

Appendix K

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

Evaluation of Relevance and Importance Criteria

For Existing and Potential ACECs

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) are BLM lands where special management attention is needed to protect important and relevant values. “Special management attention” refers to management prescriptions developed during preparation of a resource management plan (RMP) or amendment expressly to protect the important and relevant values of an area from the potential effects of actions permitted by the RMP, including proposed actions deemed to be in conformance with the terms, conditions, and decisions of the RMP (BLM Manual 1613).

To be designated as an ACEC, a nominated area must meet the criteria of relevance and importance as outlined in 43 CFR 1610.7-2 and BLM Manual 1613. If the relevance and importance criteria are met, an area must be identified as a potential ACEC and considered for designation and management in the resource planning process. Designation is based on whether or not a potential ACEC requires special management attention in the selected plan alternative.

An area meets the “**relevance**” criteria if it contains one or more of the following relevance values:

- 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.

The value, resource, system, process, or hazard described above must have substantial significance and values in order to satisfy the “**importance**” criteria. 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. [More than locally significant qualities]
- Has qualities or circumstances that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, unique, endangered, threatened, or vulnerable to adverse change. [Special qualities]
- Has been recognized as warranting protection in order to satisfy national priority concerns or to carry out the mandates of FLPMA. [Warrants national priority/FLPMA protection]
- Has qualities which warrant highlighting in order to satisfy public or management concerns about safety and public welfare. [Safety/public welfare concerns]
- Poses a significant threat to human life and safety or to property. [Poses a significant threat]

The planning area currently has seven designated ACECs:

- Azure Cave ACEC
- Big Bend of the Milk River ACEC
- Bitter Creek ACEC
- Mountain Plover ACEC
- Kevin Rim ACEC
- Prairie Dog Towns within the 7km Complex ACEC
- Sweet Grass Hills ACEC

Public comment received during the scoping period suggested that the existing Bitter Creek ACEC be expanded. Four areas were nominated as ACECs by cooperating agencies or BLM staff, including:

- Frenchman Breaks Area
- Malta Geological Area
- Woody Island Area
- Zortman/Landusky Mine Reclamation

The BLM received five ACEC nominations from the public that will be considered in the planning process:

- Black-tailed Prairie Dog and Black-footed Ferret
- Five Watersheds
- Grassland Bird/Greater Sage-Grouse
- Greater Sage-Grouse
- Mountain Plover

Three other ACEC nominations received prior to the commencement of this planning process were also considered:

- Little Rocky Mountains
- Old Scraggy
- Saddle Butte

This report presents the completed evaluation forms for all existing and nominated ACECs in the planning area (Tables K.1 through K.19). Areas that did not meet the relevance and importance criteria were dropped from further consideration for ACEC designation. Areas that met the relevance and importance criteria are included in the management alternatives analyzed in the RMP/EIS.

A summary of the relevance and importance evaluations for the existing and nominated ACECs is shown on the following page, followed by the individual evaluations. Maps K1 through K19 showing the locations of the existing and nominated ACECs are found following the individual evaluations.

Relevance and Importance Evaluation Summary

	<i>Table No.</i>	<i>Page No.</i>	<i>Met Relevance Criteria</i>	<i>Met Importance Criteria</i>	<i>Included in Management Alternatives</i>
<i>Existing ACECs</i>					
Azure Cave	K.1	1435	✓	✓	✓
Big Bend of the Milk River	K.2	1437	✓	✓	✓
Bitter Creek	K.3	1439	✓	✓	✓
Kevin Rim	K.4	1441	✓	✓	✓
Mountain Plover	K.5	1443	✓	✓	✓
Prairie Dog Towns within the 7km Complex	K.6	1445			
Sweet Grass Hills	K.7	1447	✓	✓	✓
<i>Nominations Brought Forward During Scoping</i>					
Frenchman Breaks	K.8	1449	✓	✓	✓
Malta Geological	K.9	1453	✓	✓	✓
Woody Island	K.10	1456	✓	✓	✓
Zortman/Landusky Mine Reclamation	K.11	1460	✓	✓	✓
<i>Nominations Received During the Planning Process</i>					
Black-tailed Prairie Dog and Black-footed Ferret	K.12	1462	✓		
Five Watersheds	K.13	1464	✓		
Grassland Bird/Greater Sage-Grouse	K.14	1466	✓	✓	✓
Greater Sage-Grouse	K.15	1469	✓	✓	✓
Mountain Plover	K.16	1471	✓		
<i>Nominations Received Prior to the Commencement of the Planning Process</i>					
Little Rocky Mountains	K.17	1473	✓	✓	✓
Old Scraggy	K.18	1477	✓		
Saddle Butte	K.19	1479			

Maps Showing Locations of Existing and Nominated ACECs

	<i>Map No.</i>	<i>Page No.</i>
<i>Existing ACECs</i>		
Azure Cave	K.1	1436
Big Bend of the Milk River	K.2	1438
Bitter Creek	K.3	1440
Kevin Rim	K.4	1442
Mountain Plover	K.5	1444
Prairie Dog Towns within the 7km Complex	K.6	1446
Sweet Grass Hills	K.7	1448
<i>Nominations Brought Forward During Scoping</i>		
Frenchman Breaks	K.8	1452
Malta Geological	K.9	1455
Woody Island	K.10	1459
Zortman/Landusky Mine Reclamation	K.11	1461
<i>Nominations Received During the Planning Process</i>		
Black-tailed Prairie Dog and Black-footed Ferret	K.12	1463
Five Watersheds	K.13	1465
Grassland Bird/Greater Sage-Grouse	K.14	1468
Greater Sage-Grouse	K.15	1470
Mountain Plover	K.16	1472
<i>Nominations Received Prior to the Commencement of the Planning Process</i>		
Little Rocky Mountains	K.17	1476
Old Scraggy	K.18	1478
Saddle Butte	K.19	1480

Existing ACECs

Table K.1 Azure Cave ACEC (Existing) Relevance and Importance Evaluation		
Area Considered:	Azure Cave	
General Location:	T. 25 N., R. 25 E.	
General Description:	Southeast Phillips County, Little Rocky Mountains South of Zortman, Montana	
Acreeage:	143	
Values Considered:	Critical bat hibernaculum of national significance, and general hazard to public safety	
<i>Relevance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value	No	No significant historic or cultural values are known. Scenic values are high, but similar to those of many other areas in the Malta Field Office.
A fish and wildlife resource	Yes	Azure cave was described in detail by N. P. Campbell in a 1978 report (Campbell 1978). The cave was re-surveyed in 1979 (Chester, et. al. 1979). They identified this as one of two known caves in the Northwest that contains hibernating bats. Because of the cave importance as a hibernaculum the report also recommended that entry by the public take place only from June 15 to August 15 each year. Bat surveys at Azure Cave (Hendricks and Genter 1997) confirmed the presence of hibernating bats and also confirmed the presence of bat species of concern using the cave area. The cave is hazardous to the general public and only experienced cave explorers should be allowed in it (Chester, et al. 1979) by permit.
A natural process or system	No	No threatened, endangered, or otherwise rare plants are known.
Natural hazards	Yes	The cave is hazardous to the general public and only experienced cave explorers should be allowed in it (Chester, et al. 1979) by permit.
<i>Importance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
More than locally significant qualities	Yes	One of the largest known bat hibernaculums in the state with several hundred individuals present. The cave also has speleothems of exceptional size and extent.
Special qualities	Yes	Hibernating bats are exceptionally sensitive to disturbance and cave features are also can be destroyed easily.
Warrants national priority/FLPMA protection	No	No national priority concerns are known.
Safety/public welfare concerns	Yes	Unrestricted access to the cave may represent a hazard to people inexperienced with caves and cave features.
Poses a significant threat	No	Not a significant threat to human life and safety.

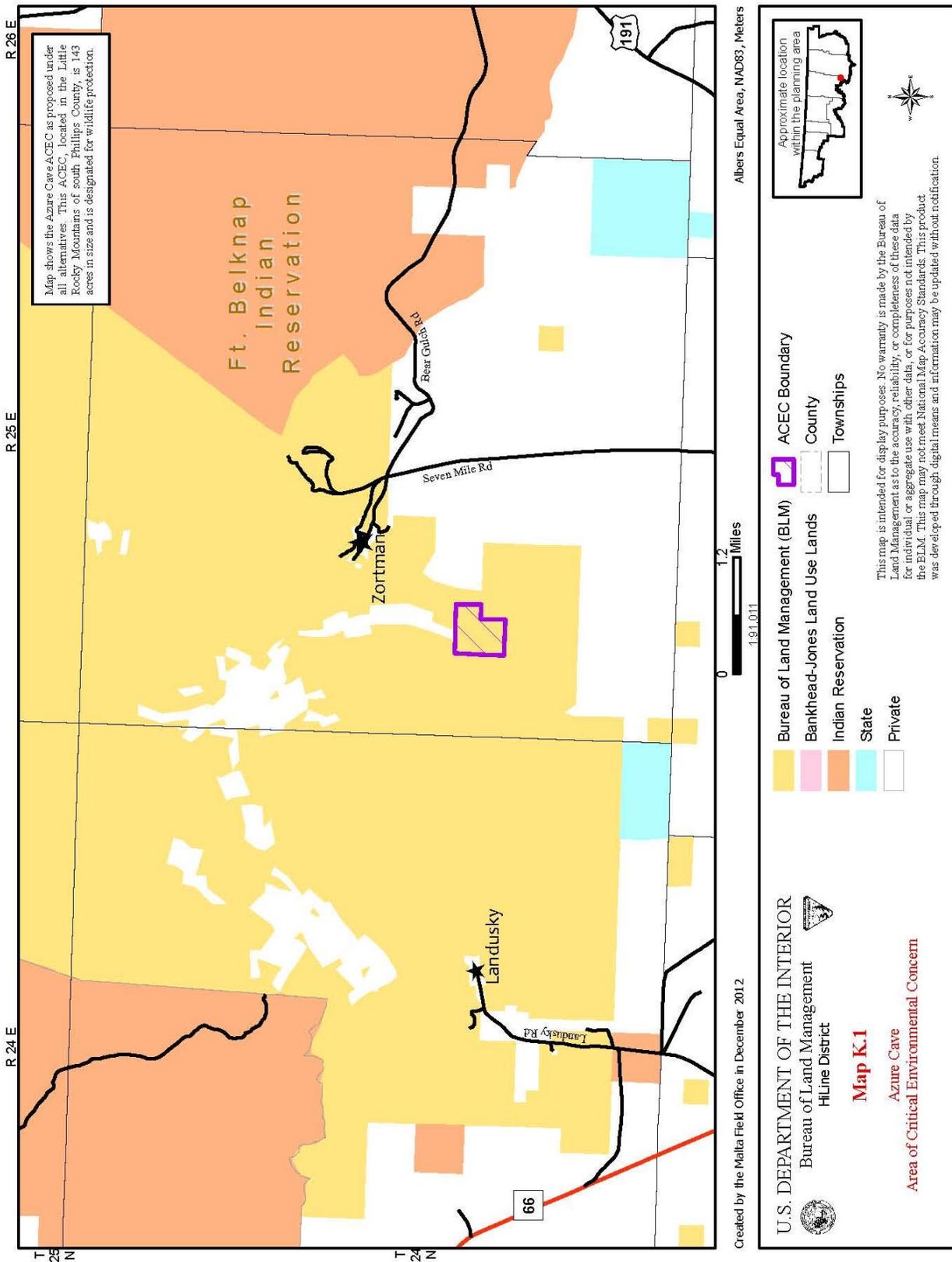
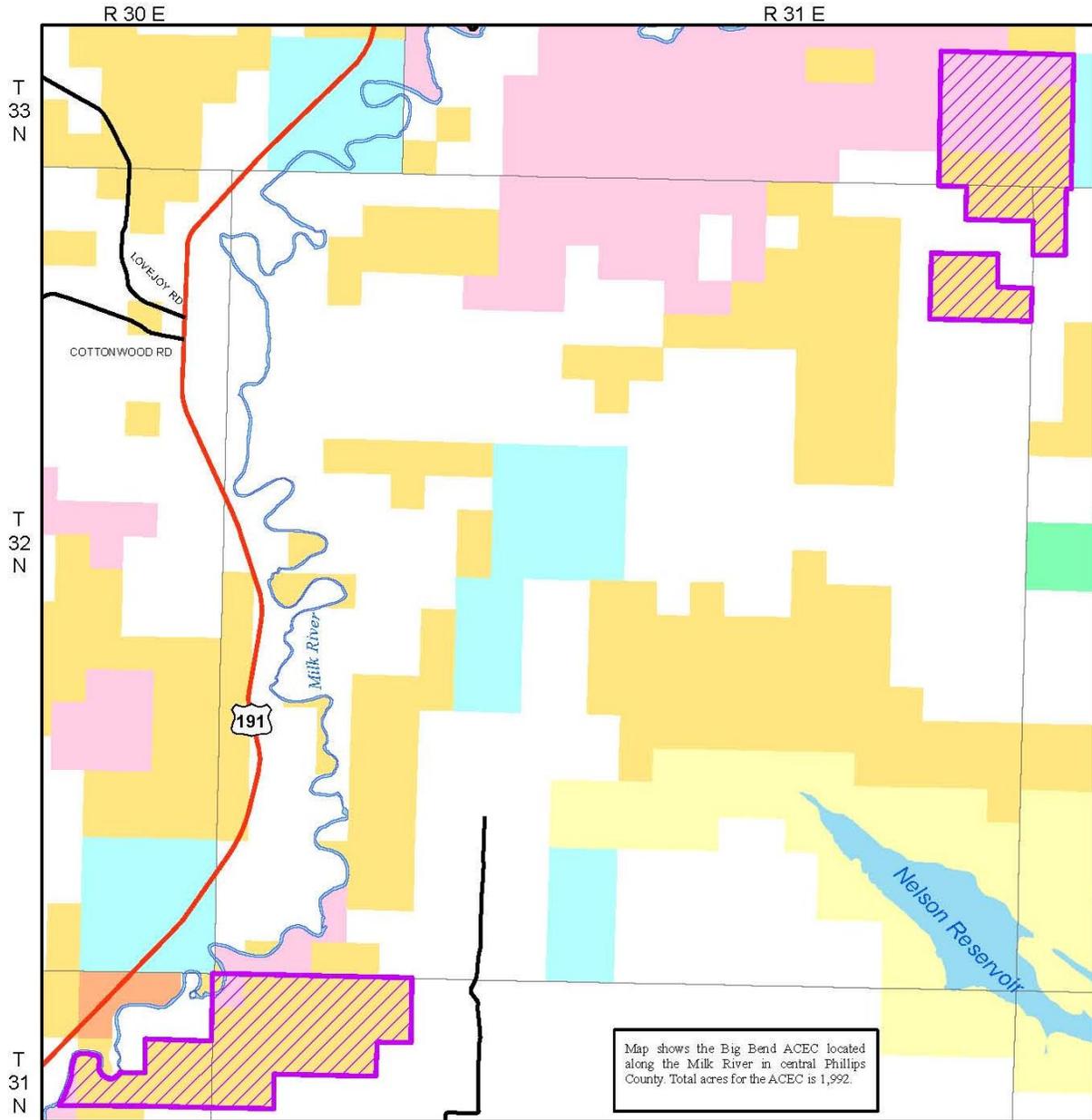


Table K.2 Big Bend of the Milk River ACEC (Existing) Relevance and Importance Evaluation		
Area Considered:	Big Bend of the Milk River	
General Location:	Portions of T. 33 N., R. 31 E.; T. 32 N., R. 31 and 32 E.; and a portion lying in T. 31 N., R. 30 and 31 E.	
General Description:	Northeast of Malta, Montana	
Acreage:	1,979	
Values Considered:	Scientific/Interpretive archaeological. Contains rare and intact important archaeological sites	
<i>Relevance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value	Yes	The Big Bend of the Milk River contains a broad range of archaeological resources representing the variety of manifestations indicative of the prehistoric occupations of the glaciated prairie of the Northwestern Plains. Included among these resources are the Henry Smith and Beaucoup sites which have been investigated professionally and determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.
A fish and wildlife resource	No	No habitat for endangered, sensitive, or threatened fish and wildlife species are known.
A natural process or system	No	No threatened, endangered, or otherwise rare plants are known.
Natural hazards	No	No natural hazards are known.
<i>Importance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
More than locally significant qualities	Yes	The Big Bend has a high density of archaeological resources, many with rare or unique characteristics and scientific values at local, national and international levels. The cultural resources are between 1000 and 2000 years old and provide an exceptional opportunity for the study of relatively pristine sites encompassing a broad range of cultural functions and established during a short period of prehistory. Sites include prehistoric bison kills in the form of traps, jumps, and pounds with associated drive lines; prehistoric ceremonial and religious locales such as petroglyph boulders, medicine wheels, intaglios, and burials; and complex habitation and resource exploitation manifestations characterized by large numbers of stone circles and cairns. These sites are irreplaceable, vulnerable, and threatened by human impacts, primarily in the form of mineral development, and vandalism.
Special qualities	Yes	Cultural materials of value to scientific research, education, and public interpretation are fragile and deteriorate readily on exposure to the elements. Surface disturbance from other land uses can have a serious adverse impact on fossil deposits.
Warrants national priority/FLPMA protection	Yes	Satisfies the FLPMA mandate to protect scientific values.
Safety/public welfare concerns	No	No safety or public welfare concerns are known.
Poses a significant threat	No	No significant threats.



