

# **Appendix H**

## **Areas of Critical Environmental Concern**

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## Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

### Introduction

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) were authorized in Section 202 (C)(3) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA, P.L. 94-579). ACECs are areas where special management attention is needed to protect, and to prevent irreparable damage to, important historic, cultural, and scenic values; fish; or wildlife resources or other natural systems or processes; or to protect human life and safety from natural hazards.

The ACEC designation indicates that the BLM recognizes that an area has significant values, and establishes special management measures to protect those values. In addition, designation also serves as a reminder that significant value(s) or resource(s) exist which must be accommodated when future management actions and land use proposals are considered in or near an ACEC. For more information on the ACEC designation and process, please refer to BLM Handbook 1601-1– Land Use Planning, Appendix C.

Before an ACEC can be considered, an area must meet both the criteria of importance and relevance.

**Relevance** An area meets the "relevance" criterion if it contains one or more of the following:

- A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value (including but not limited to rare or sensitive archeological resources and religious or cultural resources important to Native Americans).
- A fish and wildlife resource (including but not limited to habitat for endangered, sensitive or threatened species, or habitat essential for maintaining species diversity).
- A natural process or system (including but not limited to endangered, sensitive, or threatened plant species; rare, endemic, or relic plants or plant communities which are terrestrial, aquatic, or riparian; or rare geological features).
- Natural hazards (including but not limited to areas of avalanche, dangerous flooding, landslides, unstable soils, seismic activity, or dangerous cliffs). A hazard caused by human action may meet the relevance criteria if it is determined through the resource management planning process that it has become part of a natural process.

**Importance** An important resource is a value, system, process or hazard which has substantial significance and values. This generally means that the value, resource, system, process, or hazard is characterized by one or more of the following:

- Has more than locally significant qualities which give it special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern, especially compared to any similar resource.
- Has qualities or circumstances that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, unique, endangered, threatened, or vulnerable to adverse change.
- Has been recognized as warranting protection in order to satisfy national priority concerns or to carry out the mandates of FLPMA.
- Has qualities which warrant highlighting in order to satisfy public or management concerns about safety and public welfare.
- Poses a significant threat to human life and safety or to property.

To be designated as an ACEC, an area must require special management attention to protect the important and relevant values. These are management measures which would not be necessary nor prescribed if the critical and important features were not present. That is, they would not be prescribed in the absence of the designation. Management prescriptions for each ACEC are identified in this plan and are summarized below.

Under all alternatives, and for all existing or proposed ACECS, fire and fuels management will be conducted to ensure protection of public safety and property, protection of the ACEC's resource values, and consideration of adjacent Federal and local agency's fire management plans. ACEC designation does not in itself present constraints to fire or fuels management, or suppression actions in ACECs. This plan revision also recognizes that ACEC designations along the US-Mexico Border must allow for flexibility and coordination with the Department of Homeland Security for operations involving border surveillance, enforcement operations, and tactical infrastructure needs.

## **Existing ACEC Designations in the South Coast RMP**

### **Cedar Canyon**

The Cedar Canyon ACEC (Map 2-15) encompasses approximately 708 acres of BLM public lands and 280 acres of private lands targeted for acquisition. Most of Cedar Canyon, on the northeastern flank of Otay Mountain, would be within the ACEC

boundaries. This canyon contains one of the only known populations of Mexican flannel bush (*Fremontodendron mexicanus*), a shrub or small tree listed by the State of California as rare, and a candidate species for federal listing as threatened or endangered. In 1994, approximately forty specimens of that species were known to occur within the canyon. This was the only known population in the world. Cedar Canyon also contains pristine stands of riparian woodlands, as well as stands of Tecate cypress, a candidate species for federal listing as threatened or endangered. Rapid development of the private lands immediately to the north of Cedar Canyon, and easier access provided by the subdivision of what used to be large ranches in the vicinity, will likely result in increased impact levels from recreation, accidental fires, and off-road vehicle traffic. Cedar Canyon is designated as an ACEC/RNA to provide the necessary management attention to conserve the sensitive natural resources contained therein. The ACEC is a right-of-way avoidance area, is not available for mineral material sales or livestock grazing, and is closed to motorized vehicle use.

