

## CHAPTER 2 – AREAS OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION AND RESOURCE OVERVIEW

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) requires that in the development of land use plans, priority be given to the designation and protection of areas of critical environmental concerns (ACECs). It defines ACECs as 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. Regulations at 43 CFR 1610.7-2 require that for an area to be considered as a potential ACEC, both of the following criteria shall be met: 1) Relevance – There shall be present a significant historic, cultural or scenic value; a fish or wildlife resource or other natural system or process; or a natural hazard; and 2) Importance – the above described value, resource, system, process, or natural hazard shall have substantial significance and values. This generally requires qualities of more than local significance and special worth, consequences, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern.

Coupling ACEC designation with the BLM's multiple-use planning process ensures that consideration will be made within the context of all resources being evaluated in the RMP process. Designating an area as an ACEC signals that special management attention is needed in order to protect and prevent irreparable damage to relevant and important existing values. Special management conditions for existing ACECs are included in the RMP (BLM 1991), and may be included in area-specific management plans.

The first step in the ACEC designation process is a call for nominations during public scoping for the RMP. The BLM, other federal and state agencies, special-interest groups, or members of the public may formally nominate an area for ACEC designation. The nomination is reviewed by a BLM interdisciplinary team of specialists to determine if the criteria of relevance and importance are met.

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If the relevance and importance criteria are met, the area is considered as a potential ACEC to be considered for ACEC designation during the RMP planning process or during the RMP amendment process. Approval of the proposed RMP or RMP amendment by the BLM State Director by signing the record of decision officially designates an ACEC. Following ACEC designation, special management identified in the RMP or in supplemental planning is implemented.

### 2.2 SPECIFIC MANDATES AND AUTHORITY

- FLPMA Section 202(c)(3) – Provides congressional direction to consider ACECs.
- 43 CFR 1610-7-2 – Federal regulations for implementing the ACEC provisions of FLPMA.
- BLM Planning Handbook, Appendix C – Provides direction for Outstanding Natural Area ACECs.
- BLM Manual Sections 1610 and 1613 – Provides direction for considering ACECs in planning.
- BLM Manual Section 1621 – Identifies the potential to designate soil, water, and scenic ACECs in the land use planning process.
- BLM Manual Section 1622 – Identifies the potential to designate a priority habitat ACEC in the land use planning process.
- BLM Manual Section 1623 – Identifies the potential to designate a cultural resource ACEC in the land use planning process.

### 2.3 EXISTING ACECS

With the approval of the San Juan RMP (BLM 1991), 10 ACECs, comprising approximately 513,452 acres, were designated in the Monticello FO area. These areas are recognized as requiring special management attention for the protection of cultural sites, scenic qualities, recreational opportunities, and vegetation and wildlife resources. With the exception of the Grand Gulch Plateau Cultural and Recreation Management Plan (BLM 1993), separate management plans have not been developed for each ACEC. Instead, the special management conditions (from the 1991 RMP and as identified in the Table 2.1), direct how the existing ACECs are to be managed. If a project is allowed to proceed within an ACEC, these established management conditions must be followed, and are incorporated directly into the management prescription for the proposed project. The 10 existing ACECs are described below with special management considerations listed in Table 2-1.

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#### Alkali Ridge ACEC

This ACEC encompasses 39,202 acres between Alkali Canyon and Montezuma Canyon, which includes Alkali Ridge National Historic Landmark (NHL). Designated for its relevant and important cultural values, special management conditions include limits on surface disturbance and avoidance of cultural sites eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Regulations specific to management of NHLs apply within the 2,340-acre Alkali Ridge NHL.

#### Bridger Jack Mesa ACEC

Located within the Canyon Basins Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA), the top mesa surface of Bridger Jack Mesa is designated as an ACEC for the protection of its vegetation resources. Managed as a no grazing area under the grazing management program, it includes 6,260 acres of near-relict plant communities that provide a control area for comparing the effects of grazing on vegetation. In addition to the absence of grazing, this ACEC is managed in the semi-primitive, non-motorized (SPNM) recreation opportunity spectrum (ROS) class, which provides protection from motorized vehicles. Surface disturbance is limited to that which could be successfully revegetated within 5 years. Recreational use would be limited if damage to vegetative resources becomes evident.

#### Butler Wash ACEC

Located within the Canyon Basins SRMA and adjacent to Canyonlands National Park, the 17,463 acres that comprise this ACEC were identified for relevant and important scenic values. The special management conditions listed in Table 2.1 take precedence over the special management consideration also provided through the ROS P (Primitive)-class guidelines. Recreational use would be limited if damage to scenic values becomes evident.