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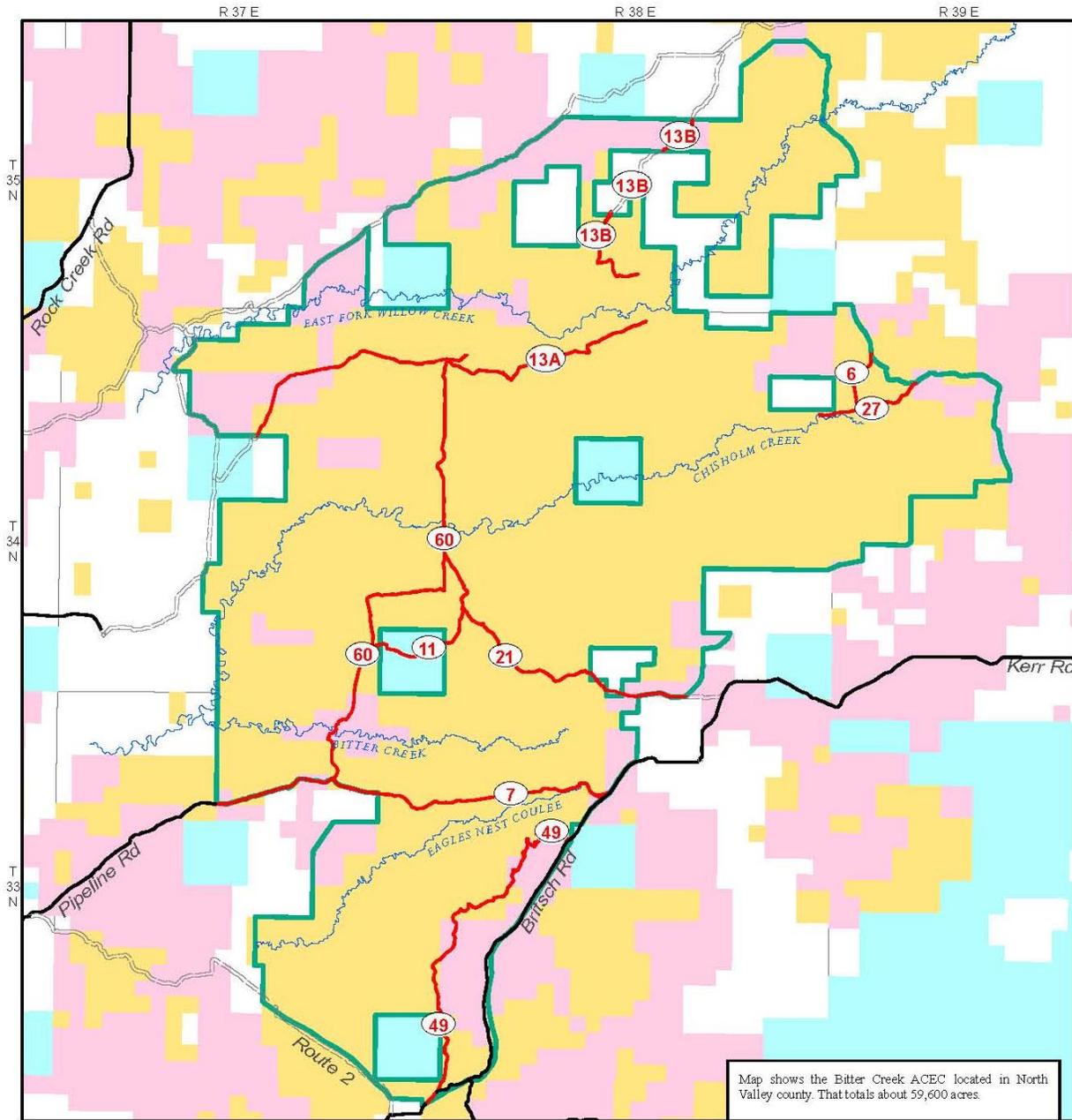
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Albers Equal Area, NAD83, Meters

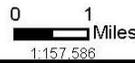
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 <p>U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR Bureau of Land Management HiLine District</p> <p>Map K.2 Big Bend of the Milk River Area of Critical Environmental Concern</p> <p><small>This map is intended for display purposes. No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual or aggregate use with other data, or for purposes not intended by the BLM. This map may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This product was developed through digital means and information may be updated without notification.</small></p>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Bankhead-Jones Land Use Lands US Fish and Wildlife National Wildlife Refuge Bureau of Reclamation Indian Reservation State Private Water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> County Route U.S. Route ACEC Boundary
	<p><small>Approximate location within the planning area</small></p> 	

Table K.3 Bitter Creek ACEC (Existing) Relevance and Importance Evaluation		
Area Considered:	Bitter Creek ACEC	
General Location:	Portions of T. 35 N., R. 37, 38 and 39 E.; Portions of T. 34 N., R. 37, 38 and 39 E.; Portions of T. 33 N., R. 37 and 38 E.; and Portions of T. 32 N., R. 38 E. (most central township is T. 34 N., R. 38 E.)	
General Description:	Northcentral Valley County	
Acreage:	60,701	
Values Considered:	Significant scenic, wildlife and cultural values.	
<i>Relevance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value	Yes	The area contains outstanding scenic views which are not compromised by visual intrusions or social imprints. The area is also known to contain sensitive archaeological resources.
A fish and wildlife resource	Yes	The area is valuable for wildlife due to the large, continuous, and contiguous amount of prairie under federal administration which provides a reservoir of grassland habitat.
A natural process or system	Yes	The area is valuable for wildlife due to the large, continuous, and contiguous amount of prairie under federal administration which provides a reservoir of grassland habitat.
Natural hazards	No	No natural hazards are known.
<i>Importance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
More than locally significant qualities	Yes	Outstanding scenic diversity and a variety of vegetation types and wildlife habitat.
Special qualities	No	The area is not particularly fragile or sensitive to change as compared to other sites in Montana.
Warrants national priority/FLPMA protection	No	No national priority concerns are known.
Safety/public welfare concerns	No	No safety or public welfare concerns are known.
Poses a significant threat	No	No significant threats.



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Abers Equal Area, NAD83, Meters

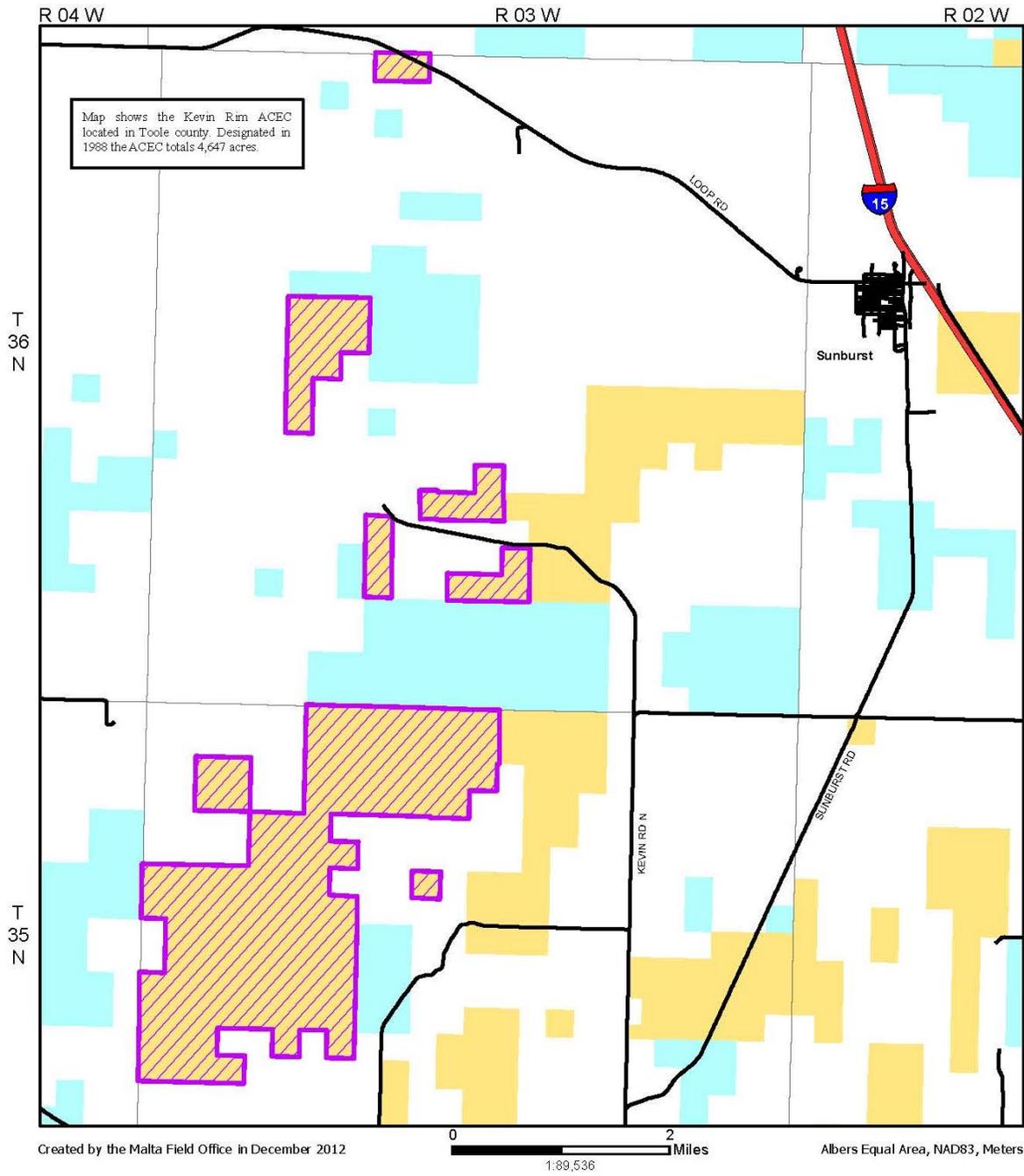
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Bureau of Land Management
HiLine District

Map K.3
Bitter Creek
Area of Critical Environmental Concern

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- ACEC Boundary
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- Bankhead-Jones Land Use Lands
- State
- Private
- Water
- Vehicle Way
- Road
- County Route
- Streams

Table K.4 Kevin Rim ACEC (Existing) Relevance and Importance Evaluation		
Area Considered:	Kevin Rim	
General Location:	T. 36 N., R. 03 W.; and T. 35 N., R. 03 W.	
General Description:	Northeast of Shelby, Montana	
Acreage:	4,557	
Values Considered:	Scientific/Interpretive archaeological. Contains rare and intact important archaeological sites. Essential breeding and nesting area for raptors.	
<i>Relevance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value	Yes	Kevin Rim would be designated and managed to protect, maintain and/or enhance the cultural resources while encouraging other types of multiple use activities to the extent they are compatible with the ACEC designation (BLM 1988).
A fish and wildlife resource	Yes	Kevin Rim serves as a primary breeding and nesting area for a number of raptors including state sensitive species such as the golden eagle and ferruginous hawk. Other raptors using the rim include the prairie falcon and rough-legged hawk. The steep, south facing walls of the rim provide optimum habitat for raptor breeding and nesting and is an uncommon feature in this area of gently rolling plains. Yearlong raptor use of the rim also occurs. Kevin Rim also has potential high value habitat for peregrine falcons. No known use of the rim is presently occurring. However, peregrine falcons have used a nest site on Kevin Rim in the past. The rim has been identified as a reintroduction peregrine site. Most raptors, including those using the rim, are quite susceptible to disturbance. This is especially crucial during the breeding and nesting period and may be a significant factor limiting maximum raptor use of the rim.
A natural process or system	No	No threatened, endangered, or otherwise rare plants are known.
Natural hazards	No	No natural hazards are known.
<i>Importance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
More than locally significant qualities	Yes	Kevin Rim serves as a primary breeding and nesting area for a number of raptors including state sensitive species such as the golden eagle and ferruginous hawk. Other raptors using the rim include the prairie falcon and rough-legged hawk. The steep, south facing walls of the rim provide optimum habitat for raptor breeding and nesting and is an uncommon feature in this area of gently rolling plains.
Special qualities	Yes	Cultural materials of value to scientific research, education, and public interpretation are fragile and surface disturbance from other land uses can have a serious adverse impact on them.
Warrants national priority/FLPMA protection	Yes	Satisfies the FLPMA mandate to protect scientific values.
Safety/public welfare concerns	No	No safety or public welfare concerns are known.
Poses a significant threat	No	No significant threats.



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 HiLine District

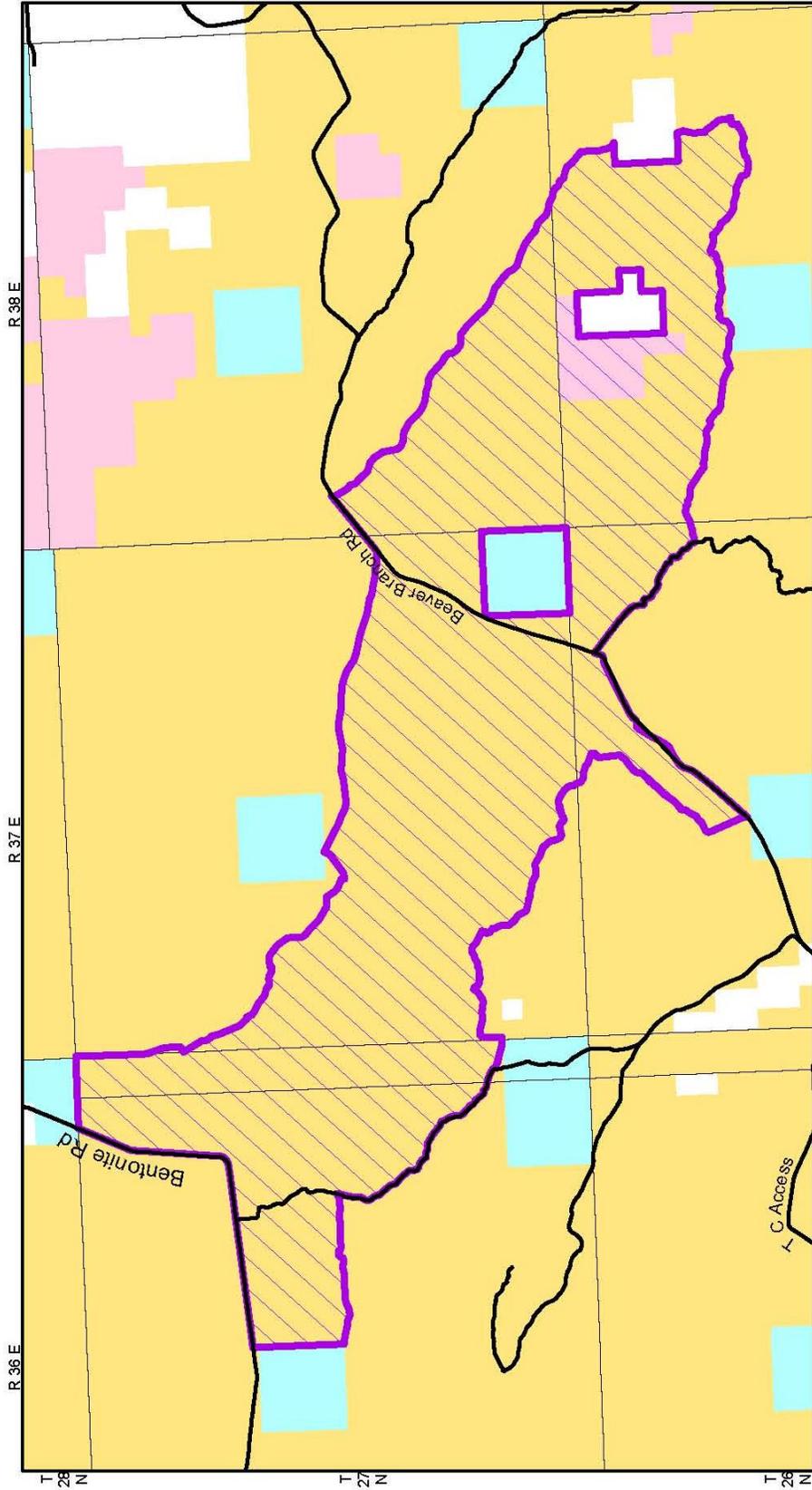
Map K.4
Kevin Rim
Area of Critical Environmental Concern

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- ACEC Boundary
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- State
- County Route
- Interstate
- Private

Approximate location within the planning area

Table K.5 Mountain Plover ACEC (Existing) Relevance and Importance Evaluation		
Area Considered:	Mountain Plover	
General Location:	Portions lie in T. 27 N., R. 36, 36½, 37, and 38 E.; and T. 26 N., R. 37 and 38 E.	
General Description:	Southcentral Valley County	
Acreage:	24,762	
Values Considered:	Essential breeding habitat for Mountain Plovers	
<i>Relevance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value	No	No significant historic or cultural values are known. Scenic values are moderate, but very similar to those of many other areas in the Malta Field Office.
A fish and wildlife resource	Yes	This ACEC contains breeding habitat for mountain plovers. The area is unique because the hardpan areas along Beaver Creek provide habitat for mountain plovers away from traditional habitat association with prairie dogs. The area contains approximately 160 mountain plovers, which is greater than 1% of the global population of this species. The area is also recognized as a Globally Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society because of the numbers of breeding Mountain Plovers in the area.
A natural process or system	No	No threatened, endangered, or otherwise rare plants are known.
Natural hazards	No	No natural hazards are known.
<i>Importance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
More than locally significant qualities	Yes	The area is of global significance for the continued existence of Mountain Plovers because of the number of plovers breeding within the ACEC.
Special qualities	No	The area is not particularly fragile or sensitive to change as compared to other sites in Montana.
Warrants national priority/FLPMA protection	Yes	The area would qualify under Section 102(a)(8) of FLPMA as an area to be managed that will protect the quality of scientific values and provide food and habitat for fish and wildlife.
Safety/public welfare concerns	No	No safety or public welfare concerns are known.
Poses a significant threat	No	No significant threats.



