

APPENDIX G

NOMINATED ACECs – EVALUATION SUMMARIES

1 INTRODUCTION

Section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act requires the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to give priority to designation and protection of areas of critical environmental concern (ACECs) during the land use planning process. The BLM Las Cruces District Office is amending or revising the land use plan decisions for public land in Doña Ana, Sierra, and Otero counties and will consider areas nominated for ACEC designation as part of that process.

Areas that have been nominated for ACEC consideration must first be evaluated to determine whether they meet the relevance and importance criteria as prescribed in Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations Part 1610 (43 CFR 1610). A nominated area must meet one or more of both the relevance and importance criteria to be considered a potential ACEC. The proposed ACECs addressed in this appendix were nominated prior to or during scoping for the *TriCounty RMP/Environmental Impact Statement* (RMP/EIS). In 2006, BLM used an interdisciplinary team of resource specialists to assess the natural and cultural values of these areas and to determine if these values met the criteria. This appendix is a summary of those evaluations. The complete evaluation reports are available at the Las Cruces District Office. The nominated ACECs or portions thereof which contained one or more resources that met the relevance and importance criteria were considered further in the RMP process.

This appendix contains summaries of evaluations of 27 areas nominated as special management areas (SMAs) or ACECs for the *TriCounty RMP/Environmental Impact Statement* (RMP/EIS). The SMA designation is not used in this RMP because it has no legal recognition, and all nominated areas were evaluated as potential ACECs. The 27 areas totaled approximately 937,000 acres of public land in Doña Ana, Otero, and Sierra counties. The BLM evaluated each of the 29 areas to determine whether it met required criteria for ACEC designation. Three nominations are expansions of current ACECs. Eighteen areas totaling 430,000 acres have been carried forward and analyzed in this RMP.

1.1 Definition of an ACEC

BLM regulations (43 CFR 1610) define an ACEC as follows:

An area within the public lands where special management attention is required (when such areas are developed or used or where no development is required) to protect and prevent irreparable damage to important historic, cultural, or scenic values, fish and wildlife resources, or other natural systems or processes, or to protect life and safety from natural hazards.

ACECs differ from other special management designations such as wilderness study areas (WSAs) in that the designation, by itself, does not automatically prohibit or restrict other uses in the area. The only regulatory requirement is that a plan of operation is necessary for any proposed locatable mineral exploration or development within an ACEC. Private land and lands administered by agencies are not included within the boundaries of ACECs nor are they subject to the ACEC management prescriptions. The ACEC designation is an administrative designation and is accomplished through the land use planning process. As such, designations may be changed in subsequent planning cycles

1.2 Requirements for ACEC Designation

To be considered as a potential ACEC and be analyzed in the RMP alternatives, an area had to meet the criteria of relevance and importance prescribed at 43 CFR 1610 and listed in *BLM Manual* Section 1613 (BLM 1988).

1.2.1 Relevance

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

1. A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value (including but not limited to rare or sensitive archeological resources and to religious or cultural resources important to Native Americans).
2. A fish and wildlife resource (including but not limited to habitat for endangered, sensitive, or threatened plant species, or habitat essential to maintaining species diversity).
3. A natural process or system (including but not limited to endangered, sensitive, or threatened plant species; rare, endemic, or relic plants or plant communities that are terrestrial, aquatic, or riparian; or rare geological features).
4. 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.

1.2.2 Importance

The value, resource, system, process, or hazard described above must have substantial significance and values 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:

1. Has more than locally significant qualities that give it special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern, especially compared to any similar resource.
2. Has a quality or circumstance that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, unique, endangered, threatened, or vulnerable to adverse change.
3. Has been recognized as warranting protection to satisfy national priority concerns or to carry out the mandates of Federal Land Policy and Management Act.
4. Has qualities that warrant highlighting to satisfy public or management concerns about safety and public welfare.
5. Poses a significant threat to human life and safety or to property.
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1.3 THE ACEC DESIGNATION PROCESS

There are several steps in the identification and evaluation of ACECs. These steps include the nomination of areas that may meet the relevance and importance criteria, evaluation of the nominated areas to determine if they meet the criteria, and analysis of the potential impacts of ACEC designation in a Draft RMP/EIS. When released for public review, the Draft RMP/EIS contains recommendations for designation and the analysis of impacts from that designation. Public comments are reviewed and considered and adjustments are made as necessary before a Proposed RMP/Final EIS is released. Designation of ACECs then occurs via a Record of Decision (ROD) approving the RMP. Each of these steps is briefly described below.

1.3.1 Identification/Nomination

ACECs can be nominated at any time, but they are only designated through the BLM's land use planning process. Nominations from the public are generally solicited as part of the scoping process during development of a land use plan or plan amendment for a particular area.

1.3.2 Evaluation of Nominations for Relevance and Importance

Nominations are evaluated by a team of BLM interdisciplinary specialists to determine whether they meet the relevance and importance criteria. A nominated area must meet one or more of both the relevance and importance criteria to be considered a potential ACEC. Potential ACECs are then further considered during the planning process.

1.3.3 Consideration of Potential ACECs

Potential ACECs are next considered as RMP alternatives. Each potential ACEC is proposed for designation in at least one management alternative. A potential ACEC is proposed for designation if it is thought to need special management. Special management is defined as management outside of standard or routine practices, and usually includes more detail than other management prescriptions contained within the plan. The need for special management and the resulting effects from applying such management are assessed in the associated environmental analysis.

1.3.4 Comment on Proposed ACECs

A notice of any areas proposed for ACEC designation is published in the *Federal Register* along with a Notice of Availability of the Draft RMP/EIS requesting public comment. At this point in the process, the public may comment on any aspect of the ACEC analysis. These comments are then considered in preparation of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. After a 30-day period when the Proposed RMP may be protested and resolution of any protests, a ROD is prepared and the plan is approved.

1.3.5 Designation

Designation of ACECs occurs when the ROD approving the RMP is signed.

1.4 EVALUATION AND FINDINGS SUMMARIES OF NOMINATED ACECS

This section contains the summary evaluations of each of the 29 nominated ACECs. Tables G-1 and G-2 show the acreage nominated, the values associated with each nomination, and the acreage carried forward as a proposed ACEC in the RMP. Table G-2 shows the summary evaluation for those areas that were not carried forward. Following the tables is a summary of the evaluation and recommendation for each ACEC. The full evaluation report for each area is available from the Las Cruces District Office. ACECs were nominated prior to starting the RMP, during the public scoping for the RMP, and in one case, during the developing of the Draft RMP. Areas were nominated by external interest groups as well as by BLM.

