

Appendix K - Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) Descriptions

Alvord Desert ACEC (Existing and Potential Addition)

Description and values: The existing and potential Alvord Desert ACEC is located in the Alvord Valley, just east of the Alvord Desert playa, about 30 miles north of Fields, Oregon. The area is unfenced and covers 17,933 acres at the edge of a popular recreation use area in the Alvord Desert Playa. Many kinds of All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) are used on the dry lakebed, with some drifting onto the adjacent ACEC.

The relevant and important values associated with this ACEC are centered around an ecosystem containing a diversity of desert landforms and plant communities. Those values include sand dunes; bare playa; playa margins; and big sagebrush greasewood, spiny hopsage, and shadscale plant communities. An additional relevant and important value includes the high scenic quality of the area.

The area is located almost entirely within portions of the Alvord Desert (2-74) and East Alvord (2-73A) WSAs. WSAs are currently managed in accordance with the BLM's IMP. Under this direction, surface-disturbing activities requiring reclamation are generally precluded from the WSAs until Congress makes a decision on wilderness designation. The area is also within the Alvord/Tule Springs HMA.

Some of the human-made developments existing in the ACEC include a bladed road and the remains of four wells, including troughs and windmills. The area is located within one grazing allotment and is withdrawn from mineral entry.

Alvord Peak ACEC (Existing)

Description and values: The Alvord Peak ACEC is located on the southern end of Steens Mountain about three miles north of Fields, Oregon. One parcel of private land totaling 80 acres is situated in the middle of the 15,015-acre ACEC.

The relevant and important values associated with this ACEC are the resident bighorn sheep and their habitat. The area was designated to protect and enhance bighorn sheep habitat and to protect the sheep from competition with wild horses for forage and water. Wild horses have since been removed from the ACEC, eliminating the threat. The dominant vegetation is big sagebrush/bunchgrass with large stands of bitterbrush.

The area is entirely within the Steens Mountain Wilderness and is managed under the direction provided by the Wilderness Act.

Some of the human-made developments include seven stock ponds, four spring developments with exclosures, two wildlife guzzlers, about 0.75 mile of water pipeline, about one mile of fence, and six miles of access and old mining roads. The area is located within the Alvord Peak grazing allotment. The area is withdrawn from mineral entry.

Borax Lake ACEC (Existing and Potential Addition)

Description and values: The Borax Lake ACEC is located in the Pueblo Valley, about six miles northeast of Fields, Oregon. Borax Lake itself is situated on private land owned by The Nature Conservancy in the middle of the ACEC.

The area was designated to protect the habitat of the federally endangered Borax Lake chub. The fish and its habitat are the relevant and important values for this area. Some parts of the ACEC support populations of the chub during the spring and summer, but most of the chub habitat is located on the private land in the center of the ACEC. The area also protects the diversity of plant and animal life inhabiting the area around Borax Lake.

The area is highly alkaline and supports vegetation that is highly salt tolerant such as greasewood, borax weed, saltgrass, and a variety of sedges and rushes in the wetter areas. Hot and cold springs can be found in the ACEC north of Borax Lake. A large reservoir, covering about 15 acres in the western part of the ACEC, is fed by overflow from Borax Lake. The reservoir contains some chubs during the summer and is an important nesting area for waterfowl.

The area is located within one grazing allotment. The ACEC is fenced, except for 120 acres on the east. About one mile of bladed road exists within the ACEC. The area receives substantial sightseer visitor use in the spring, summer, and fall, and waterfowl hunter use in the winter. The area is withdrawn from mineral entry.

East Kiger Plateau ACEC/RNA (Existing)

Description and values: The existing 1,216-acre East Kiger Plateau ACEC/RNA, located on the ridge that forms the east side of Kiger Gorge on Steens Mountain, consists of a ridgetop gently sloping to the north and steep slopes on both sides of the ridge.

Relevant and important values include a plant community type and a Special Status plant species. The area represents an excellent condition, high elevation fescue grassland, which is an important natural area cell need listed by the ONHP. This area has been determined to be one of the best examples of a high elevation fescue grassland in Oregon. One Special Status plant species known to occur on the plateau is Steens Mountain paintbrush.

A portion of the area is within the Steens Mountain ACEC. The ACEC/RNA is also located within the High Steens WSA (2-85F) and the Steens Mountain Wilderness.