Albers Equal Area, NAD83, Meters

Map shows the Mountain Plover ACEC as proposed under all Alternatives. This ACEC totals 24,762 acres in size and is located in southern Valley County.

Approximate location within the planning area

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Map K.5
Mountain Plover
Area of Critical Environmental Concern

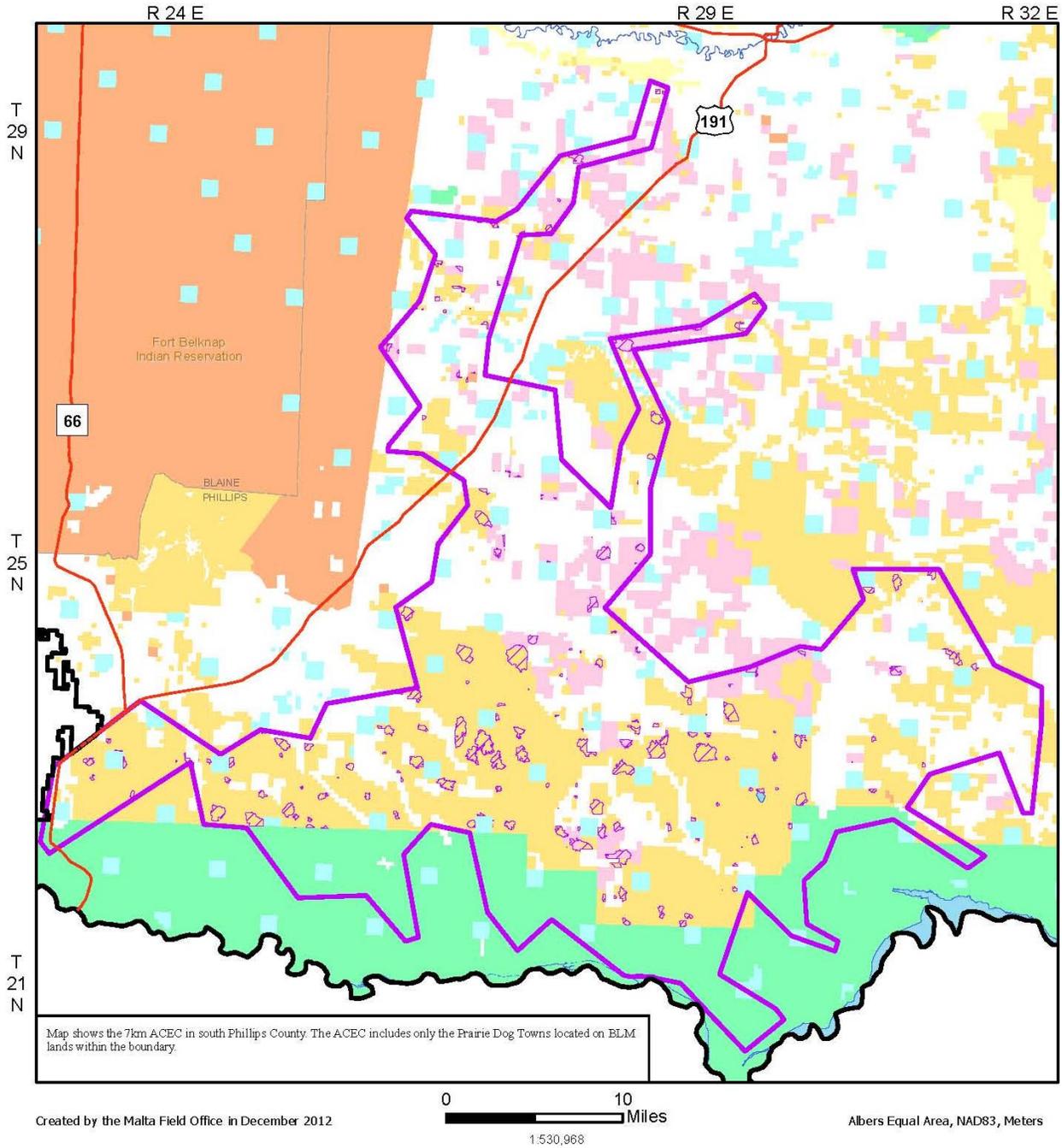
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Legend:

- ACEC Boundary
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- Bankhead-Jones Land Use Lands
- State
- Private
- County
- Townships
- Route

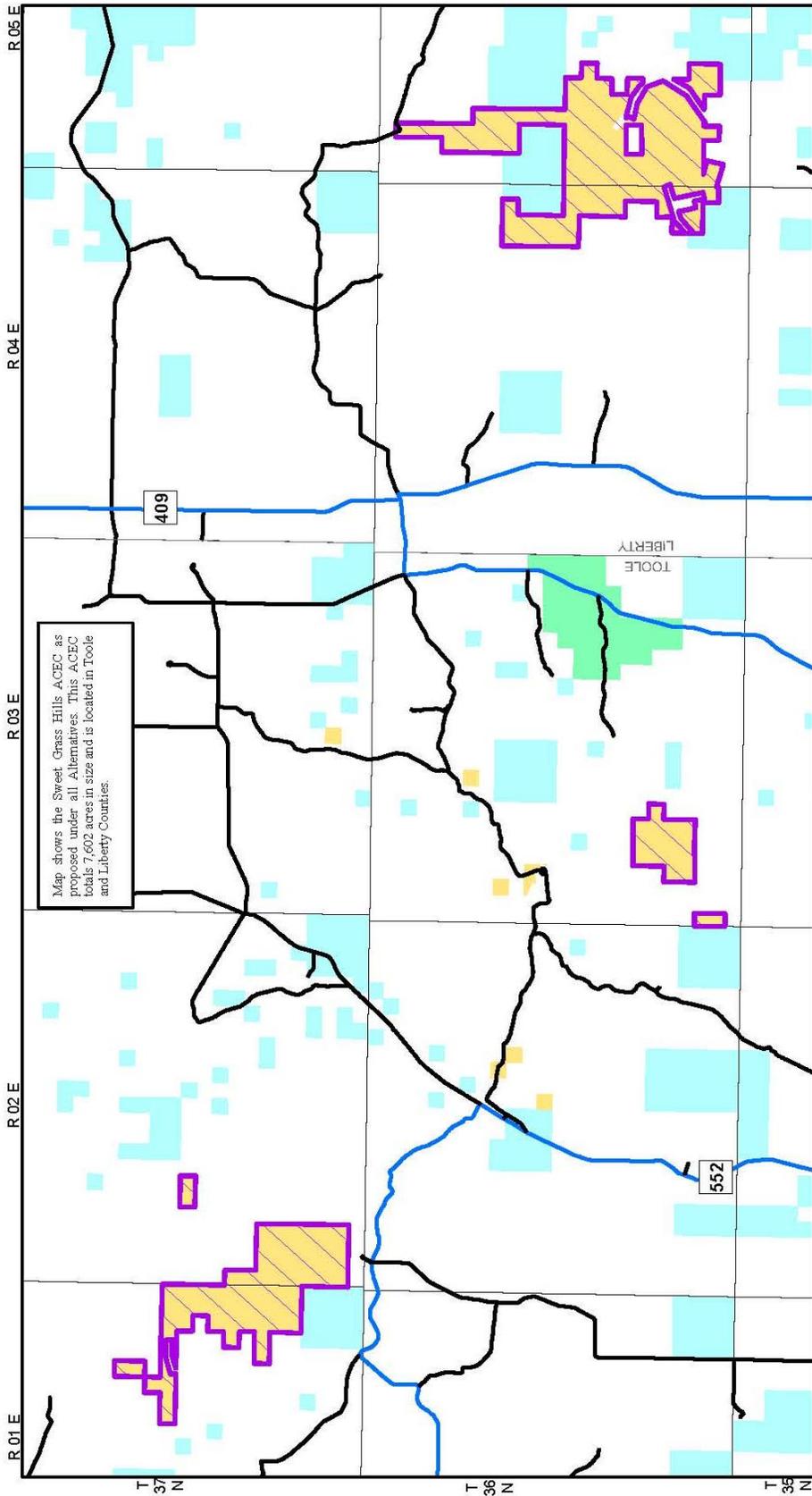
Scale: 0 to 2 Miles, 0 to 2 Kilometers

Table K.6 Prairie Dog Towns within the 7km Complex ACEC (Existing) Relevance and Importance Evaluation		
Area Considered:	7km Prairie Dog Town Area	
General Location:	Central T. 23 N., R. 29 E.	
General Description:	Southcentral Phillips County	
Acreage:	12,346	
Values Considered:	Essential Habitat for Black Foot Ferret Recovery and Prairie Dog Town Conservation Areas	
<i>Relevance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value	No	No significant historic or cultural values are known. Scenic values are moderate, but very similar to those of many other areas in the Malta Field Office.
A fish and wildlife resource	No	The boundary of this ACEC originally contained many acres of prairie dog towns. Although the area still contains many acres of prairie dogs, the boundary of this ACEC is no longer relevant to black-footed ferret recovery or prairie dog conservation.
A natural process or system	No	No threatened, endangered, or otherwise rare plants are known.
Natural hazards	No	No natural hazards are known.
<i>Importance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
More than locally significant qualities	No	Although the area still contains many acres of prairie dogs, it is no longer relevant to black-footed ferret recovery or prairie dog conservation.
Special qualities	No	The area is not particularly fragile or sensitive to change as compared to other sites in Montana.
Warrants national priority/FLPMA protection	No	No national priority concerns are known.
Safety/public welfare concerns	No	No safety or public welfare concerns are known.
Poses a significant threat	No	No significant threats.



<p>U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR Bureau of Land Management HiLine District</p> <p>Map K.6</p> <p>7Km Prairie Dog Complex Area of Critical Environmental Concern</p> <p><small>This map is intended for display purposes. No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual or aggregate use with other data, or for purposes not intended by BLM. This map may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This product was developed through digital means and information may be updated without notification.</small></p>	State Route RMP Boundary Dog Towns County	Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Bankhead-Jones Land Use Lands US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) National Wildlife Refuge Bureau of Reclamation Indian Reservation State Private Water	<p>Approximate location within the planning area</p>
	<p><small>This map is intended for display purposes. No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual or aggregate use with other data, or for purposes not intended by BLM. This map may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This product was developed through digital means and information may be updated without notification.</small></p>		

Table K.7 Sweet Grass Hills ACEC (Existing) Relevance and Importance Evaluation		
Area Considered:	Sweet Grass Hills	
General Location:	T. 37 N., R. 01 and 02 E.; T. 36 N., R. 03, 04 and 05 E.	
General Description:	Northwest of Havre, Montana in Toole and Liberty Counties	
Acreage:	7,429 acres	
Values Considered:	Scientific/Interpretive archaeological. Contains rare and intact important archaeological sites	
<i>Relevance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value	Yes	The Sweet Grass Hills have been identified by Native American traditionalists as an important location for traditional religious practices (BLM 1987). In traditional Plains Indian culture, spiritual life is integral to daily life. Fasting and vision questing are important elements to this spirituality. Vision questing is practiced by all of the groups known to have ranged into the Sweet Grass Hills.
A fish and wildlife resource	No	No habitat for endangered, sensitive, or threatened fish and wildlife species are known.
A natural process or system	No	No threatened, endangered, or otherwise rare plants are known.
Natural hazards	No	No natural hazards are known.
<i>Importance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
More than locally significant qualities	No	Similar sites and values can be found in other areas of Montana.
Special qualities	Yes	Cultural materials of value to American Indian spirituality are fragile and irreplaceable. Surface disturbance from other land uses can have a serious adverse impact on Traditional Cultural Properties.
Warrants national priority/FLPMA protection	Yes	Satisfies the FLPMA mandate to protect scientific values.
Safety/public welfare concerns	No	No safety or public welfare concerns are known.
Poses a significant threat	No	No significant threats.



Albers Equal Area, NAD83, Meters

0 2 Miles
1:165,470

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HiLine District



Map K.7

**Sweet Grass Hills
Area of Critical Environmental Concern**

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- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- US Fish and Wildlife (USFW)
- State
- Private
- ACEC Boundary
- County
- Townships
- County Route
- State Route

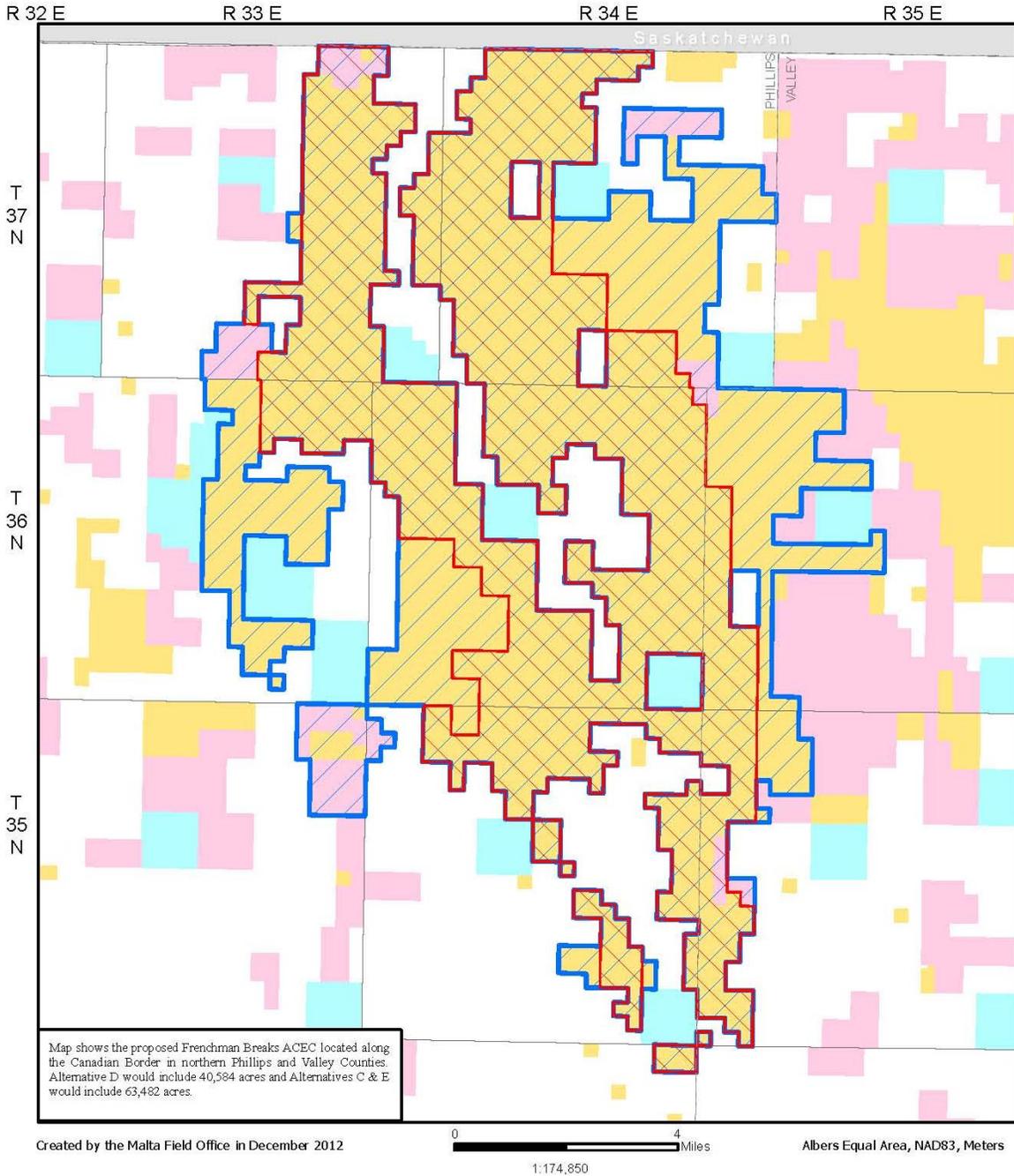


Nominations Brought Forward During Scoping

Table K.8 Frenchman Breaks ACEC Relevance and Importance Evaluation		
Area Considered:	Frenchman Breaks Area	
General Location:	T. 37 N., R. 33 and 34 E.; T. 36 N., R. 33, 34 and 35 E.; T. 35 N., R. 34 and 35 E.; T. 34 N., R. 34 E.	
General Description:	Northeast Phillips County	
Acreage:	42,020	
Values Considered:	Scenic, fish and wildlife resources (crucial mule deer winter range, diversity of wildlife and native fish), and an unfragmented fragile landscape.	
<i>Relevance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value	Yes	The majority of the area contains outstanding scenic views which are not compromised by visual intrusions or human imprints.
A fish and wildlife resource	Yes	<p>The Frenchman Breaks provide important winter habitat for several big game species. As many as 1,609 mule deer have been observed there during severe winters, the bulk of them probably migrating to the area from Canada. The large number of Canadian mule deer migrating to the area was the reason for identifying this winter habitat as crucial. The lack of humans during winter contributes to a higher dependence of mule deer on native shrubs for browse rather than being attracted to hay stacks as in other breaks habitats in Phillips and Valley Counties where ranches are more abundant. Several hundred pronghorn antelope also winter in sagebrush habitat found in drainage areas and fans protected from cold winds by the steep breaks topography. Elk could be found in the breaks habitat at any time of the year, but the hunted population is quite small. Moose have become more prevalent in the area in recent years, and the Creek bottom (mostly on private land) has been identified as one of the ten best places in North America for growing trophy white-tailed deer.</p> <p>The Frenchman Breaks provide habitat for a variety of wildlife species. It is located less than two miles from Frenchman Reservoir, a private irrigation reservoir that supports nesting colonies of eared grebe, great blue heron, and double-crested cormorant. Fish populations in Frenchman Creek provide food for these colonial nesters as well as for non-breeding concentrations of American white pelican during summer. There are nearly 20 known sharp-tailed grouse dancing grounds on federal land within the nominated ACEC, and one known greater sage-grouse strutting ground on a boundary with private land just northwest of Frenchman Reservoir. The Frenchman Creek bottom supports a significant population of ring-necked pheasants, but few upland game birds ever see a hunter in this remote area. Unique aspen stands on the east side of the ACEC probably support unknown concentrations of warblers and other passerines searching for deciduous tree habitat during their spring migration when few or no humans are present to observe and identify them.</p> <p>The Frenchman Breaks area is home to many BLM Sensitive Species, and upland grassland areas between areas of steep topography can also support additional sensitive grassland bird species. Sensitive wildlife species include greater short-horned lizard, northern leopard frog, ferruginous hawk, golden eagle, Swainson’s hawk, greater sage-grouse, loggerhead shrike, and swift fox. The four grassland birds on grassy bench tops are the Baird’s sparrow, McCown’s longspur, chestnut-collared longspur, and Sprague’s pipit. The area</p>