**TABLE G-1
NOMINATED ACECS CARRIED FORWARD IN THE RMP**

Nominated ACEC	Nominated Acreage	Nominated Values	Acreage –Percentage with R&I Criteria	Significant Values (Reason Carried Forward)
Broad Canyon	5,213	Cultural, scenic, ecological	4,720 acres – 90%	Cultural
Brokeoff Mts.	62,323	Ecological, cultural, scenic, naturalness, recreational	62,323 acres –100%	Ecological, cultural
Caballo Mountains	35,241	Scenic, ecological	17,267 acres – 49%	Scenic
Cornucopia	188,032	Cultural, naturalness, ecological, scenic	16,213 acres – 9%	Cultural
Doña Ana Mts. Expansion	1,760	Scenic	1,760 acres – 100%	Scenic
East Potrillo Mountains	11,473	Scenic, ecological, cultural	11,459 acres – 100%	Scenic
Jarilla Mountains	6,200	Ecological/special status species	6,200 acres – 100%	Ecological/special status species
Mud Mountain	2,600	Ecological/special status species	2,600 acres – 100%	Ecological/special status species
Nutt Mountain	12,650	Scenic	756 acres – 6%	Scenic
Otero Mesa Grassland	412,000	Ecological, wildlife habitat, special status species	271,262 acres – 73%	Ecological, wildlife habitat, special status species
Percha Creek	870	Ecological/special status species	870 acres – 100%	Ecological/special status species
Picacho Peak	957	Archeological, cultural, scenic	957 acres – 100%	Scenic, cultural
Pup Canyon	3,600	Ecological/special status species	3,600 acres – 100%	Ecological/special status species
Robledo Mountains Expansion	144,078	Cultural, naturalness, scenic, ecological, recreational	12,077 – 8%	Cultural
Sacramento Mountains	2,400	Ecological/special status species	2,400 acres – 100%	Ecological/special status species
Six Shooter Canyon	1,100	Ecological/special status species	1,100 acres – 100%	Ecological/special status species
Southern Caballo Mountains	63,207	Cultural, recreational, ecological, naturalness	24,113 acres – 38%	Cultural
Tortugas Mt. (“A” Mountain)	1,280	Scenic, cultural, geomorphology, soils	1,280 acres – 100%	Soils/geomorphology
Tularosa Creek	435	Ecological, aquatic, riparian	435 acres – 100%	Ecological, aquatic riparian
Van Winkle Lake	1,320	Ecological	1,320 acres – 100%	Ecological

**TABLE G-2
NOMINATED ACECS NOT CARRIED FORWARD IN THE RMP**

Nominated ACEC	Nominated Acreage	Nominated Values	Acreage – Total Percentage Meeting R&I Criteria	Reason Not Carried Forward as proposed ACEC
Aden Lava Flow RNA	3,700	Biological, scenic, geological, research	3,700 - 100%	Within a WSA boundary
Badger	12,638	Naturalness, recreational, ecological	None	R & I values not met
Organ/Franklin Mountains ACEC Bar Canyon Expansion	423	Scenic, biological	423 acres- 100%	Managed for wilderness characteristics
Cornudas Mountains	59,959	Scenic, cultural, special status species	41,710 acres – 70%	Included in Otero Mesa Grassland ACEC
Gyp Hills-Chalk Hills	29,446	Naturalness, recreational, ecological	None	R & I values not met
Greater West Portillo Mountains	18,317	Naturalness, recreational, ecological	None	R & I values not met
Robledo Mountains– Sierra de las Uvas Expansion	144,078	Cultural, naturalness, scenic, ecological, recreational, paleontological,	11,430 acres – 8% 7,000 existing ACEC 3,052 proposed expansion	Expansion area included in National Monument
Peñasco Canyon	5,354	Naturalness, cultural, ecological	None	R & I values not met

NOTES: ACEC = area of critical environmental concern, R&I = relevance and importance, RMP = resource management plan.

1.4.1 Broad Canyon

Description

A total of 5,213 acres in the Broad Canyon area were nominated as an ACEC for the purposes of recognizing and protecting cultural, scenic, and ecological resources.

Broad Canyon is fairly scenic. The multicolored cliffs and desert vegetation offer beautiful scenery for hikers and four-wheel-drive enthusiasts using the canyon bottom, but the area fails to offer more than locally significant qualities. The area is not fragile and has been use safely by the public for hiking, horseback riding, and off-highway-vehicle (OHV) enthusiasts for many years.

Broad Canyon does not support relevant ecological values such as a fish and wildlife resource or a natural process or system. No threatened or endangered plant or animal species are known to occur in the canyon.

A total of 86 archaeological sites have been recorded on public land within the nominated area. The archaeological sites present within the nominated area represent Paleoindian, Archaic, Jornada Mogollon, Mimbres Mogollon, and Apache cultures. There also are historic habitation sites within the area. One of the historic sites contains portions of the historic Butterfield Overland Trail.

Evaluation

The prehistoric structural sites within the nominated area are unique because very few structural sites in the area have been recorded or subjected to data recovery. The data from these sites would be protected under the proposed ACEC as would more segments of the Butterfield Overland Trail within the Las Cruces District Office. Much of the area meets both relevance and importance criteria for cultural resources.

1.4.2 Brokeoff Mountains – Guadalupe Escarpment

Description

A total of 62,323 acres in the Brokeoff Mountains-Guadalupe Escarpment area were nominated as a scenic area for the purposes of recognizing and protecting naturalness; outstanding opportunities for solitude and/or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; and scenic, ecological, and cultural resources. However, because the BLM has no administrative designation for a scenic area, the area was evaluated as an ACEC nomination.

The area offers opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation, such as hiking and hunting. However, these opportunities are similar to those found on millions of acres of public land throughout central and southern New Mexico, and so are judged to be less than outstanding. The area fails to offer outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation.

Grasslands and desert creosote scrub occupy the largest percentage of the acreage within the nominated area. The range sites within this area are similar to thousands of acres in the area. No special status plant species are known to occur in the area. The area provides a diversity of wildlife habitat types, from creosote flats to grassy limestone hills, to large canyon bottoms with arroyo-riparian vegetation, to juniper-covered mountains and steep cliffs. The area contains important habitat for mule deer.

Approximately 60 archaeological sites, including a variety of artifacts and features, have been recorded on public land at least two rock art sites. The archaeological sites present within the nominated area include Paleoindian, Archaic, Jornada Mogollon, Apache, and historic. Several of the sites were homesteads. Although many archaeological inventories appear to have been conducted in the nominated area, the number of inventories is actually small when the area's size is considered.

Evaluation

The proposed area does not include any relevant natural hazards or natural processes or systems.

The area is spectacularly scenic; however, there are no real threats to its scenic value. The steep escarpment and vistas of the northern portion of the area are extremely scenic, particularly on the western side, as are the limestone bluffs of the southeastern portion from Boardwell Canyon on the south to Cornucopia Draw on the north.

