

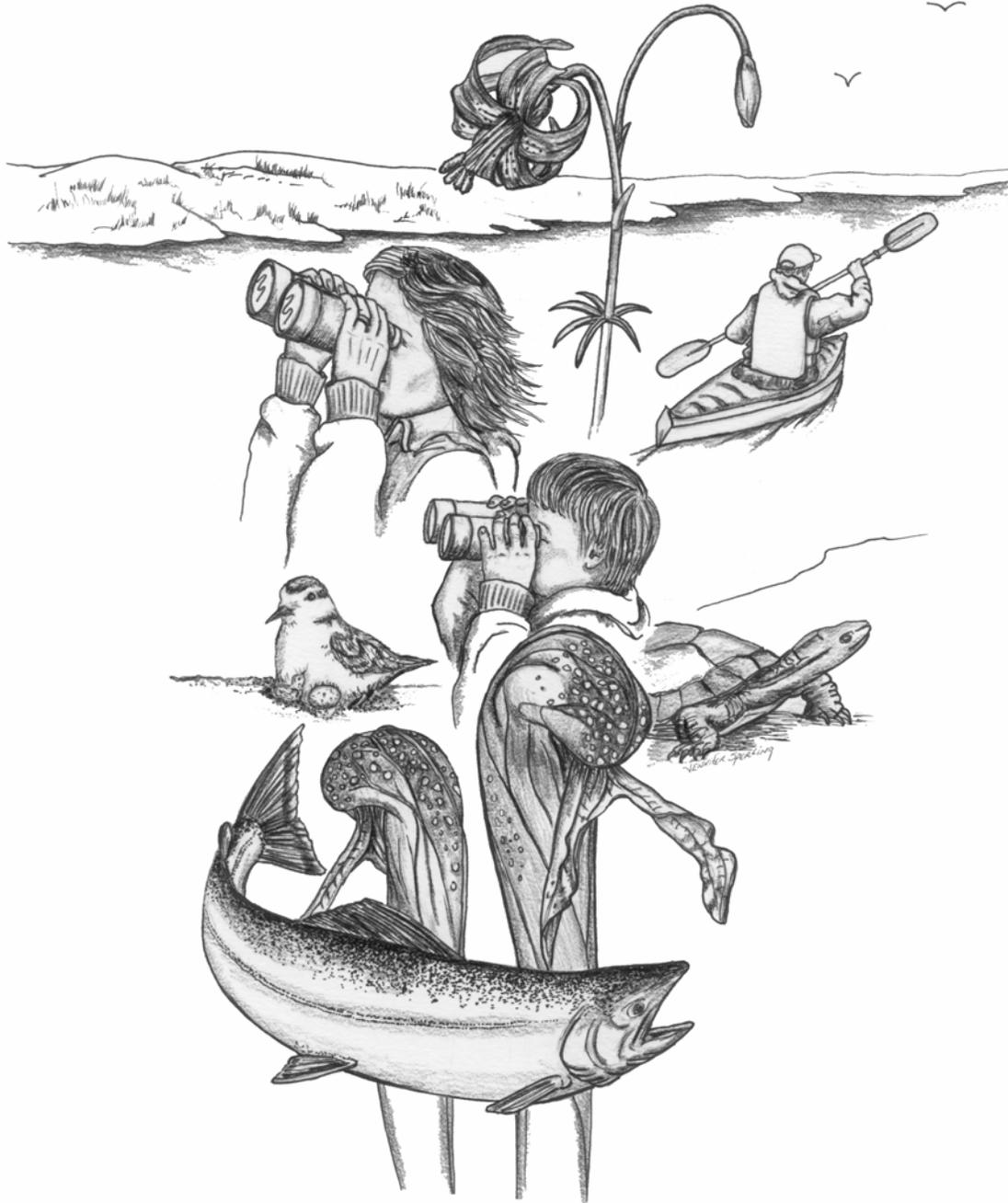
**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**  
Bureau of Land Management

Coos Bay District Office, 1300 Airport Lane, North Bend, OR 97459

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# **NEW RIVER AREA OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN MANAGEMENT PLAN**