There are no roads or other human-made developments within this natural area. The area is located within two grazing allotments, although no livestock graze the site due to topographic barriers. A small portion of the area is within the no livestock grazing area on Steens Mountain. The ACEC/RNA is withdrawn from mineral entry.

Little Blitzen ACEC/RNA (Existing and Potential Deletion)

Description and values: The existing Little Blitzen ACEC/RNA covers 2,530 acres on the top of Steens Mountain at the headwaters of the Little Blitzen River. The elevation ranges from 7,000 feet in Little Blitzen Gorge to 9,400 feet near the top of Steens Mountain.

Relevant and important values include plant community types and several Special Status plant species. The ACEC/RNA was designated to protect several terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems (cells) recognized by the ONHP as being the best examples of those cells in Oregon's Basin and Range Physiographic Province. The cells that were recognized within this natural area include a mid- to high-elevation vernal pond, a stream system originating in the subalpine, aspen grove, alpine communities on Steens Mountain including snow deflation and moderate snow cover communities, late-lying snowbeds, high-elevation fescue grassland, and rare plant communities. The rare plants occurring in this natural area include Steens Mountain paintbrush, moonwort, pinnate grapefern, lance-leaved grapefern, wedge-leaf saxifrage, Hayden's cymopterus, and moss gentian.

This entire ACEC/RNA is situated within the Steens Mountain Wilderness and is managed under direction provided by the Wilderness Act. A portion of the Oregon High Desert National Recreation Trail runs through the natural area.

The ACEC/RNA is located within the no livestock grazing area on Steens Mountain. The human-made developments within this ACEC/RNA include three miles of the Steens Mountain Loop Road and a memorial plaque. The area is withdrawn from mineral entry.

Little Wildhorse Lake ACEC/RNA (Existing)

Description and values: The existing 241-acre Little Wildhorse Lake ACEC/RNA is located on the highest elevations of Steens Mountain at the headwaters of Little Wildhorse Creek. The elevation ranges from 8,500 to 9,300 feet.

The relevant and important value for the ACEC/RNA is an aquatic ecosystem. The area fills a cell need for a pristine, mid- to high-elevation lake in the Basin and Range Physiographic Province as identified by the ONHP. The area also contains rims and upper-elevation plant communities in good to excellent condition.

This entire ACEC/RNA is located within the Steens Mountain Wilderness and is managed under the provisions of the Wilderness Act. It is also located within the Steens Mountain ACEC designated for scenic values.

This ACEC/RNA is located within the no livestock grazing area on Steens Mountain and is withdrawn from mineral entry.

Long Draw ACEC/RNA (Existing)

Description and values: The existing 441-acre ACEC/RNA is located in southwest Harney County about four miles from the Nevada border. The site is about two miles south of Lone Mountain and about three miles east of Hawk Mountain. The elevation at the site is 5,000 feet.

The relevant and important value for this area is a plant community type. The ACEC/RNA was designated to protect a unique terrestrial ecosystem (ONHP cell) containing Indian ricegrass and needle-and-thread in association with Wyoming big sagebrush. The drainages within the natural area contain the key elements or values of the ACEC/RNA, and the ridgetops are a Wyoming big sagebrush/bottlebrush squirreltail plant community.

The entire ACEC/RNA is located within portions of the Hawk Mountain (1-146A) and Rincon (2-82) WSAs. WSAs are currently managed in accordance with the BLM's IMP. Under this direction, surface-disturbing activities requiring reclamation are generally precluded from the WSAs until Congress makes a decision on wilderness designation.

The one human-made development within this area is 0.5 mile of road. The ACEC/RNA is located within the Pueblo-Lone Mountain grazing allotment.

A portion of the existing ACEC/RNA has a high potential for the occurrence of epithermal-related gold/silver/mercury deposits. Little or no interest has been shown for any mineral resources in the area.

Mickey Basin ACEC/RNA (Existing)

Description and values: The existing 560-acre ACEC/RNA is located in the north end of the Alvord Valley about 35 miles north of Fields and about four miles north of the Alvord Desert. Approximately 191 acres of the 560 acres are fenced to exclude livestock and wild horses.