The numerous rock art sites in the nominated area are unique and irreplaceable. Few Apache sites have been recorded in the Southwest. It is believed the Mescalero Apache would consider the Apache sites within the nominated area to be an irreplaceable part of their heritage. The prehistoric sites in the nominated area are unique because very few sites in the area have been recorded or subjected to data recovery. Portions of the area meet the relevance and importance criteria for cultural resources. A total of 62,323 acres have been carried forward as a potential ACEC in the *TriCounty RMP/EIS*.

1.4.3 Caballo Mountains

Description

A total of 35,241 acres in the Caballo Mountains were nominated as a scenic area of ACEC. The area was nominated for the purpose of recognizing and protecting the scenic and ecological resources of the mountains.

Parts of the Caballo Mountains provide significant scenic value. The Caballo Mountains are the dominant geologic feature in the area. The mountains offer spectacular scenery for travelers on Interstate 25 for approximately 30 miles.

The proposed area includes a major portion of the north-south-trending Caballo Mountain range, which reaches elevations of over 7,000 feet. The geology of the area is complex, but its dominant features are the sedimentary limestone that forms ridges, ledges, and mountains at higher elevations and the red and olive sandstone and siltstone formations at slightly lower elevations, especially on the area's eastern side.

Although the nomination for the Caballo Mountains did not address natural hazards, the cliffs of the steep western escarpment contain numerous natural hazards. The Caballo Mountains are in a historic mining district; however, there are no impending mining issues that necessarily threaten the ecological values. Likewise, any ACEC designation and management would be subject to valid existing rights.

Evaluation

The scenic values of the Caballo Mountains have more than local significance. The mountain range is visible from a broad geographic area, including four towns and two state parks, making it important for a large number of people. Much of the area meets both the relevance and importance criteria for scenic resources and has been carried forward and analyzed in the *TriCounty RMP/EIS* for designation as an ACEC.

The area has ecological values that set it apart from most public land in southern New Mexico. The area meets the relevance criterion for a fish and wildlife resource by the presence of diverse and relatively scarce habitat. It also meets the relevance criterion for a significant natural process or system. However, since these resources are of no more than local importance, they do not meet the importance criterion. A total of 17,267 acres have been carried forward as a proposed ACEC for scenic values in the *TriCounty RMP/EIS*.

1.4.4 Cornucopia (Southern Sacramento Mountains)

Description

The New Mexico Wilderness Alliance (NMWA) and the Wilderness Society nominated 188,032 acres in the southern Sacramento Mountains area as an outstanding natural area. Because of the abundance of areas with “*Sacramento*” or “*Sacramento Mountains*” in their names, the name of this area was changed to “*Cornucopia*” based on the names of existing geographic features in the area. Cornucopia was nominated for the purpose of recognizing and protecting naturalness; outstanding opportunities for solitude and/or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; and scenic, ecological, and cultural resources. The BLM no longer uses the administrative designation of outstanding natural area; therefore, the area was evaluated as a nominated ACEC.

The area is spectacularly scenic; however, there are no real threats to its scenic value. The steep escarpment and vistas of the northern portion are extremely scenic, particularly on the western side, as are the limestone bluffs of the southeastern portion from Boardwell Canyon.

The area provides a diversity of habitat types; creosote flats, grassy limestone hills, large canyon bottoms with arroyo-riparian vegetation, and juniper-covered mountains and steep cliffs. The area offers important habitat for mule deer. No special status plant or animal species have been recorded in the area.

Some 60 archaeological sites have been recorded. Sites within the nominated area include Paleoindian, Archaic, Jornada Mogollon, Apache, and historic. The sites contain combinations of artifact scatters, rock art, and features. Several of the sites are historical homesteads.

Evaluation

The area offers opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation, such as hiking and hunting. However, these opportunities are similar to those found on millions of acres of public land throughout central and southern New Mexico, and so are judged to be less than outstanding. Ecological values in the proposed area are similar to those on millions of acres of land in southern New Mexico.

The number of recorded archaeological sites is high compared to the acreage subjected to inventory. The numerous rock art sites within the nominated area are unique and irreplaceable. Few Apache sites have been recorded in the Southwest. It is believed the Mescalero Apache would consider the Apache sites within the nominated area to be an irreplaceable part of their heritage. The prehistoric sites within the nominated area are unique because very few sites in the area have been recorded or subjected to data recovery; therefore, portions of the area meet the relevance and importance criteria for cultural resources. A total of 16,213 acres in the Cornucopia area have been carried forward as a proposed ACEC.

1.4.5 Doña Ana Mountains ACEC – Expansion

Description

The existing Doña Ana Mountains ACEC is in central Doña Ana County, 5 miles north of Las Cruces. This ACEC encompasses approximately 1,490 acres. The expansion would add approximately 1,760 acres to the existing ACEC and would create a contiguous ACEC boundary with a portion of BLM land, the New Mexico State University's Chihuahuan Desert Rangeland Research Center, and the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park. The peaks of Doña Ana Mountains are highly scenic and are within view of most of the northern Mesilla Valley and northeastern Las Cruces.

Although the cultural resource values were not found to meet relevance and importance in the Final RMP, the existing Doña Ana Mountains ACEC does contain unique cultural features. The BLM has concluded that there is a high likelihood that cultural sites exist adjacent to the existing ACEC, which is being managed in part for cultural resource protection.

Evaluation

This area meets the importance criterion due to its proximity to Las Cruces and accessibility by much of the recreating public, who may not recognize the area's values or its need for heightened management attention. This lack of attention may result in unintentional damage from the numerous activities that take place in the area. The cultural values in this area are unique and have qualities that make them vulnerable to adverse change. Due to its proximity to both the Chihuahuan Desert Rangeland Research Center and

the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park and the research values present there, this area would become a valuable “unofficial” extension to these areas. The nominated area also meets both the relevance and importance criteria for its scenic values.

1.4.6 East Potrillo Mountains

Description

A total of 11,473 acres in the East Potrillo Mountains were nominated as a RNA for the purpose of recognizing and protecting the ecological, scenic, and cultural resources. The BLM no longer uses the administrative designation of RNA; therefore, the area was evaluated as a nominated ACEC.

The mountains are predominately limestone hills in fair condition but degrading in range condition as slope decreases. Creosote is the dominant brush species of this community, followed by succulents. Grasses occur in small patches between rocks and in fissures where soil accumulation has occurred. Grass species includes Tobias, bush muhly, side oats, threeawns, and isolated populations of black grama. The Las Cruces District Office has no records of special status plants within the nominated area. However, the ecological values of the East Potrillo Mountains are not well known.

Evaluation

The East Potrillo Mountains are one of the prominent scenic features along State Road 9 and are visible from El Paso, Texas, and Interstate 10. The scenic resources of the East Potrillo Mountains are vulnerable to adverse change from mining. There are historic mines in the mountain range, but no known mineral deposits.

The Las Cruces District Office has no records of special status plants or animals within the nominated area. From an ecological standpoint, there is nothing significant or outstanding about the nominated area. The nominated area contains two cultural resource sites, but neither is distinctive.