### **Johnson Canyon**

The ACEC includes a total of 1,800 acres (Map 2-15). This area is currently under a Recreation and Public Purposes Act (R&PP) lease and is used by the Systems Ecology Research Group of San Diego State University for research and educational purposes. The relatively small area ranges in elevation from over 6,000 to under 4,600 feet, and contains a unique diversity of vegetation including Coulter pine forest in the upper reaches and mixtures of both chamise and red shank chaparral at lower elevations.

Research opportunities to study mediterranean-type ecosystems, in particular chaparral management, are needed, but are being lost at an increasing rate due to development. Johnson Canyon is one of the few locations where this type of research can be conducted. The need to protect this unique area from uses incompatible with its sensitive resources and principle use as an outdoor classroom and field biology research necessitate special management considerations and planning. In addition to ACEC designation, Johnson Canyon is not available for mineral material sales or livestock grazing, and is a right-of-way avoidance area.

### **Kuchamaa**

Lands surrounding Tecate Peak and little Tecate Peak (803 acres) are included in the Kuchamaa ACEC (Map 2-15) for the protection of Native American religious heritage. The importance of Tecate Peak (Kuchamaa), and Little Tecate Peak, lies in their extreme religious and spiritual importance to the Kumeyaay People. In particular, Kuchamaa holds special significance because "it is where the shamans obtained their power and knowledge" (Robertson 1982), and where initiates were brought into the Shaman (spiritual/religious) order. Since time immemorial to the present day these mountains have also served as places to hold sacred dances, ceremonies, ancient sacramental acts, and to receive healing and spiritual cleansing.

These mountains also act today as a cultural link with the Kumeyaay ethnic past and their religious heritage. Parallels have been drawn comparing the Native American view of Kuchamaa to the Christian respect for a cathedral, as both represent places of great religious importance.

Contemporary Native American religious activities on Kuchamaa have become somewhat expanded from that of the past. Whereas formerly only shamans and their initiates were allowed on the summit, today the summit is open to all Kumeyaay who feel worthy of involving themselves with the spiritual power of Kuchamaa. Kumeyaay visits to the mountain are for the purposes of praying, spiritual cleansing, and other religious activities (Shipek: Personal Communication). Though religious practices have diversified, the importance of the mountain has not lessened. As a result of the strong Native American religious values held for Kuchamaa, the mountain has been recently nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

There is a threat that individuals might unknowingly perform sacrilegious acts such as off-road driving, rock-hounding, hunting, or drawing graffiti on these mountains. As a result, Kuchamaa and little Tecate Peak have been designated as an ACEC. Acquisition of approximately 422 acres for addition to the ACEC would be pursued. The ACEC is a right-of-way avoidance area, and is not available for mineral material sales or livestock grazing. Motorized vehicle use is limited to the designated routes.

### **Million Dollar Spring**

Approximately 6,265 acres of BLM public lands within the eastern part of the Beauty Mountain WSA are designated as an ACEC/ONA (Map 2-15). The area contains fragile soils (Knecht, 1917) that underlay one of the largest pristine watersheds found on BLM public lands within the South Coast Area. This watershed includes three perennial springs and approximately 300 acres of South Coast Live Oak Riparian Forest and Southern Cottonwood-Willow Riparian Forest, two communities considered rare by Holland (1986). All have significant values for wildlife management.

To conserve the sensitive natural resources and to help maintain its viability as an important water source, the ACEC is a right-of-way avoidance area, is not available for material sales, and all activities (such as grazing, public access, hunting and other recreational activities) must be in conformance with the BLM-California 208 Water Quality Management Plan. 510 acres are targeted for acquisition.

