWs would reduce these impacts.

Management associated with the Kanab Community SRMA would result in 18,800 acres (80 percent) of the potential ACEC being open for oil and gas leasing subject to major constraints (NSO). This would eliminate the potential for visual intrusions from oil and gas development and for disturbance to the R&I wildlife (raptor) resources. Fish and wildlife and special status species management in the Proposed RMP prohibits disruptive activities within established buffers and seasons to protect raptor species. These restrictions would allow impacts from discretionary activities such as mineral material disposal to be eliminated, protecting the R&I wildlife (raptor) resources from irreparable damage. In addition, management of special status species in the Proposed RMP allows for surface disturbing and disruptive activities to be controlled or regulated to minimize impacts on identified crucial habitat for sensitive species. This would protect the R&I botanical natural processes or systems (special status plants) from irreparable damage associated with surface disturbing activities.

OHV use throughout the potential ACEC would be limited to 63 miles of designated routes that already exist, with use being closed seasonally on 14 miles to protect raptor species. Limiting OHV use to these existing designated routes where disturbance has already occurred would protect the R&I cultural values and natural process (special status species plants) from irreparable damage associated with OHV use.”

Why is BLM evaluating the Pariette Cactus potential ACEC?

BLM committed to an evaluation of the Graham’s penstemon and Pariette cactus potential ACECs in the 2008 Vernal [Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan](#) (p. 18) because the agency acknowledges that it did not respond to a 2006 citizen’s nomination received during a formal comment period. Under settlement, the BLM agreed to an established timeframe for these ACEC evaluations.

Additionally, the following measures are currently implemented to mitigate impacts to these sensitive plant species from submitted projects with proposed surface disturbance: 1) Within suitable habitat, site-specific inventories will be conducted to determine occupancy. The inventories will be conducted for lands within 300 feet of proposed surface disturbance; 2) In suitable habitat, the project infrastructure will be designed to minimize impacts; and, 3) Within occupied habitat, the project infrastructure will be designed to avoid direct disturbance and to minimize indirect impacts to populations and individual plants. Section 7 Consultation will be conducted with the USFWS if any surface disturbing activity is proposed within 300 feet of populations and/or individual plants.

Will there be a public comment period on the evaluation reports?

There will be no public comment period or formal public review of the evaluation. The BLM retains responsibility for evaluating ACECs. This opportunity for public input will assist in identifying issues and resources within each potential ACEC prior to interdisciplinary review.

BLM committed to the evaluation of three potential ACECs in the settlement agreement. Why has the agency delayed request for input for the Graham's Penstemon potential ACEC?

The timeframe for evaluation of the Graham's Penstemon potential ACEC is five years (May 2022). By delaying the opportunity for public input, BLM can ensure that more current information is used when the agency is ready to analyze the Graham's Penstemon potential ACEC.

How could these evaluations affect management of the area?

A land use planning process considers whether to designate a potential ACEC and specifies appropriate management actions to protect the relevant and important resource values for designated ACECs. This evaluation is separate and distinct from the BLM's land use planning process; however, the outcome of this evaluation will inform the agency as to whether a land use plan amendment is warranted. At this time, neither the Vernal nor Kanab field offices are considering amendment of the existing Resource Management Plan decisions for ACEC designations. If BLM determines that the areas do not meet the criteria for ACECs stipulated in Manual 1613, then no further action is anticipated. If the areas do meet BLM's criteria for ACECs, then BLM may also establish any necessary temporary management prescriptions to protect the relevant and important resource values, as required by Manual 1613. As noted above, temporary management prescriptions for Pariette Cactus and Graham's Penstemon have been in place since 2008. When determining whether temporary management prescriptions may be necessary, BLM may consider, among other things, any protection provided by law, regulation, existing management prescriptions in the relevant Approved RMP, conservation agreements, or conservation strategies that overlap the potential ACECs.