		<p>has habitat for bald eagle, peregrine falcon, Brewer’s sparrow, northern goshawk, red-headed woodpecker, willet, marbled godwit, long-billed curlew, and Wilson’s phalarope. All are sensitive species, but few or no records exist for the area. The swift fox occurs primarily on the western side of the nominated ACEC.</p> <p>Few records exist for the greater short-horned lizard due to their secretive nature. The greater short-horned lizard, or horny toad, does occur in the Frenchman Breaks area near sandstone ledges and rocky slopes. The remoteness of the area has allowed populations of the lizard to persist with little or no human disturbance. The northern leopard frog probably occurs in Frenchman Creek and in reservoirs and stock ponds, but little work has been done on this species. Frenchman Creek does have the BLM Sensitive Pearl Dace and sauger. Also present is the northern redbelly dace. Although not a sensitive species itself, its hybrid with the finescale dace is a Sensitive Species and the two are very difficult to tell apart.</p>
A natural process or system	Yes	<p>The Frenchman Breaks, located mostly in extreme northeastern Phillips County and partially in northwestern Valley County, is a remote and mostly roadless area of badlands and breaks topography stretching for miles. The area is relatively unfragmented from human presences. The Frenchman Breaks are fragile due to exposed bedrock and soils with severe erosion hazards, developed from acid shales, shallow to very shallow depth, low available water holding capacity, and sparse vegetative ground cover.</p> <p>The aspen stands in the central portion of the ACEC on the east side of Frenchman Creek appear to be remnants of the Aspen Parklands found farther north in Canada. This area is rarely visited by humans, except during the fall big game hunting season, and it probably supports unique plant species in addition to the passerine bird community during spring and summer. This little-studied area needs detailed plant and animal surveys to determine its full potential as an ACEC.</p> <p>The unique geology of the Frenchman Breaks was a key factor in the prior designation of the area as a VRM Class 2 landscape. The International Boundary with Canada not only separates the Frenchman River in Canada from Frenchman Creek in the United States, but also separates the extensive Frenchman grasslands in Canada from the rugged, incised topography on the United States side. The few roads on the edges of the area are not maintained and most of the area is inaccessible during all but the driest times of the year. The rugged topography has prevented all but the most primitive jeep trails from invading the area. Any development of the area would face challenging obstacles on the steep slopes, soils with severe erosion hazards, and in weather extremes.</p>
Natural hazards	No	No natural hazards are known.
<i>Importance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
More than locally significant qualities	Yes	The various sensitive wildlife species are found at many other locations in Montana, but the large diversity in this one geographic area is quite unique. The designation of the mule deer winter range in the Frenchman Breaks as crucial is unique because of the large number of mule deer (1609 in 1982) that migrated into the area during a period of deep snow. Other breaks habitats along Cottonwood and Assiniboine Creeks can support several hundred mule deer, but they apparently do not attract large herds from Canada as Frenchman does. The eastern short-horned lizard population is significant due to the fact that there is

		<p>little human disturbance and the population has a large habitat base with no development and little human activity. The aspen groves on the east side of the unit are very unique and undoubtedly attract many migrant passerines in spring and fall, but is little studied or disturbed due to the remoteness and lack of roads. These aspen remnants are not found in other locations in the Planning Area to any large degree, and are more typically found in aspen parkland regions farther north in Canada.</p>
Special qualities	Yes	<p>Within the nominated ACEC boundary are approximately 34,396 acres (82% of the ACEC) of soils with a severe water erosion hazard and 6,800 acres with a severe wind erosion hazard . Active geologic erosion is obvious throughout the uplands. Increased sediment delivery to Frenchman Creek would be a concern if soil erosion is accelerated by surface disturbing activities. Increased sediment in Frenchman Creek could lead to scouring of the channel banks and an additional silt load in Frenchman Reservoir.</p> <p>The Frenchman Breaks are mostly road less and that helps maintain their rugged, unique, and unfragmented characteristics. That does not mean, however, that the area is without threats to the integrity of its natural systems and processes. All-terrain vehicles (ATV) continue to be a growing problem during the hunting season, with more and more people driving off roads each year, especially on the east side. Many of these new trails are on steep slopes and/or soils with severe erosion hazard. It is rare to find an area where there still remains a chance to get off-road vehicle use under control.</p> <p>The JVP describes the area as having moderate potential for natural gas development. Much of the private land in the Frenchman Breaks area has been leased since November 2004. Federal Lands were temporarily suspended from leasing due to wildlife habitat protests of previous planning documents. Gas development in the Frenchman Breaks would damage most of the unique and unfragmented characteristics mentioned above. Big game populations would be disturbed or displaced during severe winters, and the wildlife diversity could be reduced by increased human disturbance and resource development. Geologic features and soils would be affected by associated facilities such as access roads, pipelines, and power lines. Well houses and pump jacks would severely impact the scenic beauty of the area and disturb wildlife as well as detract from the area’s wild characteristics.</p>
Warrants national priority/FLPMA protection	No	No national priority concerns are known.
Safety/public welfare concerns	No	No safety or public welfare concerns are known.
Poses a significant threat	No	No significant threats.



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Map K.8

Frenchman Breaks
Area of Critical Environmental Concern

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- Proposed Boundary Alternative C & E
- Proposed Boundary Alternative D
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- Bankhead-Jones Land Use Lands
- State
- Private
- Water
- County
- Townships

Approximate location within the planning area

Table K.9 Malta Geological ACEC Relevance and Importance Evaluation		
Area Considered: Malta Geological Area		
General Location: T. 33 N., R. 29 and 30 E.; T. 32 N., R. 29 and 30 E.		
General Description: Northern Phillips County		
Acreage: 6,153		
Values Considered: Nationally significant paleontological area.		
<i>Relevance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value	No	No significant historic or cultural values are known. Scenic values are moderate, but very similar to those of many other areas in the Malta Field Office.
A fish and wildlife resource	No	No habitat for endangered, sensitive, or threatened fish and wildlife species are known.
A natural process or system	Yes	The area is known in the local paleontological community, as well as nationally and internationally, for producing some of the more unique vertebrate specimens. In fact, the first mummified dinosaur remains were recovered from the same geologic unit and in the vicinity of the Malta Geological area. This mummified specimen is the only one like it in the world. Other dinosaur fossils have been recovered from the area, several of which are also considered to be one of a kind. If these specimens remain in public ownership, they may become designated as “type specimens.” A type specimen is the specimen all other fossils are compared and is the basis for a new species designation.
Natural hazards	No	No natural hazards are known.
<i>Importance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
More than locally significant qualities	Yes	The Malta Geological Area is characterized by geologic units which have a high likelihood for containing rare and scientifically significant vertebrate and non-vertebrate fossil remains. The first mummified dinosaur remains were recovered from this geologic unit, which is in the vicinity of the Malta Geological ACEC. The mummified dinosaur remains represent only one of the several internationally significant fossils recovered from the area.
Special qualities	Yes	Phillips County has the greatest number of known paleontological localities across the HiLine on both public and private lands. According to the paleontological distribution statistics prepared by Hanna (2007), 75% of the paleontological localities on the HiLine occur within the Cretaceous Judith River Formation. The Judith River formation is one of three Class 5 geologic units that are located within the planning area. The other two geologic units are Hell Creek and Two Medicine; however the Judith River formation is the most prevalent of the three in the planning area. All three units are considered to be highly fossiliferous and have yielded trace, plant, vertebrate, fish, amphibian, reptile, dinosaur, and mammal fossils (Hanna 2007). Management concern for impacting paleontological resources is high to very high. Potential threats to paleontological resources include illegal collection, ground disturbance, and natural erosion.

		<p>The most difficult threat to manage in the Malta Geological ACEC area is theft and vandalism. Due to the high black market value placed on vertebrate fossil remains and the national/international significance of the area, the Malta Geological ACEC Area has been and is currently being threatened by illegal collection. There have been recent reports of paleontological thefts both on public land and adjoining private lands. Much of the illegal collecting occurs generally during the hours and days when federal employees are not working (after hours, weekends, and holidays). The illicit removal of these specimens negatively impacts the scientific record and prohibits the public from experiencing and learning from these fossils. For example, geologic studies often rely upon invertebrate fossils to determine stratigraphic position and make lateral correlations. Fossilized plants allow for inference of forage available for coexistent herbivores and reveal climatic conditions. The fossil record also elucidates the processes of evolution and extinction.</p> <p>However theft and vandalism are not the only threats to the Malta Geological ACEC area. All-terrain vehicles (ATV) continue to be a growing problem during the hunting season, with more and more people driving off roads each year. Many new trails are on steep slopes and/or soils with severe erosion hazard. Many of the prime fossil locations are on these steep, erosional slopes and can be negatively impacted by unauthorized off road use. The likelihood for inadvertent discovery and potential for theft/damage increases exponentially with the influx of people.</p> <p>The RFD prepared for the HiLine RMP describes the ACEC area as having both very low and moderate potential for natural gas development. Much of the public land in the Malta Geological ACEC area has been leased since November 1987. Geologic/paleontological features and soils would be impacted by associated facilities such as access roads, pipelines, and power lines.</p>
Warrants national priority/FLPMA protection	No	No national priority concerns are known.
Safety/public welfare concerns	No	No safety or public welfare concerns are known.
Poses a significant threat	No	No significant threats.

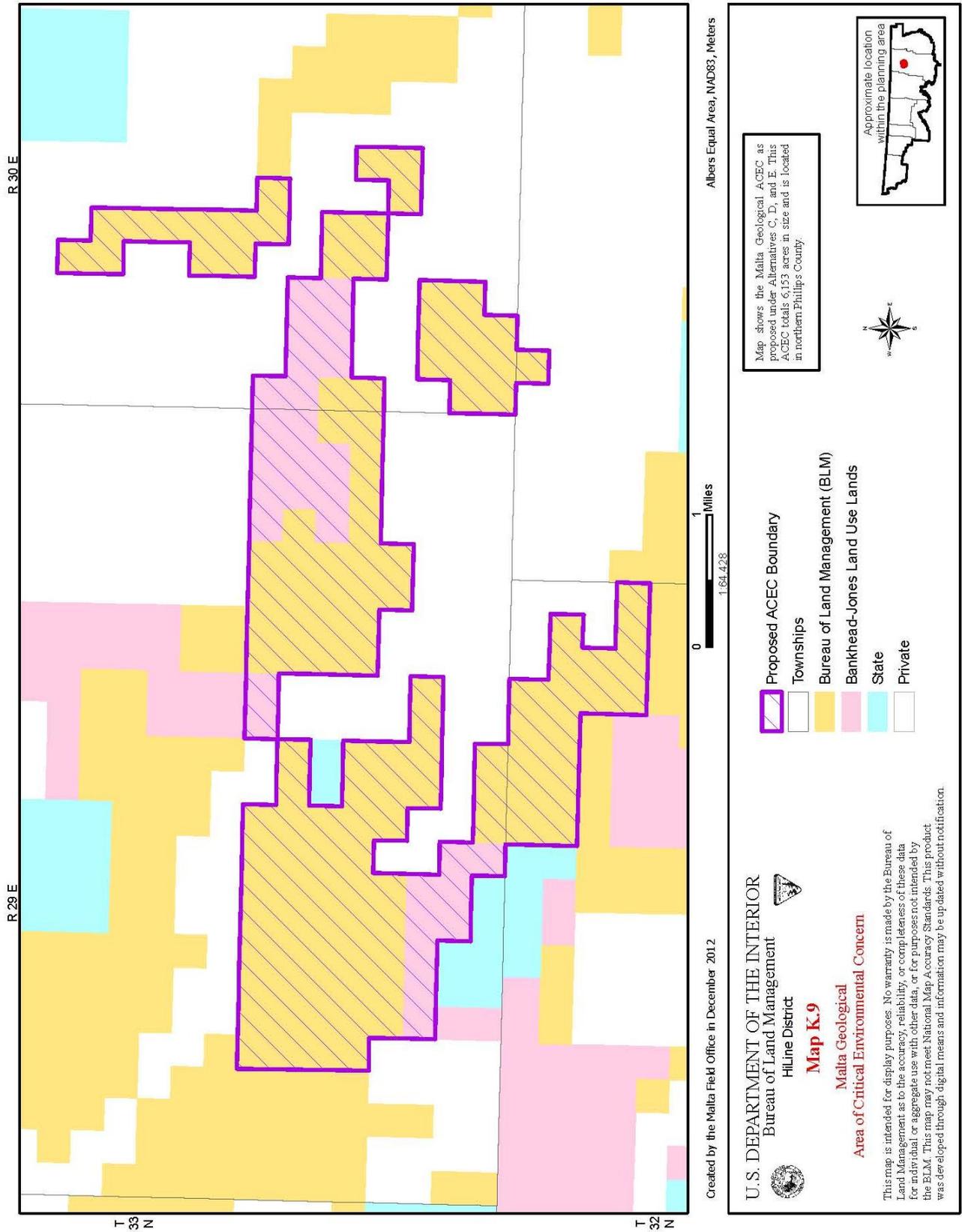
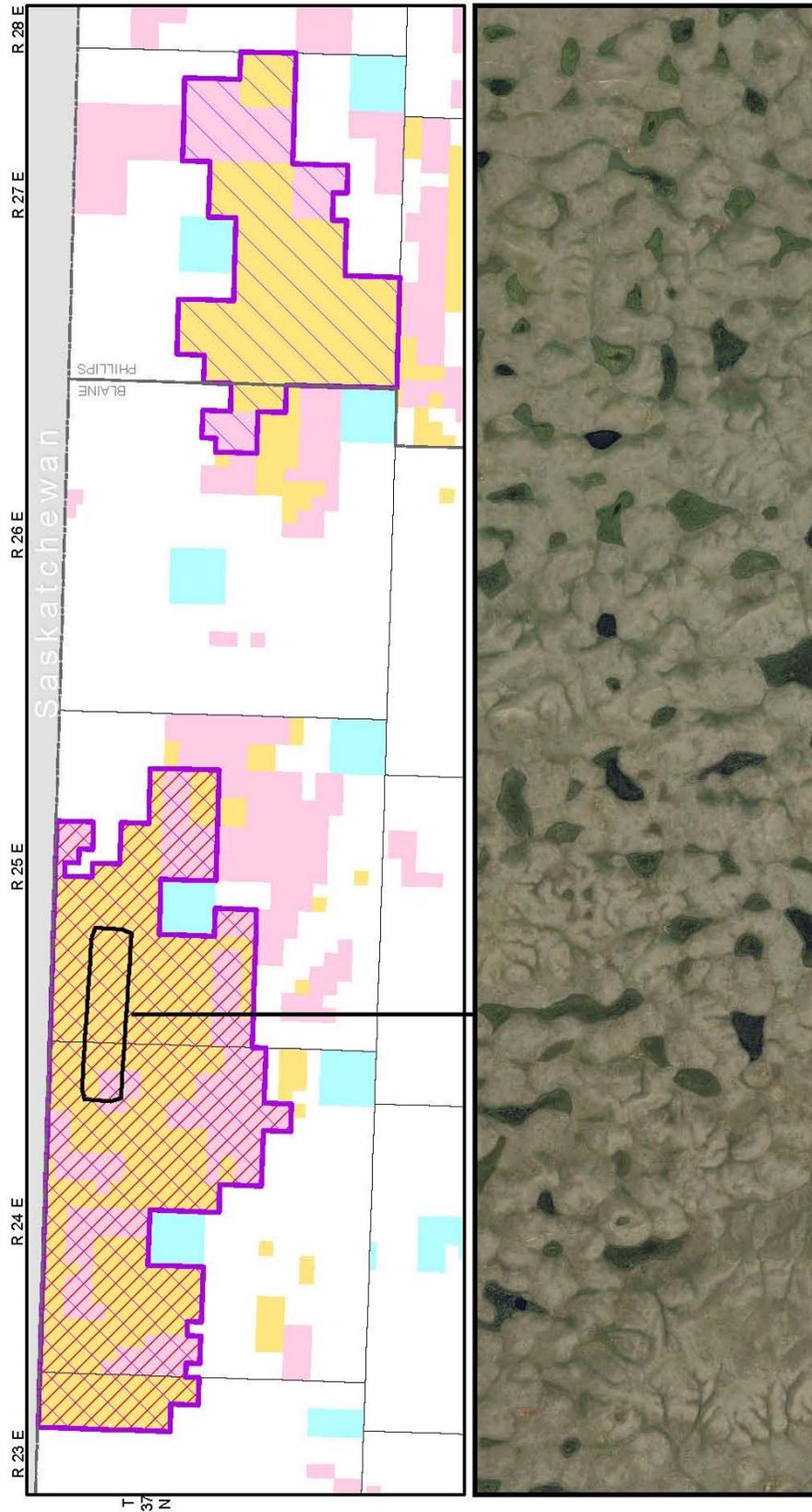