The relevant and important value includes a vegetation community type. The ACEC/RNA was designated to protect an ecosystem consisting of a winterfat plant community growing in a nearly pure stand on ash soils. This vegetation type is listed in the ONHP as a cell that is uncommon in the Basin and Range Physiographic Province and is in need of protection and recognition as a natural area.

The entire ACEC/RNA is located within the East Alvord (2-73A) and Winter Range (2-73H) WSAs. WSAs are currently managed in accordance with the BLM's IMP. Under this direction, surface-disturbing activities requiring reclamation are generally precluded from the WSAs until Congress makes a decision on wilderness designation.

The human-made developments existing within this area include about one mile of fence and 0.75 mile of road. The ACEC/RNA is located within the Alvord grazing allotment. The area is also within the Alvord-Tule Springs HMA and is withdrawn from mineral entry.

Pickett Rim ACEC (Existing)

Description and values: The existing Pickett Rim 3,941-acre ACEC is situated around the large rim system about two miles west of Frenchglen, Oregon. The area is steep and rocky, with talus slopes, vertical rims, and benches.

Relevant and important values include birds of prey and their habitat. The area is designated to protect important nesting areas and habitat for many kinds of raptors such as hawks, eagles, and vultures.

The human-made developments existing in the ACEC are limited to about one mile of road. The ACEC is located within the LaVoy Tables grazing allotment.

This area has little or no potential for the occurrence of mineral resources.

Pueblo Foothills ACEC/RNA (Existing and Potential Deletion)

Description and values: The existing 2,503-acre Pueblo Foothills ACEC/RNA is located on the lowest reach of Cottonwood Creek, about seven miles south of Fields, Oregon. The elevation ranges from 4,400 to 5,700 feet.

Relevant and important values include a plant community type and Special Status plant species. The ACEC/RNA was designated to protect an ecosystem recognized by the ONHP as being the best example of a Mormon tea/narrowleaf cottonwood community complex in the Basin and Range Physiographic Province, if not in the State of Oregon. Several Special Status plant species that also occur in this unique ecosystem include narrowleaf cottonwood, large-flowered chaenactis, , naked-stemmed phacelia, ochre-flowered buckwheat and Malheur cryptantha.

This existing ACEC/RNA is situated entirely within the Pueblo Mountain WSA (2-81). WSAs are currently managed in accordance with the BLM's IMP. Under this direction, surface-disturbing activities requiring reclamation are generally precluded from the WSAs until Congress makes a decision on wilderness designation.

The only human-made development is a small piece of the Arizona Creek Road. Two other roads that were within the area were blocked and rehabilitated due to lack of official use. This ACEC/RNA is located within the Pueblo-Lone Mountain grazing allotment.

The existing ACEC/RNA has a high potential for the occurrence of epithermal-related gold/silver/mercury deposits. A portion of the ACEC/RNA has a high potential for porphyry related deposits of gold, copper, or molybdenum. The area has a moderate potential for the occurrence of low sulfide gold deposits. The area has been heavily claimed in the past for locatables, but only a few claims exist in the area at the present time.

Rooster Comb ACEC/RNA (Existing and Potential Deletion)

Description and values: The existing 716-acre ACEC/RNA is located at the mouth of the Little Blitzen Gorge on Steens Mountain. The area encompasses both sides of the canyon and about 1.5 miles of the Little Blitzen River.

Relevant and important values include several vegetation community types. The ACEC/RNA was designated to protect a terrestrial and an aquatic ecosystem, both of which were determined to be the best examples of those ecosystems in the Basin and Range Physiographic Province. The ONHP cells represented in this natural area are a mountain mahogany/bluebunch wheatgrass community and a black cottonwood riparian community.

The entire ACEC/RNA is situated within the Steens Mountain Wilderness and is managed under the provisions of the Wilderness Act. A portion of the Oregon High Desert National Recreation Trail runs through the natural area.

Human-made developments within this ACEC/RNA include about 0.5 mile of road and about 11 miles of hiking trail. The area is located within the no livestock grazing area on Steens Mountain. The area is also withdrawn from mineral entry.

