

Special Designations



Special designation decisions may be made by the Royal Gorge Field Office (RGFO) during the land use planning process. Special designations include Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs), Instant Study Areas (ISAs), and Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSRs).

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

ACECs are BLM-administered lands where special management is required in order to protect identified values. To be eligible for designation as an ACEC, an area must meet criteria for relevance and importance. ACECs possess significant cultural or scenic values, fish or wildlife resources (including threatened and endangered species), or natural hazards. This generally requires substantial qualities of more than local significance and special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern. The following nine ACECs were designated in the 1996 Royal Gorge RMP.

- Arkansas Canyonlands – 23,921 acres
- Beaver Creek – 12,081 acres
- Browns Canyon – 11,697 acres
- Cucharas Canyon – 1,866 acres
- Droney Gulch – 705 acres
- Garden Park – 2,728 acres
- Grape Creek – 15,978 acres
- Mosquito Pass – 4,036 acres
- Phantom Canyon – 6,096 acres

Wilderness Study Areas, Instant Study Areas

Preservation of Wilderness characteristics is part of the BLM's multiple use mandate, and wilderness is recognized as a resource value to be considered during land use planning. ISAs and WSAs are generally natural, undeveloped, and untrammeled; have outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation; and may contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, scenic, or historical value. There are no designated wilderness areas in the RGFO. There are five WSAs and one ISA in the planning area:

- Beaver Creek WSA – 25,150 acres
- Browns Canyon WSA – 6,614 acres
- Upper Grape Creek WSA – 10,200 acres
- Lower Grape Creek WSA – 11,220 acres
- McIntyre Hills WSA – 16,800 acres
- High Mesa Grassland ISA – 690 acres

Under the wilderness review program, designated WSAs are managed in accordance with the BLM's Interim Management Plan. This management will continue until Congress either designates the WSAs as wilderness or releases the lands from further wilderness consideration. The BLM cannot designate new WSAs or wilderness areas.

Potential Decisions:

The BLM could make the following decisions for ACECs as part of the Eastern Colorado RMP/EIS:

- The BLM could change the status of current ACECs within the RGFO. The BLM will review ACECs to ensure their designations are still relevant and to determine whether they should continue to be managed as ACECs.
- Additional ACECs and the special resources associated with them may be identified.

Planning Issues:

- Given the current condition of resources and resource values, are current ACECs appropriate?
- Are there additional areas that should be considered as ACECs?

Potential Decisions:

- The BLM will consider management actions for existing WSAs and ISAs in the event that they area released from wilderness consideration.

Planning Issues:

- How should the BLM manage existing WSAs and ISAs in the event they are released from wilderness consideration?



Wild and Scenic Rivers

A WSR is a national designation for a river and its immediate environment with outstanding scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, cultural, and other similar values. To be eligible for WSR designation, a river must be preserved in a free-flowing condition. There are no designated segments of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System within the RGFO. The BLM will conduct further WSR studies as part of this RMP planning process.

Potential Decisions:

- The BLM will identify eligible WSRs and will consider their suitability for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Planning Issues:

- Given the current condition of rivers, are there any wild and scenic recommendations?