This area does meet both the relevance and importance criteria for scenic resources. Only areas meeting the criteria, 11,459 acres, have been carried forward into the *TriCounty RMP/EIS* as a potential ACEC.

1.4.7 Jarilla Mountains

Description

The Jarilla Mountains are a small, isolated range with complex geology, mostly on public land, north of Orogrande, New Mexico. In the 1986 *White Sands RMP*, 120 acres within the range were closed to OHV use to protect cultural resources. The Jarilla Mountains were recommended for evaluation because of the high diversity of cacti occurring there and the existence of apparently unique forms of hedgehog cactus. The variety of geologic substrates in the mountains supports a large number of plant associations and a resulting high diversity of plant species. At least 14 species of cacti have been recorded, the greatest cactus diversity known to exist in the (former) Caballo Resource Area.

The main threats to biological values under existing management would be new surface disturbances such as roads and mines in the northern half of the mountains, increased OHV use in the lower elevations, plant (cactus) collection activities, and current or greater levels of grazing in the xeroriparian zones. The uniqueness of the several forms of *Echinocereus* cactus species make them very desirable for collectors.

Evaluation

An ACEC should be designated to encompass the critical biological values within the area. The site meets the relevance and importance criteria in that it contains habitat essential for the maintenance of cactus species diversity and cactus community diversity not known elsewhere. No similar resources are known elsewhere in New Mexico; therefore, the area has at least regional, if not national, significance. The Jarilla Mountains have been carried forward as a proposed ACEC in the *TriCounty RMP/EIS*.

1.4.8 Mud Mountain

Description

Mud Mountain and the adjacent Mud Springs Mountains rise over 1,000 feet above the surrounding Rio Grande floodplain, just west of Truth or Consequences, New Mexico. This area is the only known location in New Mexico for the State listed endangered Duncan's pincushion cactus (*Escobar duncanii*).

Duncan's pincushion cactus is known only in several locations in the Big Bend region of Texas, probably in northern Mexico, and this single location in New Mexico. The plant is not listed in Texas. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service status report for this species recommended that its habitat on Mud Mountain be protected by the BLM and that the agency monitor populations. Subsequent surveys of the area revealed fewer than 500 plants.

The various limestone and dolomite substrates here support a diverse flora, which, in addition to the Duncan's pincushion, constitutes a valuable flora. The northeastern slope of Mud Mountain contain a grassland of about 3 acres of almost pure New Mexico needlegrass (*Stipa neomexicana*), an occurrence that is considered to be rare, if not unique, in New Mexico.

Evaluation

The Mud Mountain area meets the relevance and Importance Criteria for biological values. It contains New Mexico's only occurrence of the State endangered Duncan's pincushion cactus. It also contains a high diversity of plants as well as specialized limestone plant communities in late seral condition. Mud Mountain has been carried forward as a potential ACEC in the *TriCounty RMP/EIS*.

1.4.9 Nutt Mountain

Description

The NMWA and the Wilderness Society nominated 12,650 acres in the Nutt Mountain area as an RNA. The area was nominated for the purpose of recognizing and protecting the ecological and scenic resources. The BLM no longer uses the administrative designation of RNA; therefore, the area was evaluated as a nominated ACEC.

The Nutt Mountain grasslands provide good condition habitat for wildlife, similar to the rest of the Uvas Valley to the north and west and the Uvas Mountains to the south. The grassy hills are vegetated by grama grasses, green sprangletop, threeawns, nine-awn, and other desirable grass species. There are scattered juniper trees and, in a few canyons, fairly good stands of mountain mahogany. Mule deer are relatively common in this habitat type. Other mammals include desert cottontails, banner-tailed and Merriam's kangaroo rats, several species of pocket mice and deer mice, woodrats, gophers, and desert

shrews. Common birds include red-tailed hawks, scaled quail, horned larks, and roadrunners. Herptiles include gopher snakes, prairie and western diamondback rattlesnakes, coachwhips, desert grassland whiptails, lesser earless lizards, and Couch's spadefoots. The grassy uplands, while supporting creosotebush, are in fair to good condition as evidenced by the presence of grassy cover.

Evaluation

The area does not have ecological values that set it apart from adjacent public land in the Nutt Valley and Uvas Mountains. There are no known records of special status plant species from the southern Nutt Mountain area, and no potential habitat for special status plant species exists in this area. This area has no known importance for special status plants. Therefore, there is no known need to establish a RNA to support ongoing or needed special status plants in this area.

Nutt Mountain is one of the tallest hills in the range. It is a prominent historic and modern-day landmark for travelers, and is easily visible from New Mexico Highways 26 and 27. Nutt Mountain has a significant scenic value of more than local significance. This area meets relevance and importance criteria for scenic resources. A total of 756 acres have been carried forward as a proposed ACEC.

1.4.10 Otero Mesa Grassland

Description

In June 2008, the Coalition for Otero Mesa (Wilderness Society, NMWA, and others), submitted a proposal to designate approximately 412,000 acres of public land on Otero Mesa as the Otero Mesa Grassland Wildlife ACEC. Approximately 175,000 acres of the proposed ACEC is on McGregor Range and is managed according to the *RMP Amendment for McGregor Range* completed in May 2006. The remaining 270,000 acres are on Otero Mesa to the east of McGregor Range.

The Otero Mesa Coalition cited the area as containing the last and largest intact Chihuahuan Desert grasslands in the United States. Both the coalition and other organizations have noted that many wildlife species are dependent upon this habitat, including numerous breeding birds, some of which are seriously declining in numbers; high-profile species such as ferruginous hawks and aplomado falcons; colonies of black-tailed prairie dogs; and a possible remnant population of pronghorn.

In its publication *Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy*, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) named the Chihuahuan semidesert grasslands as one of two key habitats in the Chihuahuan Desert ecoregion. It noted that desert grasslands are especially important to grassland birds, which have been declining in North America over the past 50 years. The NMDGF noted that the semidesert grasslands host 55 species of greatest conservation need. New Mexico Partners in Flight identified several species of birds as priority species that are known to occur on McGregor Range and Otero Mesa. The Nature Conservancy's Prairie Wings program has mapped grassland ecosystems that need to be preserved to save 13 species of birds, including the Chihuahuan desert grasslands of southern New Mexico.

Pronghorn occur throughout the proposal area. Proponents noted that these could be descendants of a remnant herd of pronghorn native to the area; however, no conclusive evidence for this exists. The black-tailed prairie dog is distributed throughout the area, occupying over a dozen colonies or "towns." However, the colonies are small compared to historical numbers and are susceptible to sylvatic plague, which could wipe out a colony. Protecting the colonies is important to maintaining the overall prairie dog populations in Otero Mesa.

Otero Mesa contains a diversity of plants. Three sites on the adjoining McGregor Range have been designated an ACEC to protect black grama grassland and associated species.