#### Cedar Mesa ACEC

This ACEC includes the 295,335 acres between Grand Gulch and Comb Wash. It encompasses the Grand Gulch Archaeological District, the Grand Gulch Primitive Area, and two special emphasis areas, Grand Gulch and Valley of the Gods. The entire area is within the Grand Gulch Plateau SRMA and includes both the P and SPNM (semi-primitive, non-motorized) ROS classes. Identified for its cultural and visual/recreational resources, Cedar Mesa ACEC is managed to protect its cultural resources, scenic values, and natural values associated with primitive recreation. Management prescriptions, guided by the Grand Gulch Cultural and Recreation Management Plan (1993), include limits on surface disturbance and avoidance of cultural sites eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Any surface disturbance

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must be revegetated within 5 years. Recreational use is to be restricted if damage to cultural or scenic resources becomes evident.

The special management considerations of the Scenic Highway Corridor ACEC take precedence where these two ACECs overlap (affecting 21,380 acres of the Cedar Mesa ACEC). Within riparian areas, the special management considerations for floodplains and riparian/aquatic areas are followed.

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*Dark Canyon ACEC*

Located within the Canyon Basins SRMA, this 61,659-acre ACEC is managed under the Recreation/Visual Resource program to protect its scenic values and opportunities for primitive recreation. Special conditions for ROS P-class apply. Special management conditions include: 1) seasonal use restrictions for bighorn sheep habitat; and 2) restrictions on recreational use, should this activity damage cultural or scenic resources.

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*Hovenweep ACEC*

This ACEC includes 1,798 acres around Hovenweep [National Monument](#). It is designated for the protection of its cultural and wildlife habitat values. Two special emphasis areas, Cajon Pond (10 acres) and a visual protection zone (880 acres), are also managed within the Hovenweep ACEC. Cajon Pond provides important waterfowl habitat. The visual emphasis zone contains [is the area that was designated as no surface occupancy for oil and gas leasing](#) prior to adoption of the RMP. Special conditions for floodplains and riparian/aquatic areas take precedence over ACEC special management conditions.

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*Indian Creek ACEC*

Indian Creek ACEC includes 8,509 acres adjacent to Canyonlands National Park. Management direction for the relevant and important scenic values is provided by the Canyon Basins SRMA, under the ROS P-class designation. Only activities that could be successfully revegetated with native vegetation within one year after project completion are allowed. [Revegetation would be deemed successful when seedlings are established and tending toward the density that existed before the surface was disturbed. All revegetation must be with native species naturally occurring in the vicinity.](#) Evidence of damage to scenic values would limit recreational opportunities.

*Lavender Mesa ACEC*

The surface of Lavender Mesa (649 acres) was designated as an ACEC to protect its relict plant communities and is managed as a no grazing area. The absence of grazing offers ideal baseline conditions for the study of grazing effects on vegetation. In addition to ROS SPMN-class special conditions, surface disturbance is limited to those projects that could be successfully revegetated with 5 years of project completion. Only native species found on the mesa top are to be used for revegetation efforts. Recreational use is to be limited if damage to cultural resources or scenic values becomes evident.

Scenic Highway Corridor ACEC

The visual corridors along Highways U-95, U-261, and U-276, and a portion of the White Canyon viewshed were designated as an ACEC to protect scenic values. Much of the area (79,017 total acres) in this ACEC is one-mile wide. Some overlap occurs with other special management areas such as the Butler Wash Archaeological District, Grand Gulch Plateau SRMA, and the Cedar Mesa ACEC. Surface disturbance is restricted to those activities where ground-disturbance can be revegetated within 5 years of project completion. Recreational use is to be limited if damage to scenic values becomes evident.

Shay Canyon ACEC

This ACEC (3,560 acres) includes sections of the Upper Indian Creek drainage that require special management conditions to protect cultural resources. A special emphasis area for the protection of aquatic and riparian habitat is also located within this ACEC, delineated as a 275-foot corridor along upper Indian Creek. Surface disturbance restrictions and mitigation are applied as necessary, and limit direct and indirect impacts to cultural sites.