Table K.10 Woody Island ACEC Relevance and Importance Evaluation		
Area Considered:	Woody Island Area (Blaine County and Phillips County parcels)	
General Location:	T. 37 N., R. 23, 24, 25, 26 and 27 E.	
General Description:	Northeast Blaine County and Northwest Phillips County	
Acreage:	32,869	
Values Considered:	Essential habitat for Grassland Birds, and Unique Landscape	
<i>Relevance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value	Yes	No significant historic or cultural values are known. The area has a distinct topography which resulted from downwasting of stagnant glacial ice about ten thousand years ago. Accumulated glacial debris deposited from this process formed an undulating landscape of many small hills with moderately steep to steep slopes and enclosed depression, best described as a hummocky moraine. This area differs from the glacial landscape found to the south that escaped severe glacial scouring, resulting in smoother relief.-
A fish and wildlife resource	Yes	<p>The Northwest Woody Island ablation moraine is a block of intact grassland habitat and entirely public land (22,411 acres) which is located in north Blaine County and bordered by Canada to the north.</p> <p>This area is valuable, intact, habitat for grassland-associated birds. Some of these species are Montana/Dakotas BLM Sensitive Species and endemic to the Northern Great Plains: Ferruginous Hawk, Long-billed Curlew, Willet, Marbled Godwit, Sprague’s Pipit, Baird’s Sparrow, McCown’s Longspur and Chestnut-collared Longspur. There are also a number of other Special Status Species throughout the area including the swift fox</p> <p>Populations of grassland associated birds have exhibited the steepest declines of any suite of bird species in North America over the past several decades. Loss of habitat throughout North America, resulting from conversion of native prairie to agricultural production, has been identified as the primary cause of current grassland bird declines. Large blocks of intact prairie lands remaining in Montana, therefore, provide critically important breeding habitat for many grassland bird species.</p> <p>Of the 41 bird species documented for the Northwest Woody Island Coulee ablation moraine in the Montana Natural Heritage Program Point Observation Database, 22 have displayed some evidence of breeding; Fourteen are listed as State of Montana Species of Concern. Five of the ten most abundant species recorded during 2008 are State of Montana Species of Concern as well as Montana/Dakotas BLM Sensitive Species. All are endemic Great Plains prairie birds.</p> <p>The present diversity and abundance of prairie endemic bird species at Northwest Woody Island Coulee indicates a variety of habitat elements is available on this unique BLM parcel. The relative abundance of McCown’s Longspurs, a species which requires sparse short grass and bare ground (With 1994), compared with other grassland areas in the state, suggests Woody Island Coulee is an area of short-stature grasses. The abundance of Chestnut-collared Longspurs, and to a lesser extent, Sprague’s Pipits, both of which show a preference for areas with</p>

		<p>moderate grass cover and litter, (Hill and Gould 1997, Robbins and Dale 1999) indicates the presence of mid-level grass. Also present, however, are Baird’s Sparrows, which require denser grass and litter (Green, et al. 2002), suggesting the presence of a taller, more complex structure.</p> <p>Woody Island Coulee provides important habitat for prairie endemic species of a different composition than those found in Valley County, an area in which the Heritage Program has been conducting annual point counts since 2001. The total percent of points on which Chestnut-collared Longspurs were detected at Woody Island Coulee was 99% (compared to the average yearly percent of points for years 2001-2006 for this species in Valley County at 81-87%). McCown’s Longspur, present in much greater abundance at Woody Island Coulee, was recorded on 69% of the point counts during 2008 (the average Valley County is only between 14% and 31% for years 2001-2006). Detection rates for Baird’s Sparrow and Long-billed Curlew were similar to those in Valley County.</p> <p>Current management activities at Northwest Woody Island Coulee allows for a unique composition of Northern Great Plains native grassland bird species. The property contains the highest concentration of McCown’s Longspurs for any area surveyed by the Montana Natural Heritage Program, and possibly for any public lands site in Montana. The diversity and abundance of the endemic grassland bird State of Montana Species of Concern documented at Woody Island Coulee warrants continued and enhanced protection for this unique BLM property. Northwest Woody Island Coulee is critical to the conservation of Montana’s grassland bird species.</p> <p>Similar things can be said for the Northeast Woody Island Coulee end moraine in northwest Phillips County and eastern Blaine County. It is comprised of 10,440 acres of public land and is separated from the Northwest Woody Island Coulee unit by several miles of mostly cultivated private land. It is located two miles south of Canada.</p> <p>Modified Emlen (1977) transects completed by the BLM and the FWS on the north edge of the unit during 1980, 1995-2002, and 2003-2009 found the most abundant grassland birds to be (in decreasing order) the Chestnut-collared Longspur, Baird’s Sparrow, McCown’s Longspur, and Sprague’s Pipit. Baird’s Sparrow numbers remained high at a time when it was listed as endangered in Canada just a few miles away. Other BLM Sensitive Species found on the unit included Marbled Godwit, Long-billed Curlew, Willet, Wilson’s Phalarope, Ferruginous Hawk, Swainson’s Hawk, Franklin’s Gull and Golden Eagle. A variety of waterfowl and shorebird species are present in wet years due to the abundance of natural potholes. The density of potholes is so great that the observer performing the Emlen transects has to use a compass to stay on course and avoid getting lost.</p>
A natural process or system	No	No threatened, endangered, or otherwise rare plants are known.
Natural hazards	No	No natural hazards are known.
Importance Value	Yes/No	Rationale for Determination
More than locally significant qualities	No	Similar sites and values can be found in other areas.
Special qualities	Yes	The North Woody Island ablation moraine is a unique landscape comprised of hills and depressions that do not form into surface watershed unlike the rest of

		<p>the glaciated plains which have “scraped off” and cut watershed landscapes.</p> <p>The Blaine County moraine (northwest) is an island of relatively contiguous, public land habitat surrounded by private land to the west, south and east, with the International Line forming the northern boundary. Farming is common in the surrounding private land.</p> <p>The Phillips County moraine (northeast) is also a contiguous block of public land surrounded by a mix of public, state and private land on all sides. The private land is either farmed or in the Conservation Reserve Program.</p> <p>The landscape is virtually untouched with only a few livestock pits, windmills and two-track vehicle trails which for the most part are relatively unnoticed and do not detract from the visual character of the landscape.</p> <p>This landscape is vulnerable to change from off-road travel mainly associated with hunting, but also the steep, hilly terrain may be subject to recreational illegal off-road use in the future. Though the entire area is classified as low potential for gas development and is currently not leased in Blaine County, many parcels within the nominated ACEC were nominated prior to a voluntary moratorium by BLM for new leases within the West HiLine RMP until a Land Use Plan has been finalized. There are concerns that the currently un-fragmented wildlife habitat could be at risk if gas development occurs in this unique and rare landscape. Much of the Phillips County portion has been leased, but no development has occurred. It is administered by the Judith-Valley-Phillips RMP.</p> <p>The grassland bird assemblage, although found in other locations, is at a high density and includes a high proportion of McCown’s Longspurs not found at other locations. The pothole habitat obtains some, to much runoff each year which replenishes subsurface soil moisture necessary for maintaining proper nest humidity for ground-nesting birds. Species such as the Baird’s Sparrow and Sprague’s Pipit can be nomadic resulting in shifts away from other locations that remain completely dry during drought periods. Nest humidity appears to be adequate in the Woody Island Coulee area to retain birds in all years. Data from Emlen (1977) transects in Phillips County indicate that high numbers of grassland birds are present each year regardless of persistent drought periods. The cacophony of bird sound at dawn during the breeding season would be difficult to duplicate at other locations.</p>
Warrants national priority/FLPMA protection	No	No national priority concerns are known.
Safety/public welfare concerns	No	No safety or public welfare concerns are known.
Poses a significant threat	No	No significant threats.



National Agriculture Imagery Program (NAIP) 2011 Imagery shows the Ablation Moraine Landscape, where surrounding area has mostly been farmed.

Created by the Malta Field Office in December 2012
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Map K.10
 Woody Island
Area of Critical Environmental Concern

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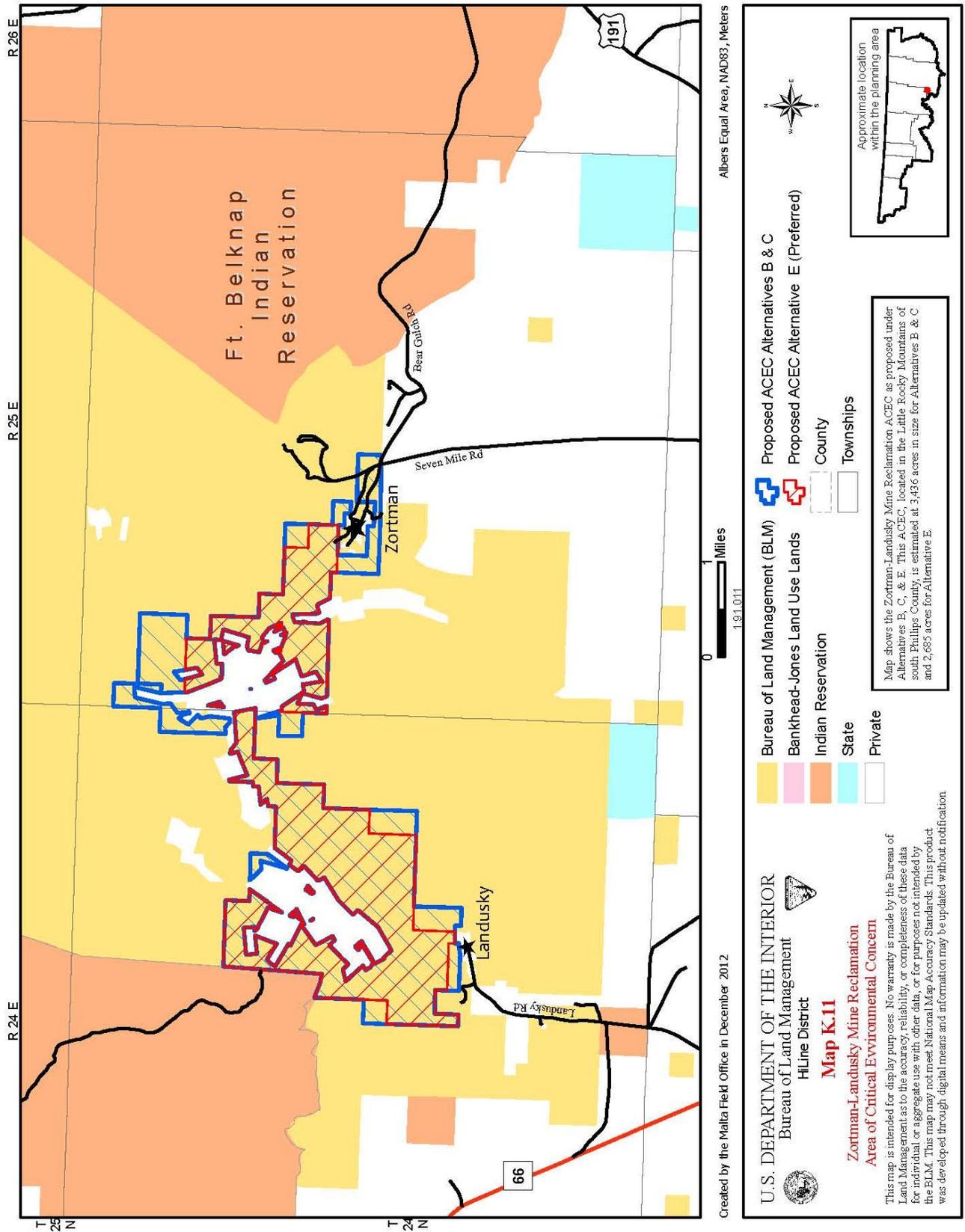
Proposed ACEC Alternative E
 Proposed ACEC Alternatives C & D
 Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
 Bankhead-Jones Land Use Lands
 State
 Private
 County
 Townships

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Map shows the proposed Woody Island ACEC located along the Canadian Border in northern Blaine County. Alternatives C & D would include 22,411 acres and Alternative E would include 32,870 acres.

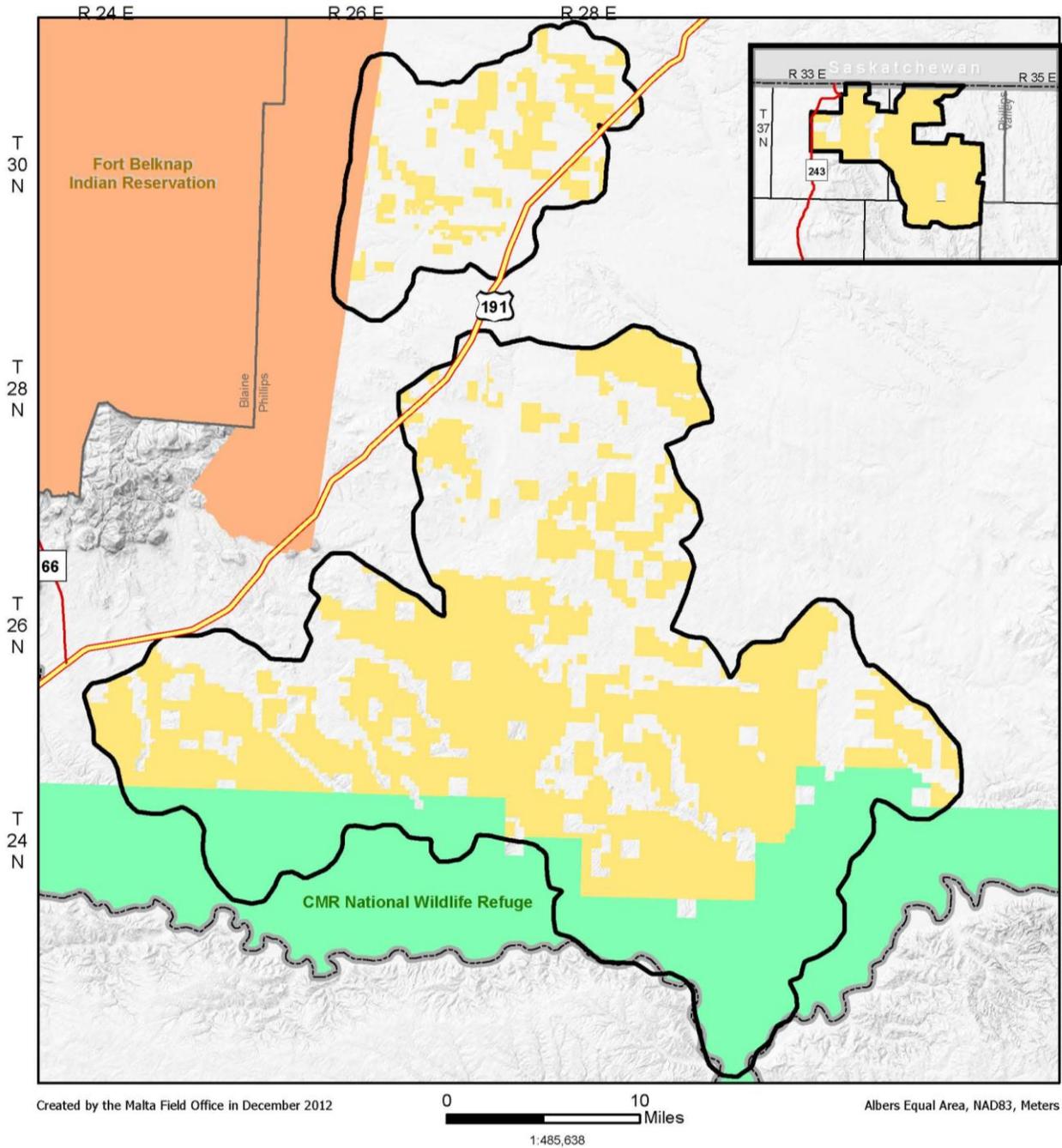
Approximate location within the planning area

Table K.11 Zortman/Landusky Mine Reclamation ACEC Relevance and Importance Evaluation		
Area Considered:	Zortman/Landusky Mine, Little Rocky Mountains	
General Location:	T. 25 N., R. 24 E.; T. 25 N., R. 25 E.	
General Description:	Southeast Phillips County	
Acreage:	3,575	
Values Considered:	Natural Hazards	
<i>Relevance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value	No	No significant historic or cultural values are known. Scenic values are moderate, but are similar to those of many other areas in the Malta Field Office.
A fish and wildlife resource	No	No habitat for endangered, sensitive, or threatened fish and wildlife species are known.
A natural process or system	No	No threatened, endangered, or otherwise rare plants are known.
Natural hazards	Yes	The Zortman/Landusky mine reclamation site consists of several large engineered slopes with thin and sensitive soils that are prone to severe erosion. The site also contains hazardously steep highwalls exposed along the edge of many of the reclaimed open pits.
<i>Importance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
More than locally significant qualities	No	Natural resources present are similar to other areas within Montana.
Special qualities	Yes	The Zortman/Landusky mine reclamation site consists of several large engineered slopes with thin and sensitive soils that are prone to severe erosion. The site also contains hazardously steep highwalls exposed along the edge of many of the reclaimed open pits.
Warrants national priority/FLPMA protection	No	No national priority concerns are known.
Safety/public welfare concerns	Yes	As part of the reclamation, several facilities for water quality treatment are present within the mine reclamation area. If the public is allowed access to these structures and facilities, it would create a concern for human safety, as well as potentially interrupting the water treatment process.
Poses a significant threat	Yes	Engineered slopes within the site are susceptible to severe erosion and instability early in the reclamation process. Exposed highwalls around the open pit areas also pose similar risks to the public with increased potential rock fall and hazardously steep surfaces. This sort of risk threatens human life and safety or property if the public is allowed any activity on or around the slopes and highwalls within the nominated ACEC.