The size of the proposed ACEC lends itself to wildlife habitat management on a landscape or ecosystem scale. This mimics management of BLM-identified habitat management areas as prescribed in habitat management plans and other large management projects. The size of the area also tends to reduce the overall impacts of localized activities or projects. However, portions of the proposed ACEC along the northeast boundary are shrub dominated communities that lack important grassland components.

All or parts of 14 grazing allotments, some 270,000 acres of public land, are present within the ACEC proposal area outside the McGregor Range. All but one of these allotments are classified in the “maintain selective management” category, which requires that allotments are managed to maintain current satisfactory resource conditions and are actively managed to ensure that resource values do not decline.

Evaluation

The proposed Otero Mesa Grassland ACEC includes high-quality semidesert grassland habitat that is declining in size and distribution in North America. This habitat type provides home to numerous species some of which, especially grassland birds, are declining in numbers. The area contains a number of special status animal species. It also contains a sizable herd of antelope, which is a managed game species. Range condition of the overall area is fair to good. Grassland habitat condition, especially for antelope, is considered to be good to excellent. The size of the proposal area would promote wildlife habitat management on a landscape scale.

Based on the above information, the BLM evaluation team determined that the nominated Otero Mesa Grassland Wildlife ACEC meets the relevance and importance criteria in regard to the grassland habitat and associated wildlife. The area has therefore been carried forward as a proposed ACEC.

1.4.11 Percha Creek

Description

More than a 1-mile-long stretch of cottonwood-willow dominated riparian communities occur on public land on the lower reaches of Percha Creek just east of Hillsboro, New Mexico. A 280-acre special management area was designated for this area in the 1986 *White Sands RMP*.

The site features a perennial stream that flows through a steep-walled box canyon into a more open canyon. The riparian zone features a Fremont cottonwood-Goodding willow habitat type with a diverse mixture of other trees, including velvet ash, Arizona walnut, netleaf hackberry, little mulberry, box elder, and Arizona alder. The riparian vegetation within the box canyon, although existing within a rather short stretch, is considered to be one of the best remaining examples of the habitat type in New Mexico. Above the canyon on the northern side are gently sloping shrubby grasslands, mostly ocotillo-black grama habitat type in good range condition. An igneous rock monolith at the head of this arroyo supports a vigorous population of the State sensitive mosquito plant (*Agastache cana*), which is globally rare and exists in only a few places in New Mexico.

Evaluation

This area meets the relevance and importance criteria for ACEC designation because it represents an exemplary riparian community that rarely occurs in such a relatively pristine condition, is vulnerable to

adverse change, and satisfies national-priority concerns for the maintenance of exemplary riparian sites. The box canyon and geological formations add to the special qualities of this site. Percha Creek has been carried forward as a proposed ACEC in the *TriCounty RMP/EIS*.

1.4.12 Picacho Peak

Description

Picacho Peak rises approximately 1,000 feet above the western side of the Mesilla Valley. To the north of Picacho Peak is the Robledo Mountains ACEC; to the southwest is the Las Cruces International Airport. Box Canyon is located to the west of Picacho Peak, which offers panoramic views of the Mesilla Valley.

The historic Butterfield Overland Trail follows the northern and western boundaries of Picacho Peak. The Butterfield Overland Trail is a nationally important trail and, along with associated stage stations, is considered to have regional, historical, and archeological significance. The Butterfield Special Management Area, which extends 0.25 mile on each side of the trail, was designated to help protect portions of the trail. Picacho Peak was considered a landmark along the trail route.

Picacho Peak is important due to its scenic value, its importance as a landmark of the Mesilla Valley, and its historic importance. It is an obviously prominent feature that has more than local significance due to its visibility to the many thousands of travelers who pass through the area.

Evaluation

This area meets the importance criterion of being more than locally significant in terms of the cultural and historic values of the Butterfield Overland Trail and the area's scenic quality, which is enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of resident of the Mesilla and travelers on Interstate 25 and Interstate 10 annually. The small size and susceptibility of Picacho Peak to potential surface-disturbing activities or related uses meets an importance criterion because it contains qualities that make it fragile, irreplaceable, and vulnerable to adverse change.

1.4.13 Pup Canyon

Description

Pup Canyon is on the western side of the Guadalupe Escarpment, north of the Brokeoff Mountains and adjacent to the Lincoln National Forest. This area is an extension of the larger nominated Brokeoff Mountains-Guadalupe Escarpment ACEC. The natural values of the area are similar to those of that larger ACEC nomination (refer to the above discussion of the Brokeoff Mountains-Guadalupe Escarpment). Pup Canyon was nominated to protect ecological values, primarily the special status plant species and habitats along this portion of the escarpment.

Evaluation

Pup Canyon contains ecological values and special status species and habitats that meet relevance and importance criteria. Therefore it has been carried forward as a proposed ACEC to be analyzed as a separate area under one or more alternatives in the *TriCounty RMP/EIS*.

1.4.14 Robledo Mountains Expansion

Description

A total of 144,078 acres covering the Robledo Mountains, the Sierra de Las Uvas, and almost all public land in between were nominated as a scenic area and primitive recreation area (PRA). The area was nominated for the purpose of recognizing and protecting naturalness; outstanding opportunities for solitude and/or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; and scenic, ecological, and cultural resources. The BLM does not have an administrative designation of scenic area or PRA; therefore, the area was evaluated as a nominated ACEC. Approximately 13,000 acres in the Robledo Mountains and 11,000 acres in the Sierra de Las Uvas are presently designated as WSAs. A portion of the Robledo Mountains (7,077 acres) was designated a scenic ACEC in the *Mimbres RMP* (1993).

Evaluation

The area offers opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation, such as hiking and hunting. However, these opportunities are similar to those found on millions of acres of public land throughout central and southern New Mexico, and so are judged to be less than outstanding. The area fails to offer outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation.

Five archaeological sites have been recorded on public land within the nominated area. The archaeological sites include one Archaic site, one Jornada Mogollon site from the Late Pithouse period, one Mimbres Mogollon site from the Late Pithouse period, one historic site, and an Apache site. The two Late Pithouse-period sites may contain the remains of structures and would be significant, as few habitation sites have been recorded in the area surrounding the Sierra de las Uvas. Portions of the area meet the relevance and importance criteria for cultural resources.

Errata

As noted in the Dear Reader letter of this document, the BLM inadvertently omitted this proposed ACEC in *Chapter 2 Alternatives* and *Chapter 4 Analysis*. The proposed management prescriptions for Alternative B are provided here and a map is located in Appendix J.

TABLE G-1 PROPOSED AREAS OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN MANAGEMENT PRESCRIPTIONS BY ALTERNATIVE*		
ACEC & VALUES	ALTERNATIVE B	ALTERNATIVE C
Robledo Mountain Expansion (Map J-46) <i>Cultural Resources</i>	12,077 Acres <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit vehicle use to designated routes. • Close to geothermal leasing. • Exclude new rights-of-way • Close to mineral material disposal. • Recommend withdrawal from mineral entry. • Manage as VRM Class II. 	Do not designate area as an ACEC.
NOTE: * No ACECs are newly proposed for Alternatives A and D.		