South Fork Willow Creek ACEC/RNA (Existing and Potential Deletion)

Description and values: The 231-acre existing South Fork Willow Creek ACEC/RNA is the upper part of a glacial cirque located on the east rim of Steens Mountain at the headwaters of the South Fork of Willow Creek. The natural area contains a wide variety of microhabitats including rock outcrops, ledges, and a series of three boggy terraces with pools, streams, and open shrubby areas. The East Rim Viewpoint lies just on the south edge of the natural area.

Relevant and important values for which the ACEC/RNA is designated include vegetation community types and Special Status plants. ONHP vegetation cells represented in the natural area include alpine communities on Steens Mountain and a stream system originating in a glacial cirque. The Special Status plants that occur within this natural area include Steens Mountain paintbrush, moonwort, pinnate grapefern, lance-leaved grapefern, Cusick's giant hyssop, moss gentian, and slender gentian.

The entire ACEC/RNA is located within the Steens Mountain Wilderness and is managed in accordance with the Wilderness Act.

The ACEC/RNA is located within the no livestock grazing area on Steens Mountain. Human-made developments within this ACEC/RNA include less than 0.25 mile of the Steens Mountain Loop Road and the East Rim Viewpoint.

The area is withdrawn from mineral entry.

Steens Mountain ACEC (Existing)

Description and values: The existing and Steens Mountain ACEC currently covers 56,501 acres and is located on the highest part of Steens Mountain about 80 miles south of Burns, Oregon. Included within the ACEC are the major topographic features that make the area a scenic attraction, such as the Little Blitzen Gorge, Big Indian Gorge, Kiger Gorge, Wildhorse Canyon, and the East Face. Other attractions include Wildhorse Lake, Little Wildhorse Lake, subalpine ecosystems, and pristine, high-gradient streams.

Relevant and important values include the high scenic values on Steens Mountain, including the craggy base of the Steens Escarpment, vista of the East Rim, and the glacial cirques and valleys. The area ranges from an elevation of 4,400 feet near the Alvord Desert to 9,730 feet at the top of the East Rim Viewpoint.

Several other special designations are included within the boundary of the ACEC including the Steens Mountain Wilderness and the High Steens WSA (2-85F).

Some of the human-made developments in the ACEC include about 20 miles of road, some of which is the Steens Mountain Loop Road, and about four miles of fence. The area is located within several grazing allotments and the no livestock grazing area on Steens Mountain..

Tum Tum Lake ACEC/RNA (Existing and Potential Deletion)

Description and values: The existing 2,064-acre Tum Tum Lake ACEC/RNA is located in Pueblo Valley about ten miles south of Fields, Oregon. The area includes Tum Tum Lake and the area north and east of the lake. The elevation is 4,100 feet.

The relevant and important values for which the ACEC/RNA was designated include vegetation community types, Special Status plant species, and a Special Status fish. The ONHP vegetation cells present at this site are low elevation alkaline lake and salt desert shrub plant communities. The three Special Status plants occurring on this site are iodinebush, salt heliotrope, and verrucose seapurslane, which are very salt tolerant species. The lake is also a valuable waterfowl rearing area as well as habitat for the Alvord chub, a Special Status fish species.

The area is located within the Pueblo-Lone Mountain grazing allotment, has two major utility corridors running through the norther part of it, and contains about two miles of road and one mile of fence.

The existing ACEC/RNA has a high potential for epithermal-related gold/silver/mercury deposits. A saleable minerals site is present in the northwest part of the area. The area has had mining claims in the past, but no claims are present now.

Big Alvord Creek ACEC/RNA (Potential)

Description and values: The potential Big Alvord Creek ACEC/RNA is located on the east face of Steens Mountain, about 30 miles south of Fields, Oregon. The area comprises most of the drainage of Big Alvord Creek, which flows into the Alvord Desert near the Alvord Ranch. The terrain is steep and rugged with elevations ranging from 5,400 to 9,200 feet.

Relevant and important values include several plant community types. The ONHP vegetation cells present on the site include a first- to third-order stream with a high gradient reach in a sagebrush zone, including intermittent streams with alder and dogwood; a big sagebrush/bluebunch wheatgrass plant community; and a black cottonwood riparian community.

The area is entirely within the Steens Mountain ACEC and the Steens Mountain Wilderness.

The area is also within the no livestock grazing area on Steens Mountain. There are no roads within the potential ACEC/RNA, and the area is withdrawn from mineral entry.