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Table 2.1. Special Management Considerations for Existing ACECs

ACEC	Minerals		Land Ownership		Livestock Use	Conditional Fire Suppression	OHV Use Designations		VRM Class	Woodland Products	Improvements			Vegetation treatments	
	Leasing (category)	Disposal	Entry	Public			Segregated from Entry	Open/Closed/Limit			Limited Existing vs. Designated Roads and Trails	Surface Disturbance (Revegetation)	Habitat		Watershed
Alkali Ridge	2; geo.	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	L	Existing roads/trails	III	Y	5-yr	Y	NA	Y
Bridger Jack Mesa	3; geo.	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	C	NA		N	N	N	N	N
Butler Wash	3; geo.	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	C	NA	I	N	1-yr	NA	NA	NA
Cedar Mesa	2; geo.	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	L	Designated roads/trails		Y	5-yr	Y	NA	Y
(Valley of the Gods; Grand Gulch)	3; 4/3	Y;N	Y	Y;Y	N;Y	Y; Y/N	Y;Y	L;C	Designated roads/trails	I; I	Y;N	1-yr; 1-yr	NA; NA	NA; NA	Y; Non-M
Dark Canyon	4	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	C	NA	I	N	1-yr			
Hovenweep	2; geo.	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	L	Designated roads/trails		N	5-yr	Y	Y	Y
(visual zone; Cajon Pond)	3; 2					N (1-ac)									N
Indian Creek	3; geo.	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	C	NA	I	N	1-yr	NA	NA	NA
Lavender Mesa	3; geo.	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	C	NA		N	5-yr	N	N	Non-M

**Table 2.1. Special Management Considerations for Existing ACECs**

ACEC	Minerals			Land Ownership		Livestock Use	Conditional Fire Suppression	OHV Use Designations		VRM Class	Woodland Products	Improvements			
	Leasing (category)	Disposal	Entry	Public	Segregated from Entry			Open/Closed/Limit	Limited Existing vs. Designated Roads and Trails			Surface Disturbance (Revegetation)	Habitat	Watershed	Vegetation treatments
Scenic Highway Corridor  (Grand Gulch)	3; geo.	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	L	Designated roads/trails	I	Y	5-yr	NA	NA	NA
Shay Canyon  (and Upper Indian Creek)	2; geo.	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	L	Designated roads/trails  Existing trails/route	I	N	5-yr		Y	Y

Notes: Y = Yes; N = No; O = Open; C = Closed; NA = Not applicable; Non-M = Non-motorized.

**2.4 RESOURCE DEMAND AND FORECAST**

A heightened interest in the desert southwest has popularized visitation to the BLM-administered public lands surrounding Monticello. The abundance of cultural resources and outstanding recreational opportunities attracts tourists, increasing the risk of impacts to cultural sites and biological resources. Uses such as increased area visitation and recreational activities, such as dispersed camping, off-highway vehicle activities, livestock grazing, oil and gas exploration and development, and minerals extraction may put unique, fragile resources at risk of irreparable damage and contribute to loss of habitat and biodiversity. Providing special management attention to protect unique natural resources ensures that such resources continue to exist on BLM-administered public lands and will meet future demands within the context of multiple-use management.

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**2.5 CONSISTENCY WITH NON-BUREAU PLANS**

ACEC specific management considerations should be coordinated with the management goals of adjacent federal lands when possible. Acquiring any State land within ACEC boundaries would help the BLM achieve management consistency.

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Adjacent lands administered by other federal agencies include Canyonlands National Park, Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, Natural Bridges National Monument, Hovenweep National Monument, the newly created BLM Canyon of the Ancients National Monument, and the Manti-LaSal National Forest.

## 2.6 ISSUES OR CONCERNS

The existing RMP is out-dated with respect to current levels of use and increasing demands [for some resources and uses within the Monticello FO area.](#)

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In the 1991 RMP, the Butler Wash, Cedar Mesa, Dark Canyon, Indian Creek, and Scenic Highway Corridor ACECs were described being managed to protect values for Recreation/Visual because the two programs, Recreation and Visual Resource Management (VRM), were combined and both managed under the Recreation program. Since that time, the two programs have been separated and are now managed under their own respective resource program. As well, in the current guidance Scenic is a relevant value listed under the evaluation criteria. Recreation is not considered an ACEC relevant value, rather Recreation is a series of activities and, therefore, not evaluated under the ACEC guidelines. This change is evidenced in the current ACEC relevance and importance criteria evaluations.

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## 2.7 MANAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS

The ten existing ACECs totaling 513,452 acres have been reconsidered for designation as required during this evaluation process. [Acreages for ACECs listed in the current RMP have been updated using modern GIS technology thereby providing more accurate acreage numbers](#) (Table 2.2).