### **Potrero**

The Potrero ACEC (Map 2-14) includes 1,419 acres of BLM public land, with approximately 12,000 acres of private land proposed for acquisition. The broad Potrero Valley, surrounded by chaparral covered hills, contains almost 13,000 acres. The Potrero Reserve contains over 1,900 acres of occupied Stephens' kangaroo rat habitat. The BLM currently administers six parcels (1,030 acres) within the proposed reserve, as well as another 7,969-acre parcel to the east. The ACEC is located within the Western

Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan, adopted in 2003, and also includes lands identified in the Stephens' Kangaroo Rat Habitat Conservation Plan. Since 1994, most of the land within the Potrero ACEC proposed for acquisition by BLM has been purchased or acquired by the California Department of Fish and Game for management of habitat and resource values.

In addition to Stephens' kangaroo rat, the Potrero area contains 88 acres of potential least Bell's Vireo habitat. Other listed or candidate species observed on the site include the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, orange-throated whiptail and San Diego horned lizard. California gnatcatcher has not been recorded on the site; however the area contains 55 acres of suitable habitat.

Two category 2 candidate plant species have been recorded at Potrero: Payson's jewelflower (*Caulanthus simulans*) and Parry's spineflower (*Chorizanthe parryi* var. *parryi*). The area also supports 95 acres of Southern Cottonwood-Willow Riparian Forest and a small stand of South Coast live Oak Riparian Forest (MWD, Eastside Reservoir Project Final EIS, October 1991).

As an ACEC, the area is unavailable for mineral material sales. The ACEC was proposed for closure to entry under the mineral leasing and 1872 Mining laws, but was never implemented. The area continues to be a right-of-way avoidance area and grazing is permissible if compatible with habitat management.

### **Santa Ana River Wash**

The ACEC (Map 2-14) encompasses 750 acres of BLM public lands north of Redlands within the flood-plains of the Santa Ana River and Plunge Creek. The ACEC was designated to provide enhanced protection of the sensitive habitats for, and populations of, two federally listed plant species: the Santa Ana River woolly-star (*Eriastrum densifolium* ssp. *sanctorum*) and the slender-homed spineflower (*Dodecahema leptoceras*). Currently, a proposed plan amendment is being developed in partnership with the San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District (SBVWCD) in order to address new management strategies in the ACEC. Should this proposed plan amendment be finalized, the final decision would be incorporated by reference into the final South Coast RMP EIS.

The ACEC/RNA status provides special management of the area for the conservation and recovery of these two very rare species. Rapid urban development of the surrounding area and high demand for sand and gravel mining within the floodplain of the Santa Ana River put extreme pressures on these BLM public lands, and may be detrimental to the two endangered species. ACEC status provides the framework within which the resolution of these demands and the conservation of these species could be achieved. Since 1994 a task group of the SBVWCD, the BLM, mining companies, the USFWS, the CDFG, and the cities of Redlands and Highland have worked to prepare a habitat conservation plan for the Upper Santa Ana River.

Under the existing RMP, the ACEC is a right-of-way avoidance area, is unavailable for mineral material sales, is closed to motorized vehicle use, and is unavailable for livestock grazing.

### **Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve**

The Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve (Map 2-14) is administered by the Systems Ecology Research Group of San Diego State University (SDSU) and is used primarily for research and educational purposes. The reserve is a tract of about 2,700 acres acquired by the State of California and presently designated for use by the California State Colleges as a field biology research area. SDSU also administers approximately 1,247 acres of BLM public lands under a Memorandum of Understanding with the Bureau of Land Management. The combined BLM/SDSU holdings in the reserve make it one of the largest public holdings of coastal wildlands in southern California for research and educational purposes.

In addition to occupied summer habitat for Least Bell's Vireo (a federally endangered species), the preserve also includes significant stands of pristine deer grass (*Muhlenbergia rigens*), and habitat for species such as the orange-throated whiptail, southwestern pond turtle, and sticky dudleya (*Dudleya viscida*). To protect this unique area from uses incompatible with its sensitive resources and to ensure its principle use as an outdoor classroom and field biology research site, the Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve ACEC is designated with the following management prescriptions: the ACEC is a right-of-way avoidance area and is unavailable for mineral material sales and livestock grazing. The ACEC was proposed for closure to entry under the mineral leasing and 1872 Mining laws, but was never implemented. 360 acres are closed to motorized vehicle use and 300 acres are targeted for acquisition to the ACEC.