Catlow Redband Trout ACEC (Potential)

Description and values: The potential Catlow Redband Trout ACEC is located in the southern Steens Mountain foothills on the Home and Threemile Creek watersheds. This area is about 20 miles south of Frenchglen, Oregon.

Relevant and important values include Special Status fish species and habitat. Home and Threemile Creeks are habitat for the Catlow Valley redband trout and the Catlow tui chub. This area would be designated to protect the fish and habitat.

The area is within the Steens Mountain Wilderness and is managed in accordance with the Wilderness Act.

The area is located within the South Steens grazing allotment, and is withdrawn from mineral entry.

East Fork Trout Creek ACEC/RNA (Potential)

Description and values: The potential East Fork Trout Creek ACEC/RNA is located in the Trout Creek Mountains, about 25 miles southeast of Fields, Oregon. The area includes part of the headwaters of the East Fork of Big Trout Creek and contains several unique ecosystems. The elevation of the area is from 7,400 to 8,000 feet.

The relevant and important values include several plant community types. The ONHP vegetation cells that would be represented in this area include a riparian community dominated by quaking aspen and Scouler willow, a high-elevation wet meadow dominated by sedges, and a first- to third-order stream system originating in the subalpine zone.

The potential ACEC/RNA is located entirely within the Mahogany Ridge WSA (2-77), and is currently managed in accordance with the BLM's IMP. Under this direction, surface-disturbing activities requiring reclamation are generally precluded from the WSAs until Congress makes a decision on wilderness designation.

The area is also located within the Trout Creek Mountain grazing allotment. Approximately 0.5 mile of road is located in the northeast quarter of the area.

The proposed ACEC/RNA has high potential for the occurrence of epithermal-related gold/mercury deposits. No mining claims or interest in mining has been observed in the area.

Fir Groves ACEC (Potential)

Description and values: The potential Fir Groves ACEC is located two miles north of the North Loop Road on Steens Mountain on Little Fir and Fence Creeks. The area is about 12 miles east of Frenchglen, Oregon.

The relevant and important value is a unique plant community type. The ONHP vegetation cell that is represented on the site is a grand fir forest on Steens Mountain. The potential ACEC consists of two separate parcels, one parcel containing an old growth stand of trees and one containing a mix of old and young trees. This area is one of the last places on Steens Mountain containing grand fir.

One of the potential ACEC parcels is within the Bridge Creek grazing allotment and the other is within a fenced federal grazing allotment composed mostly of private land.

The proposed ACEC is withdrawn from mineral entry.

Mickey Hot Springs ACEC (Potential)

Description and values: The potential Mickey Hot Springs ACEC is located in the Alvord Valley about five miles north of the Alvord Desert and about 35 miles north of Fields, Oregon.

Relevant and important values include hot springs and associated hazards. The site supports a hot springs complex containing about 50 active and inactive vents, including a mud pot, hot pools, and cool pools. The area is geologically unique and an attraction for sightseers. It is also potentially hazardous because the water is near boiling. The entire area is currently fenced to keep livestock, wild horses, and vehicles out of the hazard area.

The potential ACEC is located entirely within the East Alvord WSA (2-73A), which is currently managed in accordance with the BLM's IMP. Under this direction, surface-disturbing activities requiring reclamation are generally precluded from the WSAs until Congress makes a decision on wilderness designation.

The area is surrounded by the Alvord-Tule Springs HMA. The area is part of the Alvord grazing allotment, and is withdrawn from mineral entry.

Serrano Point ACEC/RNA (Potential)

Description and values: The potential Serrano Point ACEC/RNA is located in southern Harney County, about two miles east of Andrews. The elevation of the area is 4,100 feet.

Relevant and important values include several vegetation community types. The ONHP vegetation cells that are present on this site include a playa with greasewood and basin wildrye, big sagebrush/greasewood communities, and greasewood/shadscale/bunchgrass playa margin communities. The wildrye communities are some of the best sites for that species in the Basin and Range Physiographic Province. Wildrye grows with greasewood, sagebrush, and by itself in the area in plant communities that are naturally lacking in species diversity.

The potential ACEC/RNA is located within the Tule Springs grazing allotment. A portion of the Oregon High Desert National Recreation Trail runs through the area.

The proposed ACEC/RNA is in an area withdrawn from mineral entry.

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