**Table 2.2 Monticello FO Planning Area ACECs from 1991 RMP**

Existing ACECs	Value(s)	1991 RMP Acreage <sup>1</sup>	Existing ACEC Mapped Acreage per ArcView <sup>2</sup>
Alkali Ridge ACEC	Cultural	35,890	39,202
Bridger Jack Mesa ACEC	Near-relict vegetation	5,290	6,260
Butler Wash ACEC	Scenic	13,870	17,463
Cedar Mesa ACEC	Cultural, Scenic	323,760	295,335
Dark Canyon ACEC	Scenic	62,040	61,659
Hovenweep ACEC	Cultural, Habitat Management	1,500	1,798
Indian Creek ACEC	Scenic	8,640	8,509
Lavender Mesa ACEC	Near-relict vegetation	640	649
Scenic Highway Corridor ACEC	Scenic	78,390	79,017
Shay Canyon ACEC	Cultural, & Special Emphasis Area	1,770	3,560
<b>Total</b>		<b>531,790</b>	<b>513,452</b>

<sup>1</sup>Acreage listed in 1991 RMP

<sup>2</sup>Acreage for current existing ACECs determined by ArcView program

Nine ACEC nominations were received from the BLM and external sources. The proposed ACECs covering approximately 1.3 million acres; some of these nominations overlap portions of existing ACECs, while approximately 400,000 acres of specific nominations did not duplicate any currently existing ACEC areas (Table 2.3).

**Table 2.3. Nominated ACECs by BLM Field Offices**

Nominated ACEC	Value(s)	Acreage per Arc+View
Lockhart Basin	Scenic	56,293
Valley of the Gods	Scenic	34,771
<b>Total</b>		<b>91,064</b>

**2.7.1 ACEC Nominations**

*Lockhart Basin (56,293 acres)*

Lockhart Basin has been nominated as an ACEC to protect the relevant and important scenic values; one possible configuration for the ACEC proposal would be to include the Indian Creek ACEC within the Lockhart Basin ACEC boundary.

Relevance and Importance: The 1985 Management Situation Analysis (MSA), which identified the resources present within the proposed San Juan Resource Management Plan Boundary (now the Monticello Field Office), stated that the Lockhart Basin area met the relevance and importance requirements for ACEC status. The MSA states the following:

The special value identified is one of outstanding scenic qualities in terms of diversity of landform and colors present. The landform within the area is typified by outstanding rock formations, including rounded spires, high, truncated ledges and cliffs. The colors range from light pink and white sandstone along the lower Indian Creek areas to white, pink, red, and dark reddish-purple colors in the ledges and rock formations and are outstanding. The color contrasts add to the scenic quality of this area. Some of the most spectacular rock formations in the U.S. are found here.

The scenic values of this area are important to regional, national, and international visitors who view this area from developed overlooks, while traveling the designated byway and backways, on OHV routes, while hiking canyons, rims and lowlands, or while painting and photographing the picturesque vistas. Visitor registers located at the BLM’s Canyon Rims Overlook include these comments: "More scenic than the Grand Canyon", "Leave it as it is", and "Don’t change it", etc.

Rationale for Designation: The visual resources of the Lockhart Basin ACEC proposal are some of the most impressive of the entire Colorado Plateau, and are of local, national, and international significance. The unique characteristics of landforms, the adjacency to Canyonlands National Park, the relative pristine nature of the land, the attraction of visitors to scenic resources, and the ability of the visitor to view the area from so many vantage points makes this an extraordinary and important visual resource in our country.

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 The following three ACEC nominations would protect relevant and important cultural resources. When possible, cultural resource specialists prefer to include special management considerations for relevant and important cultural attributes within ACECs that have been primarily designated for another resource. By doing so, attention to sensitive cultural sites is diminished; therefore, these areas are better protected from human disturbance.¶  
 Bluff Canyons¶  
 Approximately 500 acres have been nominated, based on the need to protect relevant cultural resources. Cultural resource attributes include Pueblo III (PIII) occupation, evidence of cultural interaction with Kayenta and Mesa Verde Anasazi, and rock art. The area also possesses historic cattle industry attributes such as an early 1900s trail. Significant Native American values are associated with the area, especially in Cottonwood Wash caves. The importance of these relevant attributes and values would be evaluated on the greater-than-local significance and need for special management consideration for protection. Management suggestions include emphasizing the research potential of the area, and conservation of cultural sites.