### **California Rocks and Islands**

By a decision of February 5, 1990 the California Rocks and Islands were designated as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern. This decision, which is incorporated by reference, applies to all islands, rocks and pinnacles off the California coast which were withdrawn by Public Land Order (PLO) 6369. The withdrawal is for establishment of the California Islands Wildlife Sanctuary and will continue, as will management of the wildlife sanctuary by the California Department of Fish and Game through Memorandum of Understanding. Islands, rocks and pinnacles not affected by PLO 6369 include those off the Orange County Coast (these being temporarily withdrawn by the Act of Congress approved February 18, 1931) as well as Santa Catalina Island and San Clemente Island.

On January 11, 2000, President Clinton established the California Coastal National Monument under the authority of the Antiquities Act of 1906. This National Monument encompasses all of the public lands in the California Rocks and Islands ACEC. The ACEC designation remains unchanged unless modified or eliminated in the South Coast RMP revision. Because the ACEC applies across five Field Office jurisdictions, and

would require numerous plan amendments for consistency, the ACEC will remain in place under all alternatives in the South Coast RMP revision.

## **Proposed ACEC Designations in the South Coast RMP**

### **Upper Santa Clara River ACEC (Alternatives B and D)**

1,620 acres (Maps 2-16 and 2-22)

The Upper Santa Clara watershed is located in northern Los Angeles County. The portion of the watershed within the planning area includes public lands in the vicinity of the communities of Canyon Country, Agua Dulce, and Acton, and generally bounded by Mint Canyon on the north and Soledad Canyon on the south. The Santa Clara River is one of the few perennial and free flowing rivers in Southern California. Although no segments of the Santa Clara River cross BLM managed public lands, the BLM parcels near the river have become important for maintaining wildlife corridors and habitat in the region. The BLM parcels are intermixed with private, state, and local government conserved lands and BLM has participated in a collaborative approach to local planning to maintain biodiversity in the watershed.

The proposed Santa Clara River ACEC would include BLM parcels within the Angeles Linkage Conceptual Area Protection Plan (CAPP) proposed by the Upper Santa Clara Biodiversity Working Group. The ACEC designation would only apply to BLM managed surface lands and split estate.

#### Relevance

The area meets the relevance criteria by containing significant scenic values, fish and wildlife resources, and natural processes and systems. The Santa Clara River corridor runs between the San Gabriel and Castaic mountain ranges, which together are included in the Angeles National Forest. This corridor between the two units of the National Forest contains a mix of private, state, and local government conserved lands, and several parcels of public land managed by BLM. The BLM parcels are crossed by segments of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail and provide a scenic background for thousands of residents. The BLM parcels also provide essential travel routes for wide-ranging species like cougars, badgers and deer, and refuge for some of southern California's most rare and imperiled animals and plants.

#### Importance

The wildlife habitat linkage encompasses a unique transition zone between coastal and desert landscapes, featuring coastal sage and chaparral on the west, and desert scrub, juniper and Joshua tree woodlands to the east. The Santa Clara River, one of the last free-flowing rivers in southern California and an integral part of the linkage, provides

breeding sites and traveling routes for a variety of wildlife, and supports other critical natural processes such as natural flood control, recharge of groundwater basins and nutrient cycling.

The BLM parcels are critical to a multi-agency approach to maintaining and enhancing this important wildlife corridor. A consortium of federal, state, local agencies and non-profit organizations has developed a conceptual area protection plan (CAPP) for the “Angeles Linkage” portion of the Santa Clara River watershed. Essentially the report describes the need to implement a functioning wildlife corridor between the two segments of the Angeles National Forest, creation of a green-belt east of the Santa Clarita City limits, establishment of a continuous trail system connection to public parks and the Pacific Crest Trail, and restoration of the Santa Clara River and tributaries.