1.4.15 Sacramento Mountains

Description

In 1981, Todsens' pennyroyal (*Hedeoma todsenii*) was listed as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. At that time, only two small populations were known in the San Andreas Mountains on the White Sands Missile Range. In 1988, additional populations were discovered on the western flank of the Sacramento Mountains. The entire area nominated for ACEC designation supports a piñon-juniper woodland community. Within this area, 12 of the 13 known Sacramento Mountain populations of Todsens' pennyroyal occur, several of them spilling over onto Forest Service land. Other rare or sensitive plants found here include State endangered button cactus (*Epithelantha micromeris*), State sensitive Guadalupe Mountain rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus spathulatus*), and two other relatively rare plants, desert rose (*Rosa stellata*) and threadleaf horsebrush (*Tetradymia filifolia*).

The entire area provides excellent habitat for mule deer, and the upper portion along the forest boundary is elk wintering habitat with local heavy use. Neither game species appears to utilize or have adverse effects on the pennyroyal.

Evaluation

This area meets the relevance and importance criteria because of the presence of a federally listed endangered species, the Todsens' pennyroyal; therefore, the nominated Sacramento Mountains ACEC has been carried forward as a proposed ACEC in the *TriCounty RMP/EIS*.

1.4.16 Six Shooter Canyon

Description

Six Shooter Canyon is a narrow, steep-walled limestone arroyo on the Guadalupe Rim. Water flow in the canyon is ephemeral, and the canyon exhibits a treeless xeroriparian (rather than a true riparian) vegetative community with Mexican orange, Apache plume, hairy and little-leaf sumac, and bristlebrush are among the common shrubs. Many large, vigorous Guadalupe mescal bean (*Sophora gypsophila* var. *guadalupensis*), a State listed endangered species, occur on pink sandstone substrates in this canyon and in the canyon to the north, with an estimated total population of over 1,000 individuals. The limestone canyons at the site also support populations of two other rare plants, the five-flower rock daisy (*Perityle quinqueflora*) and Guadalupe needlegrass (*Sitpa curvifolia*).

The Six Shooter Canyon area populations of Guadalupe mescal bean were determined to be the most concentrated on public land in the Brokeoff Mountains study area, making this area suitable for ACEC nomination.

Evaluation

The Six Shooter Canyon site meets the relevance and importance criteria for ACEC designation because of the presence of a State listed endangered species and BLM sensitive species. The area has regional if not national significance because it supports the best known population of the Guadalupe mescal bean. In addition, this ACEC would complement the three other biological protection sites within the Carlsbad Field Area on the eastern escarpment of the Guadalupe Mountains, South Texas Hill Canyon RNA, Dark

Canyon ACEC, and Lonesome Ridge ACEC, providing an important education and research site for comparative purposes. Six Shooter Canyon has been carried forward as a proposed ACEC.

1.4.17 Southern Caballo Mountains

Description

A total of 63,207 acres in the Southern Caballo Mountains were nominated as a PRA. The area was nominated for the purpose of recognizing and protecting naturalness; outstanding opportunities for solitude and/or primitive and unconfined type of recreation; and scenic, ecological, and cultural resources. The BLM does not have an administrative designation of PRA; therefore, the area was evaluated as a nominated ACEC.

Arroyos in this area run from the hills to the river and support a greater diversity and abundance of vegetation and associated wildlife species than the uplands. Species include Apache plume, little-leaf sumac, three-leafed sumac, desert willow, Gambel's quail, mule deer, and thrashers. These arroyos may serve as travel corridors between the Rio Grande Valley and the mountains.

There are no known records of special status plant species from the Southern Caballo Mountains area, and there is no potential habitat for special status plant species in this area.

Evaluation

Opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation in this area are similar to those found on millions of acres of public land throughout central and southern New Mexico, and so are judged to be less than outstanding. The Southern Caballo Mountains do not provide more than a locally significant scenic value. The ecological values are similar to those on millions of acres of public land in southern New Mexico and are in no way outstanding. The area also fails to support a significant natural process or system.

Nine archaeological sites have been recorded on public land. The archaeological sites in the area include rock art sites (both petroglyphs and pictographs); artifact scatters; structural sites that have combinations of hearths, depressions (indicative of pithouses), masonry room blocks, and mounds (indicative of jacal structures); possible burials; and mining locales. The two rock art sites within the nominated area are unique and irreplaceable. The structural sites are significant because few habitation sites have been recorded between the Rio Grande and the Caballo Mountains. Approximately 24,000 acres meet the relevance and importance criteria for cultural resources. A total of 24,000 acres have been carried forward as a proposed ACEC in the *TriCounty RMP/EIS*.

1.4.18 Tortugas Mountain (“A” Mountain)

Description

The nominated area consists of the approximately 70 percent of the eastern Tortugas (or “A”) Mountain and areas east and southeast from the mountain, comprising approximately 1,280 acres in southern Doña Ana County. The scenic values of this mountain are tied to the prominence of the upthrust feature in the lower Mesilla Valley portion of Doña Ana County, however, these scenic values are compromised by the numerous communication towers and observatories and by a very large, white, painted “A” on the western face of the mountain.

A traditional cultural property (TCP) is in the nominated ACEC, and Los Indios de Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe conduct an annual pilgrimage to that location. There is integrity of relationship between the TCP on Tortugas Mountain and the Los Indegenes de Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe group (formerly called Los Indios de Las Cruces). Finally, although several structures have been built on Tortugas Mountain, the TCP has integrity of condition based on the continued use of the area for the pilgrimage and associated ceremonies/social events.

The nominated parcel also includes six soil/geomorphology priority study sites, which are part of a 400-square-mile study area around Las Cruces known as the Desert Soil-Geomorphology Project. The project was initiated in 1957 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which has invested hundreds of person years and many thousands of dollars into the project. In 1976, BLM entered into a Cooperative Agreement with the USDA's Soil Conservation Service (now the Natural Resources Conservation Service) with the purpose to "preserve the study sites and adjoining landscapes so that they could be observed by scientists in various fields, used as a training and study area, and saved for future generations." Over the years, the Desert Soil-Geomorphology Project has produced many scientific publications, making it internationally famous for this type of research.

Evaluation

The natural scenic values of the Tortugas Mountain are greatly diminished by the presence of existing manmade structures. The area does not have any special scenic values that are relevant and important.

The TCP issue for Tortugas Mountain meets the relevance criterion, but it does not meet the importance criterion as it does not have more than local consequence or concern.

The special values related to the soil study sites have relevance due to the significant research value attached to them, and their importance for long-term research is national. The soil pits and study sites are especially vulnerable to adverse change.