*Valley of the Gods (34,771 acres)*

Valley of the Gods has been nominated for its scenic values. Valley of the Gods lies north of US Highway 163 and extends north to the south cliff line of Cedar Mesa. The Valley of the Gods is currently a Special Emphasis Area within the Cedar Mesa existing ACEC. A portion of Road Canyon WSA lies in the northwestern section of the Valley of the Gods area.

Valley of the Gods is nominated as a potential stand-alone ACEC by the BLM Monticello Field Office ID Team based on scenic values of quality and diversity of landforms.

Relevance: Panoramic views can be seen from the highways bordering the area and from the Valley of the Gods Loop [17-mile gravel and clay] Road. The wind-sculpted spires and buttes, and long rock fins resemble animals or "gods". Seven Sailors, Rooster Butte, Setting Hen Butte, Pyramid Peak, Castle Butte, and Bell Butte are found here. The West Fork of Lime Creek, Lime Creek, and the northwest portion of Lime Ridge are included in this area.

Importance: Valley of the Gods provides varying vistas to those who travel the roads surrounding the potential ACEC area or from the Loop Road running through the area. The Valley of the Gods is important to regional, national and international visitors who view and photograph the scenery. The majority of those who travel the state highway system do not take advantage of backcountry (off the road) scenery in a natural setting, instead, the view from the highways are often their scenic experience in the area. The BLM, San Juan County, and the State of Utah have promoted the Loop Road, with easy access off of the highway system, as part of the Trail of the Ancients.

Without protective management prescriptions, the unique scenic values could be damaged by other resource uses and activities, such as potential oil and gas development or mineral-material sales, or other surface disturbing uses and activities. Special management attention would limit surface disturbance to protect scenery from potential adverse impacts, thus preserving it for future visitors to view and enjoy

Rationale for Designation: Valley of the Gods offers remarkable scenic views of many, varied rock formations and towering rims with visual access from the highway system as well as the dirt and gravel Loop Road through the area.

The ID Team suggested that Valley of the Gods be considered for potential ACEC status within a range of alternatives that include leaving it as a Special Emphasis Area within the Cedar Mesa ACEC, or as a stand-alone ACEC for scenic values.

*Areas Nominated by SUWA*

The following nominations for potential ACECs were received June 17, 2004 from the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA). Some of the nominations overlay or extend boundaries of BLM ACECs currently designated. See report of existing and nominated ACEC evaluations (Table 2.4).

**Table 2.4 Nominated ACECs by Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA) June 17, 2004**

<b>Nominated ACEC</b>	<b>Value(s)</b>	<b>Acreage</b>
Canyonlands	Scenic, Cultural, Wildlife, Natural Systems & processes	175,365
Cedar Mesa	Scenic, Cultural, Wildlife, Natural Systems & processes	379,336

**Table 2.4 Nominated ACECs by Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA) June 17, 2004**

<b>Nominated ACEC</b>	<b>Value(s)</b>	<b>Acreage</b>
Dark Canyon	Scenic, Cultural, Wildlife, Natural Systems & processes	163,678
Monument Canyon	Scenic, Cultural, Wildlife, Natural Systems & processes	46,830
Redrock Plateau	Scenic, Cultural, Wildlife, Natural Systems & processes	323,473
San Juan River	Scenic, Cultural, Wildlife, Natural Systems & processes	22,179
White Canyon	Scenic, Cultural, Wildlife, Natural Systems & processes	101,377
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,212,238</b>

BLM Monticello ID Team analyzed both currently existing and nominated areas based on relevance and importance criteria and evaluated the need for special management attention to protect important resources from irreparable damage. Based on this analysis, the BLM identified eleven potential ACECs within the boundaries of the Monticello Field Office (Table 2.5). These eleven ACECs will be proposed in a range of alternatives in the DEIS/RMP process.

