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# Appendix D

## Ecological Emphasis Areas



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### INTRODUCTION

This appendix provides background information on ecological emphasis areas, including a description of the area, the habitat type protected, and the benefiting species.

### CONCEPT AND IDENTIFICATION OF ECOLOGICAL EMPHASIS AREAS

The Vegetation and Terrestrial Wildlife sections of the RMP revision include alternatives that provide extra protections for ecological emphasis areas. These are defined as otherwise unprotected core wildlife and native plant habitat and associated movement, dispersal, and migration corridors. Protections for core and corridor habitat are proposed as a mechanism to help protect biodiversity across the UFO and larger landscape over the long term.

Cores are patches of quality habitat in a fragmented landscape, and corridors are strips of mainly undisturbed land that connect the patches. These concepts were developed in the early 1980s as scientists realized that traditional approaches to species conservation, which emphasized preserving small areas with high biodiversity or rare species, were not preserving biodiversity at the landscape scale (Faaborg 1980; Samson 1980). Noss (1983) proposed that the ideal approach to conserving biodiversity would be based on maintaining both large and small patches of natural, intact ecosystems in approximate proportion to their former abundance in the region. This strategy is designed to maintain both species and ecological processes such as fire in a landscape (Kushlan 1979). Interconnections (corridors) between the patches allow for movement and dispersal of plants and animals between habitat patches. This network of patches and corridors provides for connectivity across the landscape, which is important for maintaining genetic viability of populations and species richness within habitat patches (Miller 1979). Maintaining connectivity, particularly across elevation zones, is also one strategy suggested for minimizing loss of forest biodiversity under a rapidly changing climate (Noss 2001).

The strategy of conserving connected habitat patches across a landscape and elevation zones is well suited for BLM lands. The multiple-use mandate of BLM has resulted in an increasingly fragmented landscape over time. This fragmentation is generally damaging to the habitat, watershed, and ecological values for which the BLM is also mandated to manage. Fragmentation

degrades these values through introducing weeds, increasing erosion and edge habitat, creating barriers to migration, and disrupting wildlife behavior. Resource management planning offers the opportunity to emphasize certain uses over others in different parts of the landscape. If important core areas and corridors are designated during planning, then conflicting uses could be emphasized and located in other areas, or modified to minimize impacts within core and corridor habitat.

The west-central Colorado landscape is dominated by large plateaus, mountain ranges, and the valleys in between. BLM lands make up only a portion of this landscape, are largely situated in the mid-elevation zone between valley and mountain, and occupy primarily salt desert, sagebrush, pinyon-juniper, and mountain shrub habitats. Many of the wildlife species that occur on BLM lands move into other habitat types for parts of their life cycles. Furthermore, under a scenario of rapid climate change, plants currently on BLM lands may need to move upward in elevation, potentially onto non-BLM lands. If the ultimate goal is species conservation on BLM lands, then protected areas on BLM lands need to be coordinated with conserved areas across the larger landscape. Therefore, BLM lands need to contribute patches and corridors of salt desert, sagebrush, pinyon-juniper, and mountain shrub habitats to a larger network of core and corridor habitat.

The UFO has identified a number of ecological emphasis areas with the intention of contributing to connectivity across the larger landscape. Efforts to develop networks of protected lands elsewhere have depended on existing protected areas such as Wilderness, National Parks, roadless areas, and nature preserves as primary core areas, and then looked to undeveloped lands in between for corridors (e.g., Yellowstone to Yukon and Algonquin to Adirondacks) (Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative 2015). Within and adjacent to the UFO are existing and proposed Wilderness and WSAs, ACECs, and National Conservation Areas. These were all considered during the identification of ecological emphasis areas. Additional patches of comparatively pristine habitat were added and spatially distributed to represent the different regions within the UFO. Corridors were mainly situated along major drainages that led from valley bottom up to National Forest. The resulting ecological emphasis areas supplement the other protected areas proposed for the RMP revision. These include rivers, streams, and adjoining riparian areas; pristine, unique, and ancient plant communities; WSAs; Wilderness Areas; lands with wilderness characteristics outside WSAs and Wilderness; ACECs; and protected areas of occupied habitat for threatened and endangered species. Together these form a network of largely interconnected habitat patches, both small and large, that span the UFO and links mountain areas with the valley bottoms.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF ECOLOGICAL EMPHASIS AREAS**

**Table D-1**, Description of Proposed Ecological Emphasis Areas, describes each ecological emphasis area, including their habitat type and the primary benefiting species.