*Updated May 2004*

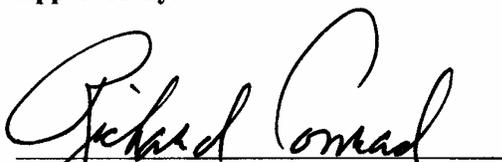




**NEW RIVER  
AREA OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN  
MANAGEMENT PLAN**  
*Updated May 2004*

Myrtlewood Field Office  
Coos Bay District  
Bureau of Land Management  
U.S. Department of the Interior

**Approved By:**

  
Richard Conrad  
Myrtlewood Field Manager

5-25-04  
Date

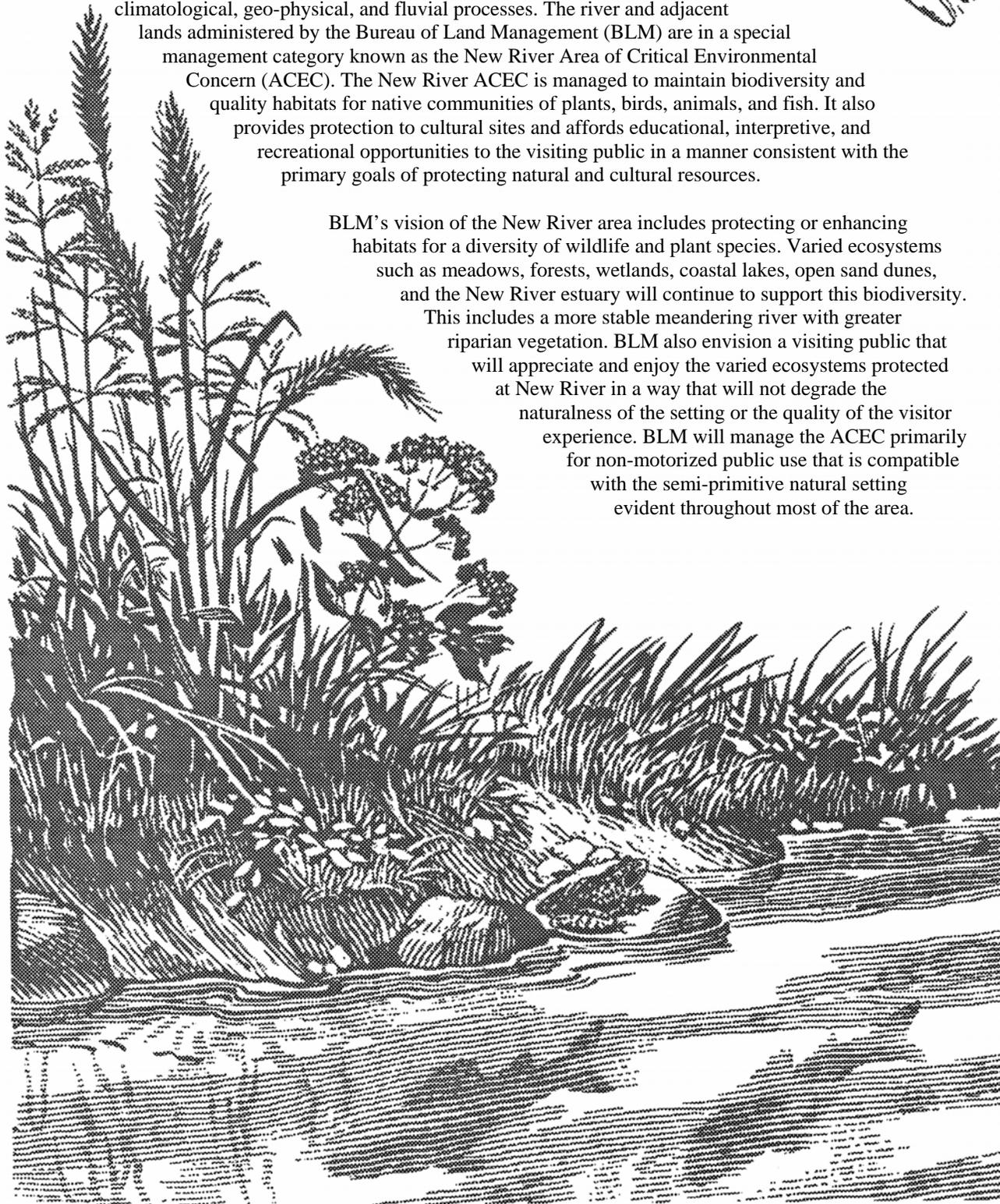


# VISION STATEMENT



New River is a dynamic, ever-changing system influenced by biological, climatological, geo-physical, and fluvial processes. The river and adjacent lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are in a special management category known as the New River Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The New River ACEC is managed to maintain biodiversity and quality habitats for native communities of plants, birds, animals, and fish. It also provides protection to cultural sites and affords educational, interpretive, and recreational opportunities to the visiting public in a manner consistent with the primary goals of protecting natural and cultural resources.

BLM's vision of the New River area includes protecting or enhancing habitats for a diversity of wildlife and plant species. Varied ecosystems such as meadows, forests, wetlands, coastal lakes, open sand dunes, and the New River estuary will continue to support this biodiversity. This includes a more stable meandering river with greater riparian vegetation. BLM also envision a visiting public that will appreciate and enjoy the varied ecosystems protected at New River in a way that will not degrade the naturalness of the setting or the quality of the visitor experience. BLM will manage the ACEC primarily for non-motorized public use that is compatible with the semi-primitive natural setting evident throughout most of the area.





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# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACEC	Area of Critical Environmental Concern
ACS	Aquatic Conservation Strategy
APHIS	Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
CFS	Cubic Feet per Second
CHU	Critical Habitat Unit
CMA	Cooperative Management Agreement
DLCD	Division of Land Conservation and Development
EA	Environmental Assessment
EFH	Essential Fish Habitat
ESA	Endangered Species Act
ESU	Evolutionarily Significant Unit
HMM	Hazardous Materials Management
LAC	Limits of Acceptable Change
MSA	Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NGVD	National Geodetic Vertical Datum
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
NRCS	Natural Resource Conservation Service