The soil/geomorphology study sites meet the relevance criterion for both containing research values with long-term significance due to the number of years that these areas have been studied and the continued use of these sites for future study. They also meet the importance criterion due to the national importance of these sites to long-term research. Tortugas Mountain has been carried forward as a proposed ACEC.

1.4.19 Tularosa Creek

Description

The area being considered covers approximately 435 acres of BLM-administered public land consisting of aquatic, riparian, and surrounding upland habitats along Tularosa Creek downstream from Bent, New Mexico, in Otero County. U.S. Highway 70 crosses the creek in this area.

The stream is bordered on both sides by dirt-bank cliffs ranging from approximately 10 to 30 feet high. The stream flows swiftly and directly across the property, with few meanders and no natural oxbows. The riparian area includes approximately 2 miles of stream. The riparian area supports native plants, but has been invaded by salt cedar. Native ashes, willows, and cottonwoods are abundant. On the benches above the cliffs, desert shrub-scrub of mesquite, rabbitbrush, and thick stands of four-winged saltbush. The riparian area shows evidence of wildlife use by mule deer, elk, raccoons, coyotes, and mountain lions and provides important yearlong habitat for songbirds, such as brown towhees, white-crowned sparrows, and sage sparrows. The riparian area is potential habitat for a high diversity of wildlife, and the stream

has historically supported fish such as rainbow trout, brown trout, and various terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates.

Evaluation

This area meets the relevance criterion because it has an existing natural process or system that includes riparian and aquatic habitat for a variety of plant and animal species that are exceedingly rare in southern New Mexico. The small size and fragility of the area makes it vulnerable to impacts from grazing and overuse by the public, which fulfills the importance criterion. The Tularosa Creek has been carried forward as a proposed ACEC in the *TriCounty RMP/EIS*.

1.4.20 Van Winkle Lake

Description

The area being considered covers 1,320 acres in south-central Otero County. The BLM-administered public land in and around Van Winkle Lake consists of lake-bottom playa surrounded by relatively flat uplands. Van Winkle Lake is a playa lake, catching seasonal runoff water and occasionally holding water for months.

The playa lakes provide important nesting and migration stopover sites for a large number of shorebirds. In late summer, when Van Winkle Lake holds water, at least 41 species of species of birds have been observed, including waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors, and songbirds.

Other wildlife species observed on site included round-tailed horned lizards, little-striped whiptails, coachwhips, western box turtles, western spadefoots, and pronghorns. This level of species diversity is exceedingly uncommon in southern New Mexico, as is the habitat for shorebirds and waterfowl.

Evaluation

Van Winkle Lake meets the relevance criterion because it is an important stopover for migratory shorebirds and waterfowl. Despite the small size of the lake, it provides habitat for numerous species of these birds, including special status species.

The nominated Van Winkle Lake ACEC supports shorebird and waterfowl habitat that is exceedingly rare on BLM-administered public land in southern New Mexico, and it provides habitat for a far greater diversity of plant and animal species than the surrounding upland habitats. Van Winkle Lake meets the importance criterion due to its small size and vulnerability to potential surface-disturbing or water-diversion uses. Van Winkle Lake has been carried forward as a proposed ACEC.

1.5 Nominated ACECs Not Brought Forward Into the Alternatives

1.5.1 Aden Lava Flow

Description

The *Mimbres RMP* (1993) identified the Aden Lava Flow to be maintained as a research natural area (RNA), with specific management goals and planned actions. The area covers 3,930 acres of public land in southern Doña Ana County, approximately 20 miles southwest of Las Cruces. This area is within the

boundaries of the Aden Lava Flow WSA and is currently managed under the BLM's *Interim Management Policy for Lands Under Wilderness Review*.

The lava flow is a nearly flat landform with steep, walled depressions that vary in size and shape. The area also contains crevices, pressure ridges, and lava tubes. The most prominent feature is Aden Crater, which is currently designated as an RNA and is located in the northwestern lava flow area. The area has significant scenic and geologic values as well as interesting wildlife and wildlife habitat features.

Evaluation

The Aden Lava Flow meets the BLM's relevance criterion because of its scenery and outstanding natural character, as well as for the potential for research and education about its unique lava habitat type and melanistic wildlife species. However, the area fails to meet the importance criterion because it lacks more than locally significant qualities. It will continue to be managed under BLM's *Interim Management Policy for Lands Under Wilderness Review*.

1.5.2 Badger

Description

A total of 12,638 acres were nominated in the Badger area as a PRA for the purpose of recognizing and protecting naturalness, outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive and/or unconfined type of recreation, and ecological resources. The BLM does not have an administrative designation of scenic area or PRA; therefore, the area was evaluated as a nominated ACEC.

The area consist predominantly of low, limestone hills supporting a near monoculture of creosotebush on gravelly sand and gravelly loam soils, although there are some scattered grassy patches and several small canyons containing sumacs and other shrubs.

Although pronghorn antelope and deer both use the area, the habitat quality is not outstanding. The biological diversity of the Badger area is vastly less than that of the greater Otero Mesa area, and its ecological values do not meet the relevance criterion.

Evaluation

The proposed area does not include any natural hazards or relevant natural processes or systems.

The ecological values of the area are similar to those on millions of acres of public land in southern New Mexico and are in no way outstanding. The area fails to support a significant natural process or system. According to Las Cruces District Office records, the only special status plant potentially occurring within the nominated Badger area is the grama grass cactus. There are no known locations for special status plant or animal species in the area. This evaluation finds that the nominated Badger ACEC fails to meet both the relevance and importance criteria for naturalness, outstanding opportunities for solitude and/or unconfined type of recreation, and ecological resources. The Badger area has not been carried forward as a proposed ACEC in the *TriCounty RMP/EIS*.

1.5.3 Cornudas Mountain

Description

The nominated Cornudas Mountain ACEC offers spectacular scenery, particularly in the Wind, Alamo, and Cornudas mountains. These mountains are included in existing ACEC designations and meet relevance and importance criteria. The rest of the area is not significantly scenic enough to qualify as a scenic ACEC in terms of the relevance and importance criteria.

Both the Cornudas and Alamo mountains were landmarks used by historic travelers and have been mentioned in the journals of individuals traveling from the East and Midwest to California during the mid-1800s. The nominated ACEC has cultural relevance; a portion of the historic Butterfield Overland Trail and two Butterfield stage stations, all nationally significant, are within its boundaries. The Butterfield Overland Trail extends beyond the western boundary of the nominated ACEC.

Petroglyph panels have been recorded on rock faces in the Cornudas, Alamo, and Wind mountains. Prehistoric habitation sites also are near each of the mountains. These petroglyph panels increase the cultural relevance of the nominated ACEC because they are unique and irreplaceable.