**Table 2.5. Summary Table of Potential ACECs**

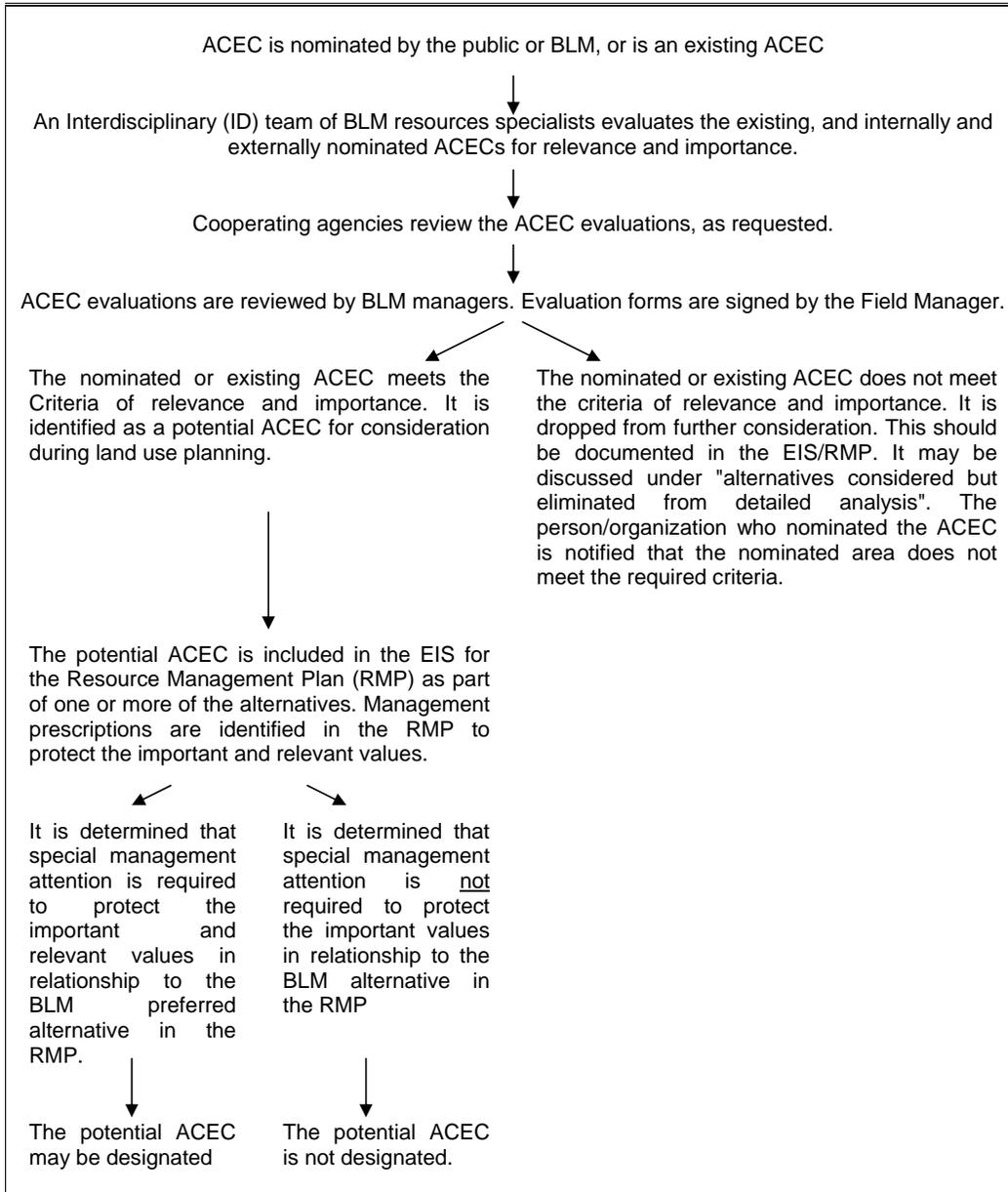
<b>Area Name</b>	<b>Value(s)</b>	<b>Acreage</b>
Alkali Ridge	Cultural	39,202
Bridger Jack Mesa	Near-relict vegetation	6,225
Butler Wash North	Scenic	17,463
Cedar Mesa	Cultural and Scenic, with Special Emphasis Areas – Grand Gulch, Valley of the Gods, and Arch Canyon, and Pine/Step Canyon area	344,262
Dark Canyon	Scenic, Cultural and Wildlife	61,659
Hovenweep	Cultural with Special Wildlife Habitat	2,438
Indian Creek / Lockhart Basin	Scenic	56,293 <sup>1</sup>
Lavender Mesa	Relict-vegetation	649
Shay Canyon	Cultural	119
San Juan River	Scenic, Cultural, Wildlife and Natural System	7,626
Valley of the Gods	Scenic	-- <sup>2</sup>
<b>Total</b>		<b>535,936</b>

<sup>1</sup> Indian Creek: 8,509 acres, included within Lockhart Basin total.

<sup>2</sup> Valley of the Gods: 34,771 acres, included in Cedar Mesa total.

Table 2.6 illustrates the ACEC process utilized by the Monticello Field Office ID Team from evaluating relevance and importance of existing and nominated ACECs through the DEIS/RMP and final determination of ACEC designation.

**Table 2.6. The ACEC Process**



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## 2.8 REFERENCES

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