### Land Use Allocations

The following land use allocations would apply to the proposed ACEC:

- All public lands would be retained.
- Under Alternative B, the ACEC would be a ROW exclusion area for land use authorizations and major surface disturbing activities. The ACEC would remain open for wind energy ROW if the ACEC relevance and importance values are protected.
- Under Alternative D, the ACEC would be a ROW avoidance area for land use authorizations and major surface disturbing activities.
- Under Alternative B, the ACEC would be closed to oil and gas development, and partly closed for oil and gas as shown on (Map 2-31) under Alternative D.
- The ACEC would be closed to disposal of saleable minerals, except for State of California Division of Mines and Geology classified and designated sand and gravel resources in Los Angeles County.
- The ACEC would be closed to grazing.
- The ACEC would be closed to OHV use under Alternative B, and limited to designated routes under Alternative D.
- The VRM designation for the ACEC would be VRM Class 2.

## **Western Riverside County ACEC (Alternative B)**

24,995 acres (Map 2-17)

The Western Riverside County ACEC would include BLM lands within the planning boundary of the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP).

### Relevance

The Western Riverside County MSHCP is designed to protect over 150 species and conserve over 500,000 acres of open space and habitat preserves. The MSHCP Plan Area encompasses approximately 1.26 million acres (1,966 square miles); it includes all unincorporated Riverside County land west of the crest of the San Jacinto Mountains to the Orange County line, as well as the jurisdictional areas of 14 cities, including 24,995 acres of BLM managed lands. This HCP is one of the largest plans ever attempted. It covers multiple species and multiple habitats within a diverse landscape, from urban centers to undeveloped foothills and montane forests, all under multiple jurisdictions. It extends across many Bioregions as well, including the Santa Ana Mountains, Riverside Lowlands, San Jacinto Foothills, San Jacinto Mountains, Agua Tibia Mountains, Desert Transition, and San Bernardino Mountains. It will provide a coordinated MSHCP Conservation Area and implementation program to preserve biological diversity and maintain the region's quality of life.

### Importance

Most of the BLM parcels within the Western Riverside County MSHCP are considered "core habitat" and are essential as the links or building blocks that connect the other conserved lands in the MSHCP. The BLM parcels contain habitat for many, if not most, of the 150 species covered by the MSHCP, as well as critical habitat for several federally listed species. Riverside County and the other jurisdictions with the MSHCP consider conservation of the BLM parcels as critical to the biological goals and successful implementation of the MSHCP.

### Land Use Allocations

The following land use allocations would apply to the proposed ACEC:

- All public lands would be retained or available for exchange to meet the conservation objectives of the MSHCP or SKR HCP.
- The ACEC would be a ROW exclusion area for land use authorizations and major surface disturbing activities, but could be open for wind energy development if the ACEC values of relevance and importance are protected.

- The ACEC would be an avoidance area for renewable and non-renewable energy development.
- The ACEC would be closed for oil and gas development.
- The ACEC would be an avoidance area for disposal of saleable minerals.
- The ACEC would be closed to grazing.
- The ACEC would be limited to designated routes for OHV use.
- The VRM designation would be VRM Class 2 and Class 3.

### **Gavilan ACEC (Alternative D)**

3,822 acres (Map 2-23)

The proposed Gavilan ACEC would encompass thirteen BLM parcels that are essential to the Western Riverside County MSHCP and the Stephens' kangaroo rat HCP. This cluster of BLM parcels are adjacent to other conserved, or core preserve, lands and protect critical habitat and/or habitat linkage for several of the species covered under these HCPs.

#### Relevance/Importance

The relevance and importance attributes are discussed above under the Western Riverside County ACEC alternative. In particular, this ACEC would provide protection and habitat connectivity for 20 species covered under the HCPs, including nine federally listed species (Quino checkerspot butterfly, thread-leaved brodiaea, coastal California gnatcatcher, Stephens' kangaroo rat, southwest willow flycatcher, least Bell's vireo, Munz's onion, San Diego ambrosia, and slenderhorned spine flower). Critical habitat for the coastal California gnatcatcher is included in this proposed ACEC.