The Otero Mesa grasslands certainly have regional and perhaps national value. However, the grasslands comprise only 18 percent of the nominated ACEC. The Otero Mesa grasslands provide habitat for a herd of pronghorn antelope. The hilly and mountainous areas of the nominated ACEC contain a small number of deer. An exotic ungulate, the Barbary sheep, has encroached into the Cornudas Mountains from a population established by escaped game/farm animals near Hondo, New Mexico.

Cornudas Mountain woodland snail was one of the defining values qualifying the Cornudas, Wind, Chatfield, and Alamo mountains for ACEC status. Because this species may potentially be found in the Black, Deer, and Flat Top mountains, those locations would also meet relevance and importance criteria.

Evaluation

The scenic, historic and prehistoric resources within the nominated ACEC meet both the relevance and importance criteria for cultural resources. A special status species is known to occur in several mountains in the nominated ACEC and is likely to occur on other hills and mountains of the area. The presence of this species meets relevance and importance criteria as well.

Subsequent to the nomination of Cornudas Mountains, Otero Mesa Grassland ACEC was nominated and it fully encloses the Cornudas Mountains nominated ACEC. The lands associated with Cornudas Mountain are now considered part of the Otero Mesa Grassland ACEC.

1.5.4 Greater West Potrillo Mountains

Description

A total of 18,317 acres in the Greater West Potrillo Mountains area were nominated as an SMA. The area was nominated for the purpose of recognizing and protecting naturalness, outstanding opportunities for solitude and/or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation, and scenic and ecological resources.

Evaluation

The area offers opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation, such as hiking and hunting. However, these opportunities are similar to those found on millions of acres of public land throughout central and southern New Mexico, and so are judged to be less than outstanding. The area fails to offer outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation.

The proposed area does not include any natural hazards or relevant natural processes or systems.

Most wildlife species found in the nominated area are common throughout the deserts of southern New Mexico. The claim of a high diversity of bats having been recorded in the area is questionable. There has been little bat inventory conducted in the area, and the BLM has no bat records from this area.

The LCDO has no records of special status species plants within the nominated area; however, little botanical inventory has occurred. This evaluation finds that the nominated area fails to meet both the relevance and importance criteria for naturalness, outstanding opportunities for solitude and/or primitive and unconfined type of recreation, and scenic and ecological resources. The Greater West Potrillo Mountains have not been carried forward as a proposed ACEC.

1.5.5 Gyp Hills – Chalk Hills

Description

A total of 29,446 acres in the Gyp Hills-Chalk Hills in northern Sierra County were nominated as a PRA. The area was nominated for the purpose of recognizing and protecting naturalness, outstanding opportunities for solitude and/or primitive and unconfined type of recreation, and ecology. The BLM does not have an administrative designation of PRA; therefore, the area was evaluated as a nominated ACEC.

The Gyp Hills-Chalk Hills area does not include any natural hazards or relevant natural processes or systems that would meet the relevance criteria for ACECs.

The area offers opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation, such as hiking and hunting. However, these opportunities are similar to those found on millions of acres of public land throughout central and southern New Mexico, and so are judged to be less than outstanding.

The proposed area includes a portion of the mountain slopes and western foothills of the San Andres Mountains. The area also includes some of the alluvial fans and terraces along the western toe slopes of the mountains. The public land within the Gyp Hills-Chalk Hills area nomination includes grassy hills and creosote-dominated bajadas interspersed by large arroyos supporting arroyo-riparian habitats. The area has low to moderate potential for occurrence of special status plant species.

Evaluation

This evaluation finds that the Gyp Hills-Chalk Hills nomination fails to meet the relevance and importance criteria for naturalness, outstanding opportunities for solitude and/or primitive unconfined type of recreation, and ecological resources. None of the Gyp Hills-Chalk Hills area has been carried forward as a potential ACEC.

1.5.6 Organ/Franklin Mountains ACEC Bar Canyon Expansion

Description

In 2001, the BLM Las Cruces District Office acquired 113 acres through a land exchange with The Nature Conservancy and acquired another 310 adjoining acres in the Organ Mountains through purchase. The 423-acre Bar Canyon parcel (also mistakenly called Soledad Canyon) is immediately adjacent to the Peña Blanca WSA and the Organ/Franklin Mountains ACEC.

The Organ Mountains are a unique and spectacular topographic feature in the region. Characterized by a palisade of massive granite peaks with bare rock caps, they visually dominate the landscape. The Organ Mountains exhibit vegetal influences from the Chihuahu Desert, Rocky Mountains, and Great Plains and are home to some of the highest concentrations of threatened and endangered plant species found in New Mexico. Special status plant species and/or associated suitable habitats occur near the nominated Bar Canyon ACEC. These include Organ Mountains pincushion cactus (*Escobaria organensis*; BLM sensitive and State endangered), Organ Mountains evening primrose (*Oenothera organensis*; BLM sensitive), nodding cliff daisy (*Perityle cernua*; BLM sensitive), smooth figwort (*Scrophularia laevis*; BLM sensitive), night-blooming cereus (*Peniocereus greggii* var. *greggii*; BLM sensitive and State endangered), and crested coral-root (*Hexalectris spicata* var. *arizonica*; BLM sensitive). The parcel offers additional suitable habitat for special status animal species such as the Organ Mountains Colorado chipmunk, the ringtail, and numerous bats.

Evaluation

The nominated Bar Canyon expansion of the Organ/Franklin Mountains ACEC meets the relevance criterion due to its proximity to the existing ACEC and the added scenic values within the canyon. This area has relevance due to the biological values of the habitat for numerous special status plant and animal species. This area meets the importance criterion because it is a natural part of the entire Organ Mountains system and is potentially at risk from impacts associated with unmanaged recreational uses.

Subsequent to the nomination of Bar Canyon as an expansion of the Organ/Franklin Mountains ACEC, an inventory of wilderness characteristics determined that the 423 acres, adjacent to the existing Peña Blanca WSA, have wilderness characteristics. Bar Canyon is analyzed in the *TriCounty RMP/EIS* under Lands with Wilderness Characteristics.

1.5.7 Penasco Canyon

Description

A total of 5,354 acres in the Penasco Canyon area were nominated as a PRA. The area was nominated for the purpose of recognizing and protecting naturalness; outstanding opportunities for solitude and/or primitive and unconfined type of recreation; and scenic, ecological and cultural resources. The BLM does not have an administrative designation of PRA; therefore, it was evaluated as a nominated ACEC.

The nomination listed naturalness, outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined types of recreation, and scenery as values to be protected. Ecological and cultural resources were also noted as values to be protected by ACEC designation.

Evaluation

The resource values of the area are similar to those on millions of acres of public land in southern New Mexico and are in no way outstanding. The nominated Penasco Canyon ACEC fails to meet both the relevance and importance criteria for naturalness; outstanding opportunities for solitude and/or primitive unconfined types of recreation; and scenic, ecological, and cultural resources. None of nominated Penasco Canyon has been carried forward as a proposed ACEC in the *TriCounty RMP/EIS*.