Nominations Received During the Planning Process

Table K.12 Black-tailed Prairie Dog and Black-footed Ferret Habitat Relevance and Importance Evaluation		
Area Considered:	Phillips County	
General Location:		
General Description:	Mostly southern Phillips County and a small area in northern Phillips County	
Acreage:	268,563	
Values Considered:	Black-tailed prairie dogs and black-footed ferret habitat.	
<i>Relevance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value	No	No significant historic or cultural values are known. Scenic values are moderate, but are similar to those of many other areas in the planning area
A fish and wildlife resource	Yes	The southern portion of the nominated area meets the relevance criterion for wildlife resources. This area provides habitat for prairie dogs as noted by the MFWP Region 6 Prairie Dog Abundance and Distribution Objectives Plan (2006). Prairie dogs are a BLM sensitive species. However, the portion of the nominated area in north Phillips County does not meet the relevance criterion because there are no prairie dogs or black-footed ferrets currently in this area and this area has little potential for prairie dogs due to the steep slopes and rugged nature of the area.
A natural process or system	Yes	The southern portion of the nominated area also meets the criterion for a natural system or process because prairie dog towns in the nomination area also provide habitat for a broad suite of wildlife species, including many BLM special status species because of the unique habitat features they create by burrowing and grazing. The northern portion does not meet the criterion.
Natural hazards	No	No natural hazards are known.
<i>Importance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
More than locally significant qualities	No	The nomination does not meet the importance criteria. Although important to black-tailed prairie dog and black-footed ferret conservation as noted in the nomination material, the area is not significantly unique or more important than other habitat areas throughout the range of these species.
Special qualities	No	Prairie dog complexes of various sizes occur throughout much of the former range of the black-tailed prairie dog.
Warrants national priority/FLPMA protection	No	No national priority concerns are known.
Safety/public welfare concerns	No	No safety or public welfare concerns are known.
Poses a significant threat	No	No significant threats.



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Map K.12

**Black-tailed Prairie Dog & Black-footed Ferret
Nominated Area of Critical Environmental Concern**

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- Nominated ACEC
- BLM within Nominated Boundary
- Indian Reservation
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- County
- Highway
- Local Roads

Approximate location within the planning area

Table K.13 Five Watersheds Relevance and Importance Evaluation		
Area Considered:	Blaine, Phillips and Valley Counties	
General Location:		
General Description:	Five watersheds in Blaine, Phillips and Valley Counties	
Acreage:	487,871	
Values Considered:	Streams and Fisheries	
<i>Relevance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value	No	No significant historic or cultural values are known. Scenic values are moderate, but are similar to those of many other areas in the planning area
A fish and wildlife resource	Yes	The nomination meets the relevance value for wildlife resources. Small prairie streams within the HiLine District planning area provide habitat for the BLM sensitive species pearl dace and northern redbelly x finescale dace hybrid. Little is known of these fish species and populations could be rather low. Several of the small streams are spring-fed and pool levels are dependent upon protection of the source springs, especially during periods of extended drought.
A natural process or system	Yes	The nomination also meets the relevance value for a natural system or process. Prairie streams in these watersheds are part of the hydrologic cycle and exist in the Missouri River Watershed. The five watersheds include aquatic habitat that supports a variety of sensitive fish species.
Natural hazards	No	No natural hazards are known.
<i>Importance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
More than locally significant qualities	No	The five watershed areas are not significantly unique or more important than other watersheds in the HiLine District planning area. Although the five watersheds most likely have fish, the BLM has limited or no data on native minnow populations or species diversity for them. Warm Creek does have significant populations of minnows in pools near road culverts, but Telegraph Creek is usually dry with limited pool habitat. A survey of Rock Creek in Valley County in 1979 found longnose dace, but not the sensitive dace species.
Special qualities	No	There are small prairie streams within the planning area that have records of the sensitive dace species, so the nominated streams are in no way unique, rare or exemplary. The BLM has records of the sensitive dace species in Phillips County from Whitewater Creek, Cottonwood Creek, and Garland Creek. Assiniboine Creek also supports a fish population, but species composition has not been studied.
Warrants national priority/FLPMA protection	No	No national priority concerns are known.
Safety/public welfare concerns	No	No safety or public welfare concerns are known.
Poses a significant threat	No	No significant threats.

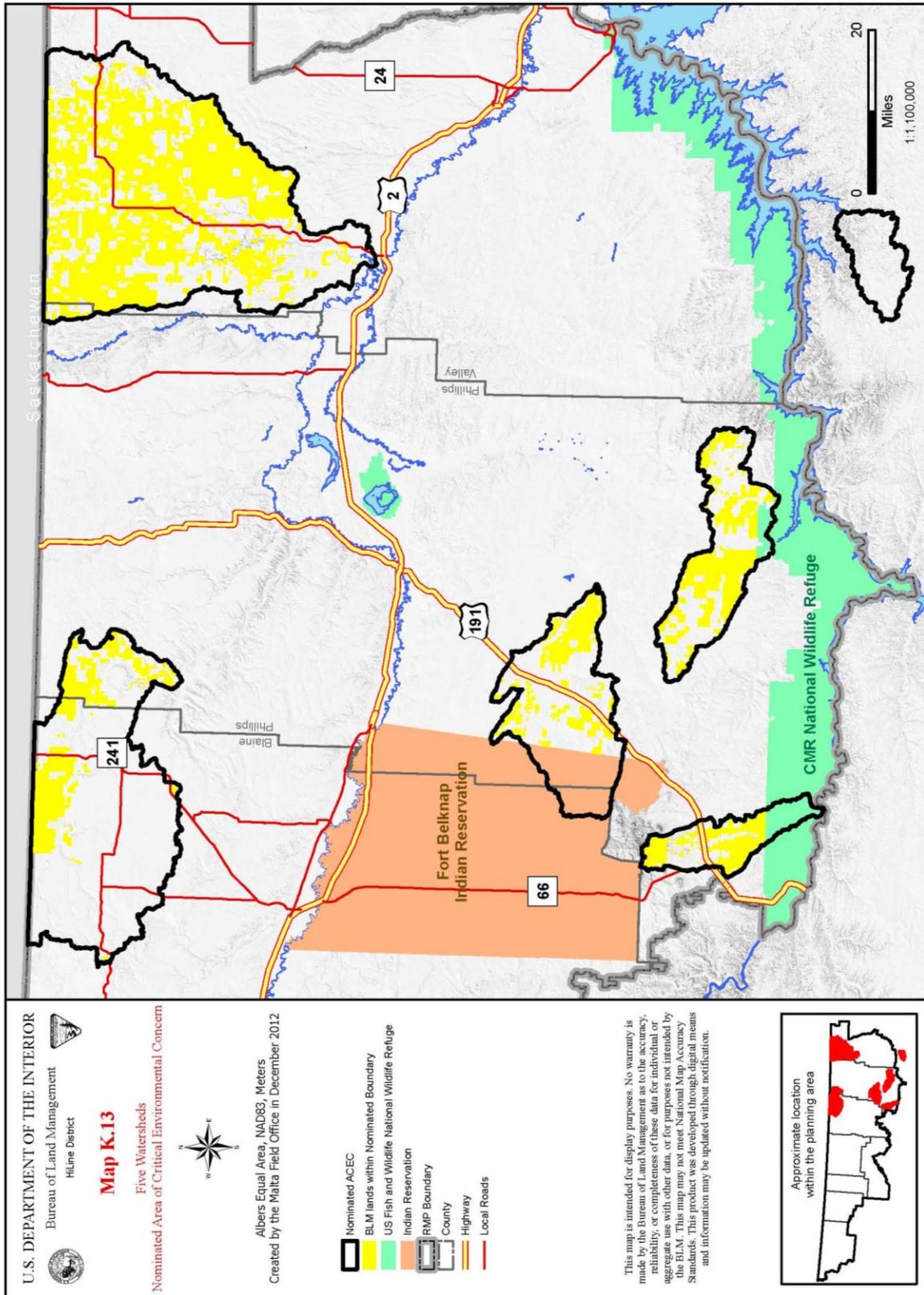
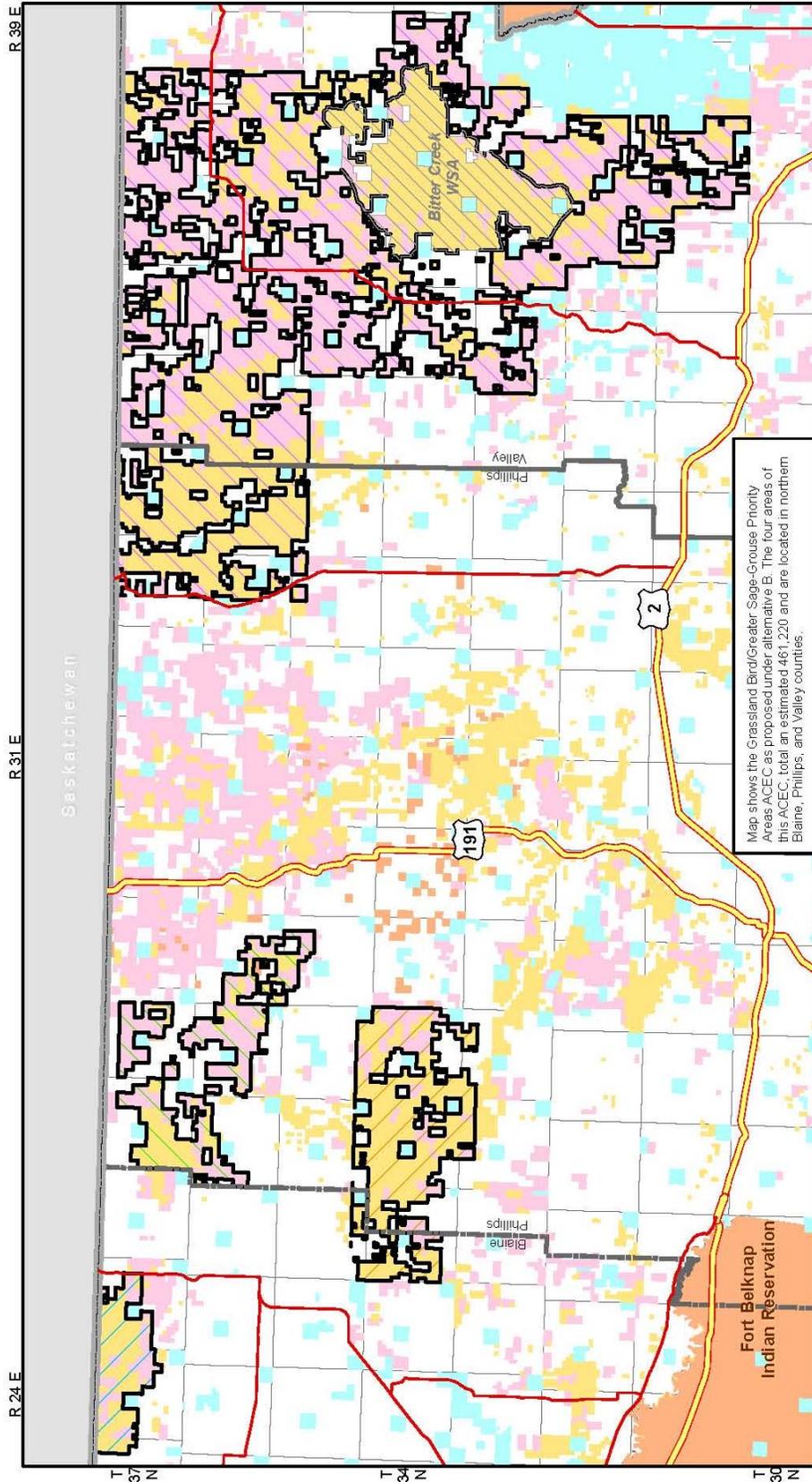


Table K.14 Grassland Bird/Greater Sage-Grouse Relevance and Importance Evaluation		
Area Considered: Valley County		
General Location:		
General Description: Northern Valley County		
Acreage: 341,468		
Values Considered: Grassland bird and greater sage-grouse habitat		
<i>Relevance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value	No	No significant historic or cultural values are known. Scenic values are moderate, but are similar to those of many other areas in the planning area
A fish and wildlife resource	Yes	The nomination meets the relevance criterion for wildlife resources. The nominated area provides habitat for greater sage-grouse (310,806 acres) as well as a suite of grassland birds including BLM sensitive species long-billed curlew, Sprague’s pipit, Baird’s sparrow, McCown’s longspur and chestnut-collared longspur.
A natural process or system	Yes	The nomination also meets the criterion for a natural system or process because of the condition of the grassland habitat in the nomination area. Large blocks of native grasslands provide quality habitat for grassland birds.
Natural hazards	No	No natural hazards are known.
<i>Importance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
More than locally significant qualities	No	<p>Although the area contains habitat for greater sage-grouse and grassland bird conservation as noted in the nomination material, the area is not significantly unique or more important than other habitat areas in this region.</p> <p>Greater sage-grouse are distributed throughout the western United States. The portion of the distribution in Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, Alberta, and Saskatchewan are designated as Management Zone I (Stiver, et al. 2006). Management zones are delineations of greater sage-grouse populations and sub-populations within floristic zones with similar management issues. Within Management Zone I in Montana, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) has designated core areas (MFWP 2009) and Wyoming Game and Fish has also designated core areas in Wyoming (Wyoming Game and Fish 2009).</p> <p>In addition, Montana Audubon has also designated five important bird areas for sage-steppe associated birds, including greater sage-grouse, in Montana, most of which are contained within the MFWP core areas.</p> <p>All of these areas are considered important to greater sage-grouse conservation. In addition, greater sage-grouse habitat in these core areas is owned by a number of different entities and habitat on BLM lands is not distinct from habitat managed by other ownership.</p> <p>Results of modeling for grassland bird distribution suggests that much of the planning area provides habitat for a suite of grassland birds of conservation concern (Hendricks, et al. 2008). The nominated lands are not significantly unique or more important than other lands depicted in the modeling effort. All of</p>

		these areas are important to grassland bird conservation. In addition, grassland bird habitat in the area is owned by a number of different entities and habitat on BLM land is not distinct from habitat managed by other ownership.
Special qualities	No	The area is not particularly fragile or sensitive to change as compared to other sites in Montana.
Warrants national priority/FLPMA protection	Yes	<p>The initiative to conserve, enhance, and restore greater sage-grouse habitat is the result of the March 2010, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) 12-Month Finding for Petitions to List the Greater Sage-Grouse (<i>Centrocercus urophasianus</i>) as Threatened or Endangered. In that finding, the USFWS concluded that greater sage-grouse was “warranted, but precluded” for listing as a threatened or endangered species.</p> <p>Over 50% of the greater sage-grouse habitat is located on BLM-managed lands. In its “warranted, but precluded” listing decision, USFWS concluded that existing regulatory mechanisms, defined as “specific direction regarding sage-grouse habitat, conservation, or management” in the BLM’s Land Use Plans, were inadequate to protect the species. The USFWS is scheduled to make a new listing decision in Fiscal Year 2015.</p>
Safety/public welfare concerns	No	No safety or public welfare concerns are known.
Poses a significant threat	No	No significant threats.



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Map K.14
Grassland Bird/Greater Sage-Grouse Priority Areas
Proposed Area of Critical Environmental Concern

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Existing ACEC
 [Hatched Box] Existing ACEC

Proposed ACEC areas
 [Diagonal Lines Box] Grassland Bird/SageGrouse PPA1
 [Blue Diagonal Lines Box] Grassland Bird/SageGrouse PPA2
 [Green Diagonal Lines Box] Grassland Bird/SageGrouse PPA3
 [Yellow Diagonal Lines Box] Grassland Bird/SageGrouse PPA4

BLM Land Use
 [Yellow Box] Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
 [Pink Box] Bankhead-Jones Land Use Lands

Other Land Use
 [Orange Box] Indian Reservation
 [Light Blue Box] State
 [White Box] Private

Infrastructure
 [Thick Yellow Line] Highway
 [Thin Red Line] Local Roads
 [Red Outline] RMP Boundary
 [Grey Box] County
 [White Box] Townships

Scale
 0 8 Miles
 0 1670.641 Meters

Legend
 [North Arrow] North
 [Inset Map] Approximate location within the planning area

Map Description
 Map shows the Grassland Bird/Greater Sage-Grouse Priority Areas ACEC as proposed under alternative B. The four areas of this ACEC, total an estimated 461,220 and are located in northern Blaine, Phillips, and Valley counties.