#### Land Use Allocations

The following land use allocations would apply to the proposed ACEC:

- All public lands would be retained, or would be available for exchange to meet the conservation objectives of the MSHCP or SKR HCP.
- Under Alternative B, the ACEC would be a ROW exclusion area for land use authorizations and major surface disturbing activities. The ACEC would remain open for wind energy ROW if the ACEC relevance and importance values are protected.

- Under Alternative D, the ACEC would be a ROW avoidance area for land use authorizations and major surface disturbing activities.
- The ACEC would be closed to oil and gas development.
- The ACEC would be closed to disposal of saleable minerals.
- The ACEC would be unavailable to grazing under Alternatives B and D.
- The ACEC would be closed to OHV use.
- The VRM designation for the ACEC would be VRM Class 3.

### **Oak Mountain ACEC (Alternative D)**

894 acres (Map 2-23)

The proposed Oak Mountain ACEC would encompass three BLM parcels that are critical to the Western Riverside County MSHCP and the Stephens' kangaroo rat HCP. This cluster of BLM parcels are adjacent to other conserved, or core preserve, lands and provide a habitat linkage for several of the species covered under these HCPs.

#### Relevance/Importance

The relevance and importance attributes are discussed above under the Western Riverside County ACEC alternative. In particular, this ACEC would provide protection and habitat connectivity for 23 species covered under the HCPs, including seven federally listed species (arroyo toad, California red legged frog, coastal California gnatcatcher, Stephens' kangaroo rat, southwest willow flycatcher, least Bell's vireo, Munz's onion, slenderhorned spine flower, and Nevin's barberry). Critical habitat for the coastal California gnatcatcher and Nevin's barberry is included in this proposed ACEC.

#### Land Use Allocations

The following land use allocations would apply to the proposed ACEC:

- All public lands would be retained.
- Under Alternative B, the ACEC would be a ROW exclusion area for land use authorizations and major surface disturbing activities. The ACEC would remain open for wind energy ROW if the ACEC relevance and importance values are protected.
- Under Alternative D, the ACEC would be a ROW avoidance area for land use authorizations and major surface disturbing activities.

- The ACEC would be closed to oil and gas development.
- The ACEC would be closed to disposal of saleable minerals.
- The ACEC would be closed to grazing.
- The VRM designation for the ACEC would be VRM Class 2.
- The ACEC would be closed to OHV use.

### **Badlands ACEC (Alternative D)**

1,051 acres (2-23)

The proposed Badlands ACEC would encompass three BLM parcels that are within an area proposed as additional core habitat for the Western Riverside County MSHCP and the Stephens' kangaroo rat HCP. This cluster of BLM parcels are adjacent to other conserved or open space lands and provide a habitat linkage for several of the species covered under these HCPs.

#### Relevance/Importance

The relevance and importance attributes are discussed above under the Western Riverside County ACEC alternative. In particular, this ACEC would provide protection and habitat connectivity for ten species covered under the HCPs, including three federally listed species (San Bernardino kangaroo rat, Stephens' kangaroo rat, and Nevin's barberry).

#### Land Use Allocations

The following land use allocations would apply to the proposed ACEC:

- All public lands would be retained.
- Under Alternative B, the ACEC would be a ROW exclusion area for land use authorizations and major surface disturbing activities. The ACEC would remain open for wind energy ROW if the ACEC relevance and importance values are protected.
- Under Alternative D, the ACEC would be a ROW avoidance area for land use authorizations and major surface disturbing activities.
- The ACEC would be closed to oil and gas development.

- The ACEC would be closed to disposal of saleable minerals.
- The ACEC would be closed to grazing.
- The ACEC would be designated as VRM Class 3.
- The ACEC would be limited to designated routes for OHV use.

**Expanded Santa Margarita River Ecological Reserve ACEC (Alternative B and D)**  
4,474 acres (Map 2-17 and 2-23)

This alternative would expand the existing ACEC to include the three Fern Creek parcels to the west of the ACEC. The San Diego MSCP North County Sub-area Plan covers 63 species and includes these BLM parcels as part of the core preserve areas.