**Table D-1  
Description of Proposed Ecological Emphasis Areas**

<b>Ecological Emphasis Area Name</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>Primary Benefiting Species</b>
Adobe	Includes Adobe Badlands WSA; connects Dominguez-Escalante NCA, Gunnison River, and Uncompahgre Plateau with the Grand Mesa. Includes some of the richest Colorado hookless cactus habitat. Corridor identified as important by Southern Rockies Ecosystem Project. Divided into four zones.	Salt desert, pinyon-juniper	Pronghorn, bear, kit fox, prairie dog, burrowing owl, mule deer, elk, mountain lion, Colorado hookless cactus
Dry Creek	Centers on three large drainages that link the Uncompahgre Valley to the Uncompahgre Plateau and National Forest – Dry Creek, Cushman Creek, and Sandy Wash. Divided into five zones.	Riparian, cliff/canyon, pinyon-juniper, small areas of sagebrush and ponderosa	Bear, mountain lion, mule deer, native warm water fish
Jumbo Mountain-McDonald Creek	Links North Fork Valley with the National Forest and West Elk Wilderness. Adjoins several conservation easements that link the southern three parcels. Important for landscape-scale linkage. Divided into five zones.	Mountain shrub, pinyon-juniper, small areas of sagebrush	Mule deer, elk, mountain lion, bear
La Sal	Centers on Dolores Canyon WSA and provides connection between the Dolores River to the La Sal Mountains via La Sal Creek and Nyswonger Mesa. Divided into three zones.	Riverine and riparian, cliff and canyon, pinyon-juniper	Peregrine falcon, desert bighorn, bear, mule deer, elk, native warm water fish, sensitive frog species, Mexican spotted owl
Monitor-Potter-Roubideau	Based around Camel Back WSA and adjoins protected Roubideau Area on National Forest, centering on major Roubideau and tributary stream and canyon complex. Links Uncompahgre Valley with Uncompahgre Plateau. Divided into 11 zones.	Riparian, salt desert, cliff/canyon, pinyon-juniper, small areas of sagebrush and mountain shrub	Desert bighorn, native warm water fish, native cold water fish, bear, mule deer, mountain lion
Naturita Canyon	Adjoins National Forest System lands leading up to Lone Cone area; includes the major Naturita Canyon drainage, which has wildlife/indicator species emphasis on adjoining National Forest. Divided into four zones.	Riparian, cliff and canyon, pinyon-juniper	Bear, mountain lion, mule deer, elk, native warm water and cold water fish
Ridgway	BLM land on Log Hill Mesa and around Billy Creek State Wildlife Area. Contributes to linkage between Cimarron Ridge and Uncompahgre Plateau, in critical big game wintering area. Divided into four zones.	Pinyon-juniper, mountain shrub	Mountain lion, mule deer, elk, bear

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**Description of Proposed Ecological Emphasis Areas**

<b>Ecological Emphasis Area Name</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>Primary Benefiting Species</b>
San Miguel	Links the Mount Wilson area on National Forest across the San Miguel Canyon to the Uncompahgre Plateau, and contributes to linkage between Mount Sneffels area and Lizard Head area; includes parts of the existing San Miguel ACEC. Divided into seven zones.	Riverine and riparian, cliff and canyon, mountain shrub, pinyon-juniper, montane forest	Bear, mountain lion, lynx, mule deer, elk, native cold water fish
Sims Mesa	An important core area for wintering mule deer and elk. Contributes to connectivity between Uncompahgre Plateau and the Ridgway Ecological Emphasis Area. Contains historic, potential, and occupied Gunnison sage-grouse habitat. Also contains proposed critical habitat for Gunnison sage-grouse as designated by USFWS.	Sagebrush, pinyon-juniper, mountain shrub	Mule deer, elk, Gunnison sage-grouse, mountain lion
Spring Canyon	Includes BLM lands in Spring Canyon, a major drainage on the eastern Uncompahgre Plateau. Links Uncompahgre Valley with National Forest along Spring Creek.	Riparian, cliff/canyon, pinyon-juniper, small areas of sagebrush	Bear, mountain lion, mule deer, turkey, cutthroat trout
Tabeguache	Centers around protected Tabeguache Area on BLM and National Forest lands, and includes Tabeguache Creek and its major tributaries. Provides connection between the San Miguel River and the Uncompahgre Plateau, and over the Plateau into other protected areas. Divided into 10 zones.	Riverine and riparian, cliff and canyon, pinyon-juniper, small areas of sagebrush	Bear, mountain lion, mule deer, elk, native warm water and cold water fish, sensitive frog species
Terror Creek	Terror Creek drainage from North Fork of the Gunnison River up to National Forest on the Grand Mesa.	Riverine and riparian, pinyon-juniper, mountain shrub, small areas of montane forest	Cutthroat trout, bear, mountain lion, mule deer, elk

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