Table K.15 Greater Sage-Grouse Relevance and Importance Evaluation		
Area Considered:	Phillips and Valley Counties	
General Location:		
General Description:	Southern Phillips and Valley Counties	
Acreage:	885,399	
Values Considered:	Greater sage-grouse habitat	
<i>Relevance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value	No	No significant historic or cultural values are known. Scenic values are moderate, but are similar to those of many other areas in the planning area
A fish and wildlife resource	Yes	The nomination meets the relevance criterion for wildlife resources. The nominated area provides habitat for greater sage-grouse (839,659 acres), a BLM sensitive species, and the area has also been identified as a core area by MFWP.
A natural process or system	Yes	The nomination also meets the criterion for a natural system or process because of the condition of the sagebrush habitat in the nomination area.
Natural hazards	No	No natural hazards are known.
<i>Importance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
More than locally significant qualities	No	The nomination does not meet the importance criteria. Although the area contains habitat for greater sage-grouse and grassland bird conservation as noted in the nomination material, the area is not significantly unique or more important than other habitat areas in this region. See the discussion for greater sage-grouse under the grassland bird/greater sage-grouse nomination.
Special qualities	No	The area is not particularly fragile or sensitive to change as compared to other sites in Montana.
Warrants national priority/FLPMA protection	Yes	<p>The initiative to conserve, enhance, and restore greater sage-grouse habitat is the result of the March 2010, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) 12-Month Finding for Petitions to List the Greater Sage-Grouse (<i>Centrocercus urophasianus</i>) as Threatened or Endangered. In that finding, the USFWS concluded that greater sage-grouse was “warranted, but precluded” for listing as a threatened or endangered species.</p> <p>Over 50% of the greater sage-grouse habitat is located on BLM-managed lands. In its “warranted, but precluded” listing decision, USFWS concluded that existing regulatory mechanisms, defined as “specific direction regarding sage-grouse habitat, conservation, or management” in the BLM’s Land Use Plans, were inadequate to protect the species. The USFWS is scheduled to make a new listing decision in Fiscal Year 2015.</p>
Safety/public welfare concerns	No	No safety or public welfare concerns are known.
Poses a significant threat	No	No significant threats.

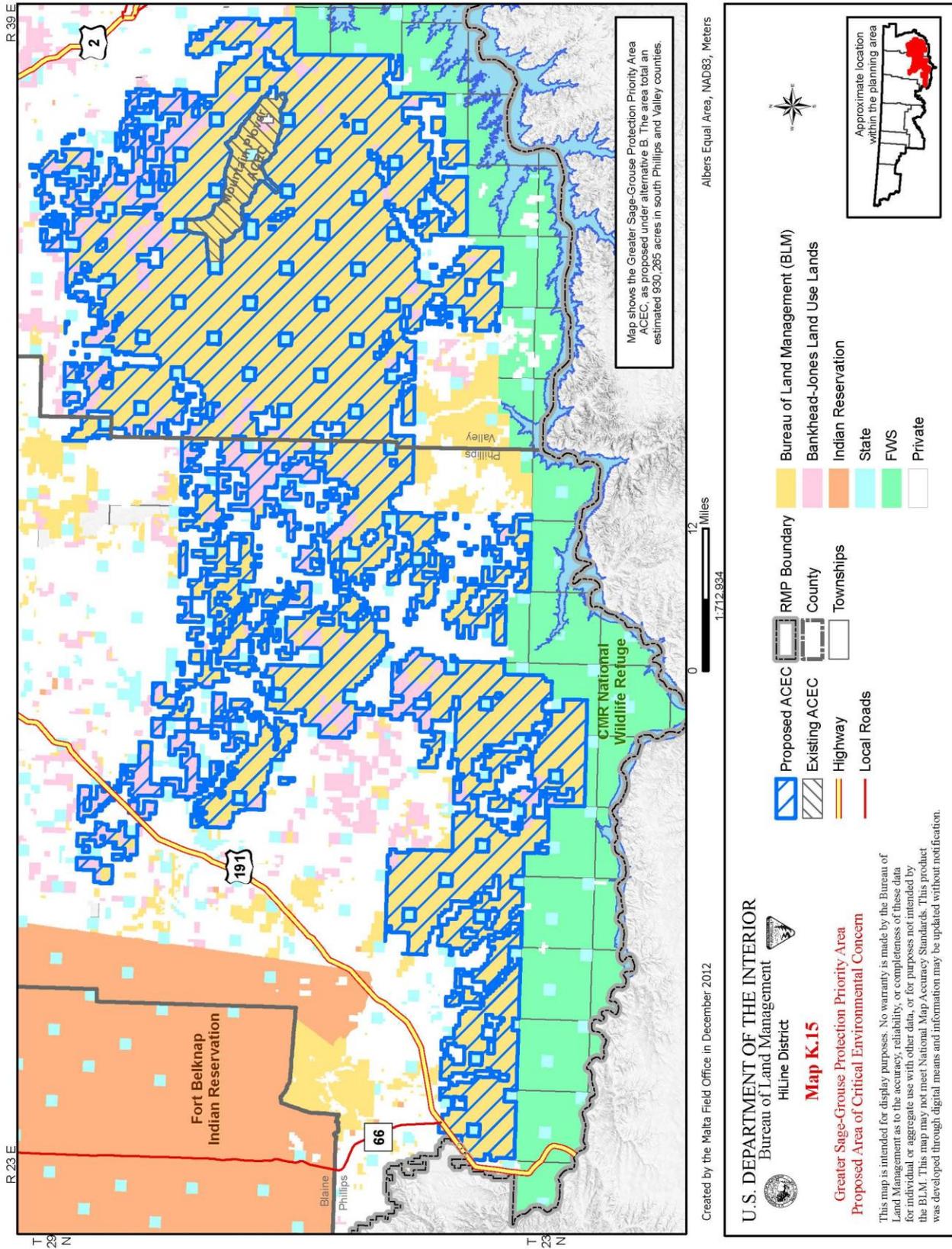
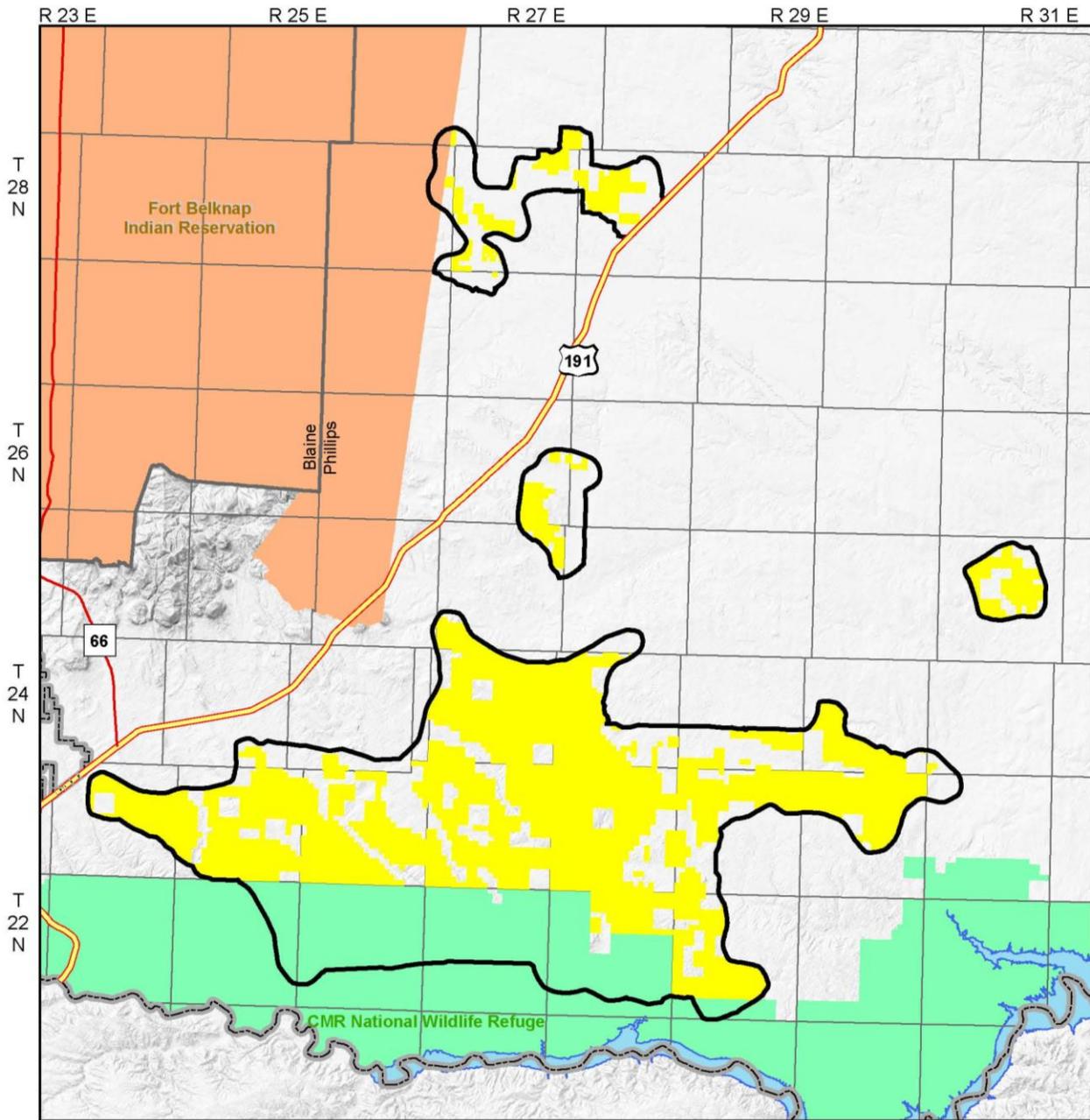
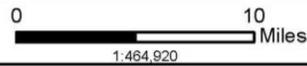


Table K.16 Mountain Plover Relevance and Importance Evaluation		
Area Considered:	Phillips County	
General Location:		
General Description:	South Phillips County	
Acreage:	148,425	
Values Considered:	Mountain plover habitat	
<i>Relevance Value</i>		
<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>	
A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value	No	No significant historic or cultural values are known. Scenic values are moderate, but are similar to those of many other areas in the planning area
A fish and wildlife resource	Yes	The nomination meets the relevance criterion for wildlife resources. The nominated area provides habitat for mountain plovers (134,111 acres), a BLM species of concern and currently petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act and will be a proposed species by July 31, 2010.
A natural process or system	No	No threatened, endangered, or otherwise rare plants are known.
Natural hazards	No	No natural hazards are known.
<i>Importance Value</i>		
<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>	
More than locally significant qualities	No	<p>The nomination does not meet the importance criteria. Although this area is important to mountain plover conservation as noted in the nomination material, the area is not significantly unique or more important than other habitat areas throughout the range of the mountain plover.</p> <p>Mountain plovers breeding distribution in North America is confined to the northern Great Plains (Knopf and Wunder 2006) and is associated with areas of short grass, often created by prairie dogs.</p> <p>The Mountain Plover Conservation Plan (Andres and Stone 2009) describes a number of important breeding sites throughout the species range and states that of the three states where most breeding occurs, Colorado has the greatest number of breeding plovers (11,000) followed by Wyoming (3,400) and then Montana (1,600). The nomination is located in the Northern Prairie Region of breeding mountain plovers (Andres and Stone 2009), and is considered a key area and an area of highest abundance of mountain plovers in the state, along with Blaine and Valley Counties (Andres and Stone 2009).</p>
Special qualities	No	The nominated area for mountain plovers is habitat associated with black-tailed prairie dog towns as noted in the nomination material. Much of the breeding distribution in Valley County is currently designated a Mountain Plover ACEC (BLM 2000) because of the unique nature of the breeding habitat which is not associated with prairie dogs. In addition, modeling of mountain plover distribution in Montana suggests that the area along the south side of the Snowy Mountains in Wheatland and Golden Valley Counties is also an area of importance of mountain plovers in Montana.
Warrants national priority/FLPMA protection	No	No national priority concerns are known.
Safety/public welfare concerns	No	No safety or public welfare concerns are known.
Poses a significant threat	No	No significant threats.



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Map K.16

Mountain Plover Area
Nominated Area of Critical Environmental Concern

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- Highway
- Local Roads
- Nominated ACEC
- BLM within Nominated Boundary
- Indian Reservation
- US Fish and Wildlife National Wildlife Refuge
- County
- Townships

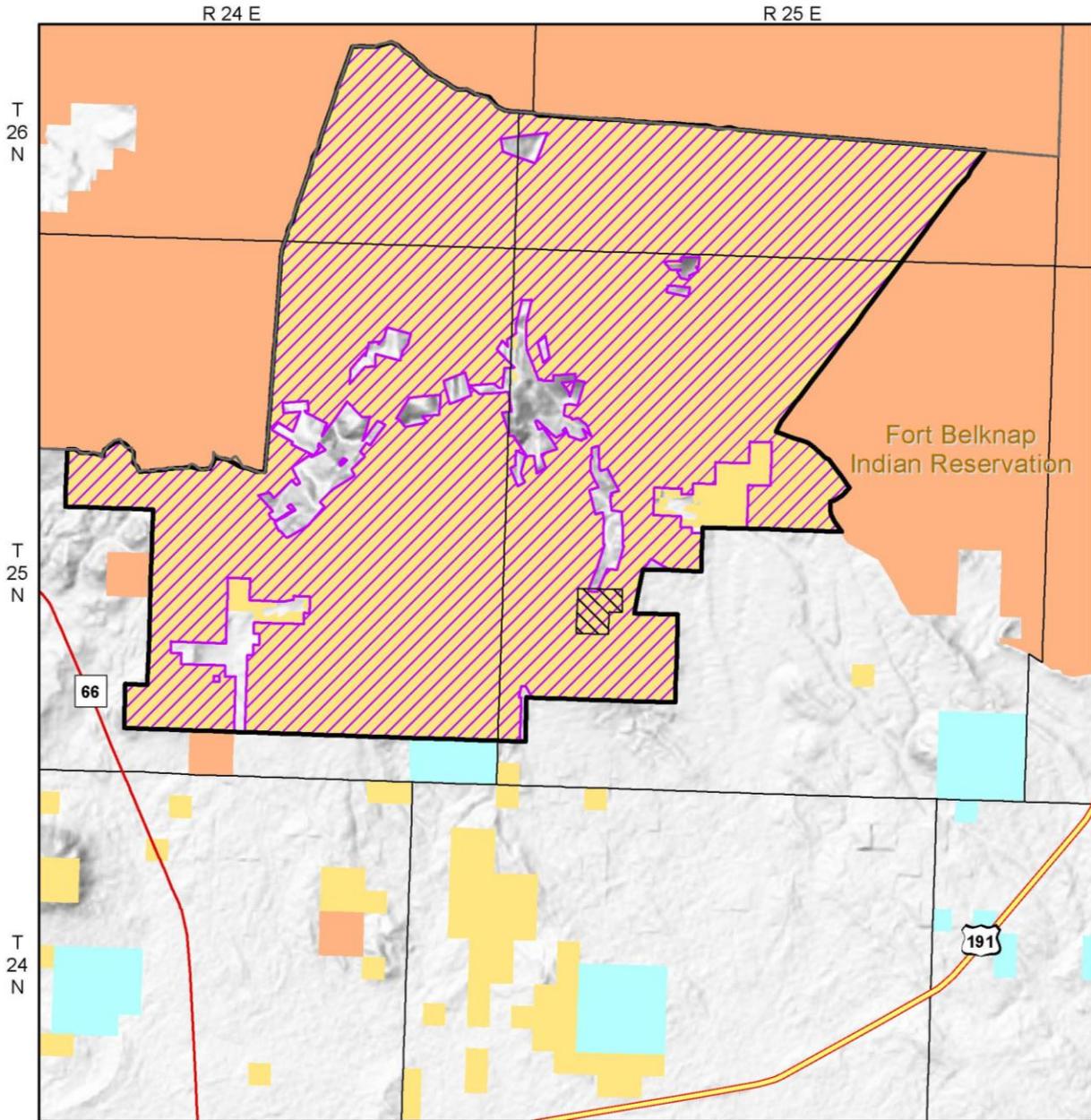
Approximate location within the planning area

Nominations Received Prior to the Commencement of the Planning Process

Table K.17 Little Rocky Mountains ACEC Relevance and Importance Evaluation		
Area Considered: Little Rocky Mountains		
General Location:		
General Description: South Phillips County		
Acreage: 25,000		
Values Considered: Prehistoric and historic archaeological resources and spiritual and traditional resources		
<i>Relevance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value	Yes	<p>Cultural resources consist of both prehistoric and historic archaeological resources and spiritual and traditional resources. The Little Rocky Mountains contain prehistoric and historic archaeological resources and also resources of cultural and religious importance to tribes. Prehistoric archaeological resources in the Little Rocky Mountains mostly comprise of vision questing sites, lithic debris, and rock art sites. Historic archaeological resources in the Little Rocky Mountains consist of mining complexes, mills, cabins, dumps, a ranger station, jail and school (Deaver and Kooistra 1992). The Little Rocky Mountains have been used by indigenous tribal groups throughout the prehistoric and historic periods and are still used today by tribal groups for ceremonial and religious purposes.</p> <p>Once called the Fur Cap Mountains by the Gros Ventre and the Island Mountains by the Assiniboine, the Little Rocky Mountains have many oral histories surrounding them, which have been passed down many generations and are still discussed today. There are several places in the mountain range, which were used for spiritual ceremonies such as vision questing, burials, offerings, and ceremonial dances and are still being used for those purposes today. Particularly seven main peaks were used as fasting altars. On one of those peaks Lame Bull noted that one of her tribe's two sacred pipes was received, just like Moses getting the Ten Commandments (Strahn 1992). The Little Rocky Mountains are considered spiritually sacred by the Assiniboine, Gros Ventre, Blackfeet, Chippewa/Cree and also Native Americans in Canada (Deaver and Kooistra 1992). Because the power of life was apparently more concentrated there, the Little Rockies were perceived as a place in which the Creator was more abundantly manifested (Strahn 1992).</p> <p>The Little Rocky Mountains are littered with limestone caves and in a few is evidence that tribal groups have visited and lived for long periods of time. Three of these caves, Lookout, Two Hands and Grouse Gulch have unique rock art. Lookout Cave is located on the south side of the Little Rockies and has at least 35 individual pictograph images located mostly in an outer chamber but an inner chamber contains a couple as well. The images appear to have been placed there over an extended period of time. In addition to the rock art at Lookout Cave it was studied and excavated in the 1960s and due to the remoteness and dry climate of the cave a series of organic artifacts were recovered. Of the organic material 65 arrowshafts, sinew, trimmed feathers, bone beads, a turtle shell ornament, fossils, a claw, shells, and a wooden flute with insects engraved on it</p>