Relevance/Importance

The existing Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve ACEC is one of the largest public holdings of coastal wildlands in southern California for research and educational purposes. The reserve is also significant for the biological and riparian values protected in the ACEC. The BLM parcels to the west of the ACEC contain 1,973 acres which include oak/sycamore riparian and marsh communities and populations of the federally listed Orcutt's brodiaea and San Diego button celery. Adding these parcels to the ACEC would provide additional management emphasis to the protection of sensitive habitat and species, and ensure connectivity and consistency with the North County MSCP.

Land Use Allocations

The following land use allocations would apply to the proposed ACEC:

- All public lands would be retained.
- Under Alternative B, the ACEC would be a ROW exclusion area for land use authorizations and major surface disturbing activities. The ACEC would remain open for wind energy ROW if the ACEC relevance and importance values are protected.
- Under Alternative D, the ACEC would be a ROW avoidance area for land use authorizations and major surface disturbing activities.
- The ACEC would be closed to oil and gas development.
- The ACEC would be closed to disposal of saleable minerals.

- The ACEC would be closed to grazing.
- The ACEC would be designated as VRM Class 2.
- The ACEC would be limited to designated routes.

## **Beauty Mountain ACEC**

### **Alternative B**

27,376 acres (Map 2-18)

### **Alternative D**

3,925 acres (Map 2-24)

There are two proposals for ACEC designations in the Beauty Mountain Management Area. Both are intended to encompass lands recently acquired for conservation purposes, including 2,175 acres recently donated to BLM in the vicinity of Adobe Spring. Under alternative B, the existing Million Dollar Spring and Johnson Canyon ACECs, along with the Beauty Mountain WSA, and lands with wilderness characteristics, are included in one ACEC. This alternative would provide the maximum conservation and protection of resources.

Under Alternative D, the portion of the existing Million Dollar Spring ACEC outside wilderness is expanded to include the donated lands around Adobe Spring. Surrounding public lands outside the ACEC would be protected and managed under the existing Beauty Mountain WSA and as lands with wilderness characteristics. The existing Johnson Canyon ACEC remains unchanged.

### Relevance/Importance

These lands contain South Coast Live Oak Riparian Forest, which is a plant community considered rare in southern California, and also significant cultural resources related to human occupation on the site. Both proposed ACECs contain fragile soils that underlay one of the largest pristine watersheds found on BLM public lands within the South Coast Planning Area. This watershed includes three perennial springs and approximately 300 acres of South Coast Live Oak Riparian Forest and Southern Cottonwood-Willow Riparian Forest. Oak woodlands, the sheltered valley, and available water have attracted human settlement around Adobe Spring over a period of several thousand years. The donated lands around Adobe Springs complement the Million Dollar Spring ACEC and would provide additional management emphasis and protection for the extensive cultural resources found on the site. These lands are expected to provide important information on the human history and resources of the region.

## Land Use Allocations

The following land use allocations would apply to the proposed ACECs:

- All public lands would be retained.
- Under Alternative B, the ACECs would be exclusion areas for ROWs and land use authorizations. ACECs would remain open to wind energy development if the ACEC values of relevance and importance are preserved.
- Under Alternative D, the ACECs would be avoidance areas for ROWs, including wind and renewable energy, and land use authorizations.
- The ACECs would be closed to oil and gas development.
- The ACECs would be closed to disposal of saleable minerals.
- Under Alternatives A and C, the Beauty Mountain and Rogers Canyon Allotments would be available for grazing year-round. Under Alternatives B and D, the Beauty Mountain Allotment would be available for limited grazing between 11/1 and 3/30 and the Rogers Canyon Allotment would be unavailable for grazing.
- The Beauty Mountain WSA would be designated as VRM Class 1, with the remainder of the ACECs designated as VRM Class 2 or Class 3.
- The ACECs would be limited to designated routes for OHV use.
- The ACECs would be open for hunting under CDFG and local regulations, and a recreation area management plan would be developed to designate public access and parking.

### **Otay/Kuchamaa ACEC (Alternative B and D)**

8,291 acres (Map 2-18 and 2-24)

The proposed ACEC would include the BLM managed lands outside wilderness within the Otay/Kuchamaa Cooperative Management Area as identified in the San Diego MSCP. The proposed ACEC would replace the existing Cedar Canyon and Kuchamaa ACECs and surround the Otay Mountain Wilderness. Under the MSCP plan, the BLM agreed to acquire lands within the Otay/Kuchamaa Cooperative Management Area. Since 1994, the BLM has acquired over 4,000 acres through the Land and Water Conservation Fund to be included in the MSCP preserve system.

## Relevance

The San Diego Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) covers 582,000 acres and establishes a 172,000-acre preserve system in southwestern San Diego County. The MSCP plan and sub-area plans cover 85 species of plants and animals and 23 vegetation types. The MSCP plan area encompasses eleven planning subareas, which include individual cities, the county, water districts, and other jurisdictions. The boundary and objectives of this ACEC would match the Otay/Kuchamaa Cooperative Management Area which was identified in the Final MSCP Plan (Section 4.2.2) and EIR/EIS (1998).

The BLM managed lands within the MSCP are considered “core habitat” and are essential as the links or building blocks that connect the other conserved lands in the MSCP. The BLM lands in the proposed Otay/Kuchamaa ACEC contain habitat for many of the species covered by the MSCP, as well as critical habitat for several federally listed species. San Diego County and the other jurisdictions with the MSCP consider conservation of the BLM parcels as critical to the biological goals and successful implementation of the MSHCP.

## Importance

This ACEC would provide protection and habitat connectivity for several species covered under the MSCP. Critical habitat for the coastal California gnatcatcher, Quino checkerspot butterfly, and Mexican flannelbush are included in this proposed ACEC.

The existing Cedar Canyon ACEC was designated in 1994 to protect the only known occurrence of the federally listed Mexican flannelbush, and stands of Tecate cypress. The Kuchamaa ACEC was also designated in 1994 to protect the cultural values of Tecate Peak and Little Tecate Peak. Tecate Peak was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1992.

In addition to the importance of the biological and cultural resources in the proposed ACEC, there is also an element of public safety and significant hazards due to the proximity of the US-Mexico International Border. These BLM lands are adjacent to the border and have a long history as a corridor used for illegal entry into the United State by undocumented immigrants and smugglers. Over the last several years the Border Patrol has increased their personnel and enforcement on these public lands. The Secure Border Act and other legislation have mandated construction of new border fencing and other infrastructure along the border within the proposed ACEC. Although these efforts are intended to reduce illegal traffic and improve safety, some areas may still present significant risks or hazards to casual visitors. The BLM works closely with the Border Patrol to implement these national security projects, and is often asked to temporarily close or limit access to public lands to visitor use during construction or enforcement activities. This ACEC designation would emphasize the need for special management attention to the area.

## Land Use Allocations

The following land use allocations would apply to the proposed ACEC:

- All public lands would be retained.
- Under Alternative B, the ACEC would be exclusion areas for ROWs and land use authorizations. The ACEC would remain open to wind energy development if the ACEC values of relevance and importance are preserved.
- Under Alternative D, the ACEC would be avoidance areas for ROWs, including wind and renewable energy, and land use authorizations.
- All communication sites in the ACEC are built out and no new or expanded communication site facilities would be approved.
- The ACEC would be closed to oil and gas development.
- The ACEC would be closed to disposal of saleable minerals.
- Under Alternatives B and D, the ACEC would be restricted to seasonal grazing and reduced numbers of livestock.
- The Otay Mountain Wilderness is closed to OHV use; the remainder of the ACEC would be limited to designated routes for OHV use.
- The Otay Mountain Wilderness would be designated as VRM Class 1, with the remainder of the ACEC designated as VRM Class 2.
- The ACEC would be open for hunting under CDFG and local regulations, and a recreation management plan would be developed to designate public access and parking.