		<p>were recovered. One arrowshaft was radiocarbon dated to AD 1510-1590. In addition, 46 projectile points dating from the Late Prehistoric Period were collected from the surface of the cave floor and several other points were excavated and date from the Middle Archaic Period (3000 to 4000 years ago). Lookout Cave is located well into the range suggesting use of not only the cave but the Little Rockies over an extended period of time.</p> <p>Grouse Gulch and Two Hands Cave have rock art only and no excavations or surface collections have been conducted. Heart Cave, which has no rock art is approximately 500' west of Two Hands Cave has had various animal bones recovered from the surface of the cave floor.</p> <p>24PH2886 or the King site is a lithic scatter site with both surface debris and buried material located on the reservation. The King Site has been excavated and projectile points ranging in age from Pelican Lake to the Late Plains Side-Notched were recovered. The dating of this site further proves that the Little Rockies have been used by tribal groups over an extended period of time.</p> <p>In conclusion the Little Rocky Mountains meet the Relevance Criterion 1 as a rare or sensitive area of religious and cultural importance to tribes. The Little Rocky Mountains are an integral part of tribal religious identity and contribute significantly to the traditional life way of the tribes in the region.</p>
A fish and wildlife resource	No	No habitat for endangered, sensitive, or threatened fish and wildlife species are known.
A natural process or system	No	No threatened, endangered, or otherwise rare plants are known.
Natural hazards	No	No natural hazards are known.
<i>Importance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
More than locally significant qualities	No	Similar sites and values can be found in other areas of Montana.
Special qualities	Yes	<p>There are several prehistoric archaeological sites, such as vision quest sites, which are direct evidence of past religious use in the Little Rocky Mountains such as vision quest sites. Today cloth offerings can be found in many places in the Little Rocky Mountains, particularly the mountain peaks, however for local traditionalists, all aspects of the Little Rocky Mountains have sacred/holy/spiritual qualities. The mountains, plants, rocks, paints, fossils and animals all have spiritual characteristics (Deaver and Kooistra 1992).</p> <p>Group religious ceremonies and individual religious ceremonies for both Assiniboine and Gros Ventre have been performed in the Little Rocky Mountains. Group ceremonies for the Gros Ventre are the Feathered and Flat Pipe ceremonies and Sacrifice Lodge. As late as 1946, the Gros Ventre held a pipe bundle ceremony (Deaver and Kooistra 1992). Individual ceremonies for the Gros Ventre are vision quests. The individual vision quest is a way to get supernatural power/medicine. The supernatural power is obtained by fasting/questing (Deaver and Kooistra 1992). The Assiniboine group ceremonies were the Sundance and the Horse Dance. The last known Sundance performed by Assiniboine was 1935 (Deaver and Kooistra 1992). Individual Assiniboine ceremonies also include the vision quest which is usually done in an isolated spot in the mountains (Deaver and Kooistra 1992).</p> <p>Assiniboine and Gros Ventre both have oral stories, which relate to the spiritual values of the Little Rocky Mountains. Oral stories are stories told from</p>

		<p>generation to generation as a tool to teach the young people about tribal culture, ethics and in particular tribal religion. One example of oral tradition and its use in religion practiced in the Little Rocky Mountains is defined by Dan Flemmer (1991):</p> <p>The plant resources can only be used to the fullest advantage when a specific level of understanding is attained via cognitive and spiritual education into, first, the proper physical use of the resources, and second, the spiritual understanding the individual must attain before physical application is most advantageous. A common phrase used to describe this combined attainment of pharmacological and spiritual knowledge is referenced as in a good or respectful way (2/13 and 14/1991, personal communication with the author). The process of enabling individuals to use the natural plant resources of the area in this way can only be fully realized by ceremonial use, within the complete education process, of the areas specific to the perception of the individual who seeks to use this combination of physical and spiritual resources.</p> <p>Archaeological evidence on the surrounding plains suggests that tribes used it differently than the Little Rocky Mountains. Unlike the spiritual sites discussed above in the Little Rocky Mountains, the surrounding plains mostly contain sites associated with habitation, subsistence and hunting. These types of land uses culminate in archaeological sites such as tipi ring sites, drive lines, and kill sites. These are the predominant site types on the northern plains. Although these site types are found in the Little Rocky Mountains they are rare. Spiritual sites such as vision quest sites found in the Little Rocky Mountains are even rarer on the plains. There are no caves like those found in the Little Rocky Mountains located on the surrounding plains. Although the plains are no longer used by tribes as they were traditionally used for such as habitation camps and hunting grounds, the Little Rocky Mountains are still used today for the same spiritual purposes as they have been for generations.</p> <p>The Little Rocky Mountains meet Criterion 2 for Importance. The sensitive resources within the Little Rocky Mountains are vulnerable to loss by damage and/or destruction from other resource uses. These sensitive resources are directly linked to the spiritual and cultural lifeway of the tribal peoples who use them. If these sensitive resources are damaged or removed the tribal people's link to that spiritual and cultural lifeway is dramatically hindered. Their ability to practice their religious beliefs would be jeopardized. The sensitive resources utilized by the tribes in the Little Rocky Mountains are resources which are inherently non-renewable in nature, particularly archaeological sites like vision quest and fasting structures. These resources have been used for generations and several physical attributes are still standing and used today.</p> <p>In conclusion, the Little Rocky Mountains meet criterion 1 for Relevance and criterion 2 for Importance.</p>
Warrants national priority/FLPMA protection	No	No national priority concerns are known.
Safety/public welfare concerns	No	No safety or public welfare concerns are known.
Poses a significant threat	No	No significant threats.



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Map K.17

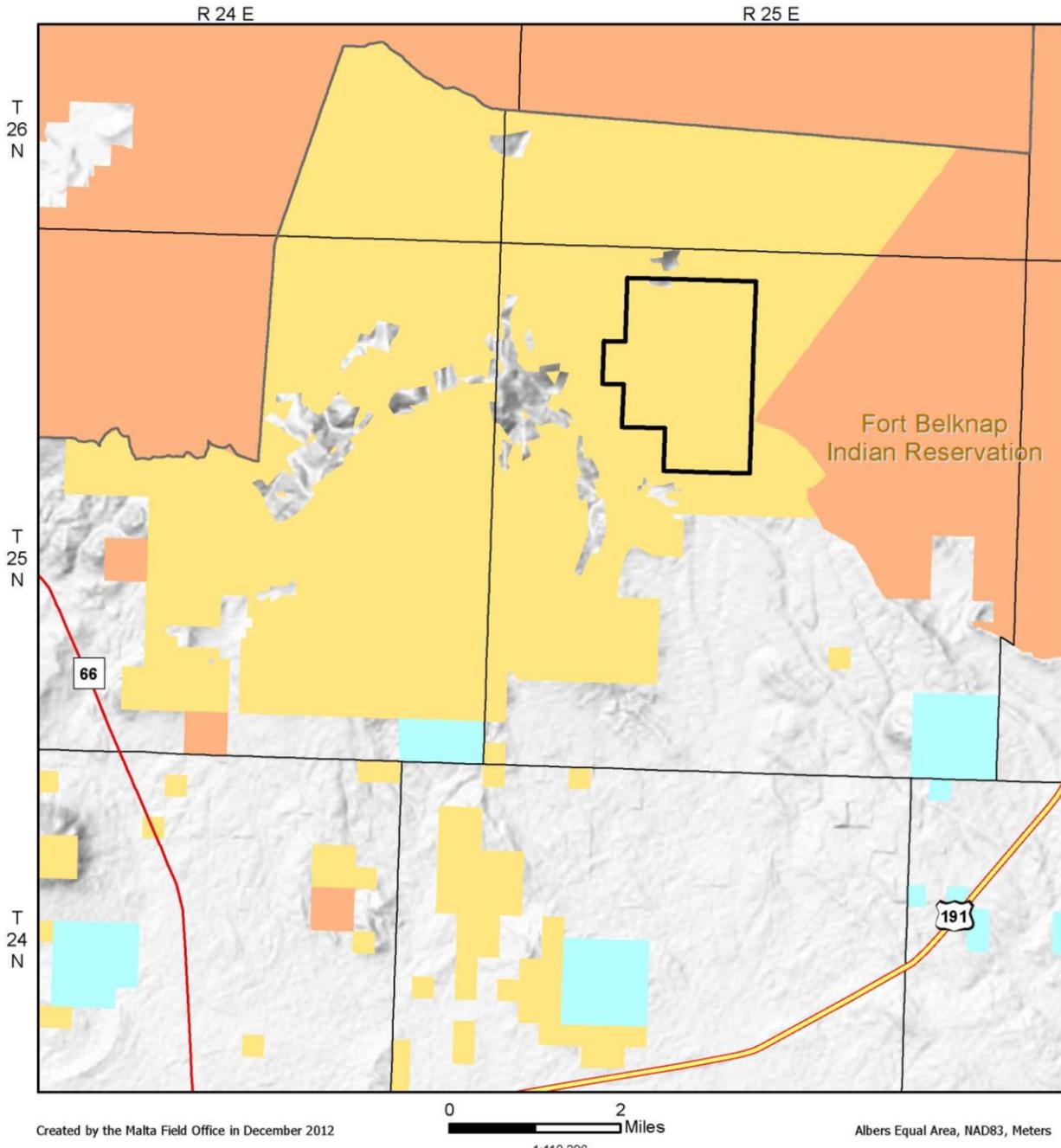
Little Rocky Mountains
Nominated Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

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Nominated ACEC	County
Proposed ACEC Alternative D	Townships
Existing ACEC	Highway
Bureau of Land Management (BLM)	Local Roads
Indian Reservation	
State	
Private	

Approximate location within the planning area

Table K.18 Old Scraggy Relevance and Importance Evaluation		
Area Considered:	Little Rocky Mountains	
General Location:		
General Description:	South Phillips County	
Acreage:	2,080	
Values Considered:	Cultural resources	
<i>Relevance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value	Yes	Old Scraggy contains vision questing sites used for religious purposes and landmark. Old Scraggy is the highest peak in the Little Rockies range with an elevation of 5708 ft.
A fish and wildlife resource	No	No habitat for endangered, sensitive, or threatened fish and wildlife species are known.
A natural process or system	No	No threatened, endangered, or otherwise rare plants are known.
Natural hazards	No	No natural hazards are known.
<i>Importance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
More than locally significant qualities	No	Many peaks in the Little Rockies were and are used for vision questing, offerings, fasting, and plant/herb collecting. Although Old Scraggy is viewed as an important location spiritually to local Native Americans, it is viewed with the same importance as other peaks in the Little Rockies and in some cases surrounding island mountain ranges as well.
Special qualities	No	The area is not particularly fragile or sensitive to change as compared to other sites in Montana.
Warrants national priority/FLPMA protection	No	No national priority concerns are known.
Safety/public welfare concerns	No	No safety or public welfare concerns are known.
Poses a significant threat	No	No significant threats.



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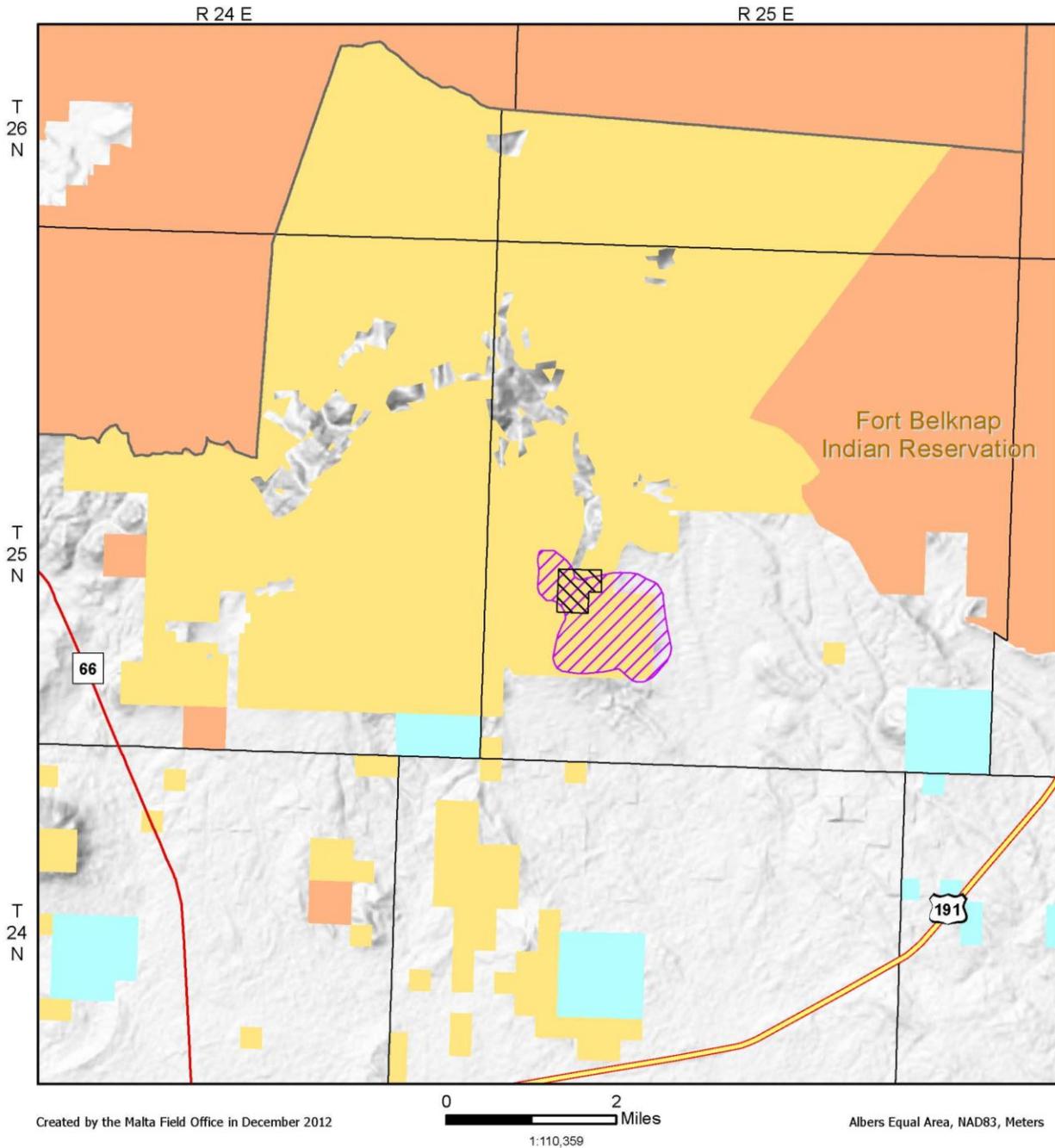
Map K.18
Old Scraggy
Nominated Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

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- Nominated ACEC
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- Indian Reservation
- State
- Private
- County
- Townships
- Highway
- Local Roads

Approximate location within the planning area

Table K.19 Saddle Butte Relevance and Importance Evaluation		
Area Considered:	Little Rocky Mountains	
General Location:		
General Description:	South Phillips County	
Acreage:	1,000	
Values Considered:	Unique vegetation type	
<i>Relevance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value	No	The plant community for which the area was nominated does not occur except as a seral stage of a common community. A subsequent site visit did not find the Douglas fir/little bluestem site. As a seral stage of the common Douglas fir/bluebunch wheatgrass or Douglas fir/Idaho fescue community, proposed vegetation management in the planning area will adequately protect the vegetation resource and manage for the natural range of seral stages.
A fish and wildlife resource	No	No habitat for endangered, sensitive, or threatened fish and wildlife species are known.
A natural process or system	No	No threatened, endangered, or otherwise rare plants are known.
Natural hazards	No	No natural hazards are known.
<i>Importance Value</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Rationale for Determination</i>
More than locally significant qualities	No	The area is not locally or regionally significant.
Special qualities	No	The area is not particularly fragile or sensitive to change as compared to other sites in Montana.
Warrants national priority/FLPMA protection	No	No national priority concerns are known.
Safety/public welfare concerns	No	No safety or public welfare concerns are known.
Poses a significant threat	No	No significant threats.



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Map K.19
Saddle Butte
Nominated Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

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Nominated ACEC	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Existing ACEC	Indian Reservation
County	State
Townships	Private
	Highway
	Local Roads

Approximate location within the RMP