ODA	Oregon Department of Agriculture
ODFW	Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
OHV	Off-highway vehicles
ONHP	Oregon Natural Heritage Program
ONHIC	Oregon Natural Heritage Information Center
OPRD	Oregon Parks and Recreation Department
RMP	Resource Management Plan
ROS	Recreation Opportunity Spectrum
SCORP	Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan
SPCC	Spill Control and Countermeasures Plan
SRMA	Special Recreation Management Area
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USDI	United States Department of Interior
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
VRM	Visual Resource Management



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

New River has been described as one of the last remaining wild places along the Oregon Coast. With its diversity of habitats; interconnected network of rivers, streams, and lakes; and limited human use, New River is a secluded place rich in biodiversity – a place where plants and animals flourish and people are only visitors.

In 1983, BLM designated 686 acres of federal lands along New River as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) to protect this unique natural area. In 1987, BLM completed an initial management plan for the area. In 1989, a land acquisition plan was completed, and over the next eight years, BLM acquired an additional 670 acres of private lands from willing sellers, bringing the current total land base of the ACEC to 1,356 acres.

In 1989, the New River ACEC was identified as a Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) (USDI BLM 1989), then later designated as such in the Coos Bay District Resource Management Plan (RMP) (USDI BLM 1995). SRMA is defined as an area where a commitment has been made to provide specific recreation activity and experience opportunities. These areas usually require a high level of investment and/or management.

In 1994, BLM completed the Final Coos Bay District Proposed RMP Environmental Impact Statement that described the primary resource values for the New River ACEC (USDI BLM 1994). These values included:

“Special Status Species – River area and uplands contain important habitat for the American and Arctic Peregrine Falcon, Bald Eagle, Aleutian Canada Goose, and Western Snowy Plover – all federally listed species. Botanical species habitat supported in the New River area include silvery phacelia, western bog lily, pink sand-verbena – all federally proposed or candidate species.

Plant Communities – Includes natural meadows, wetlands, sand dunes, and other habitat types supporting many unique plant species.

Wildlife Habitat – Upland areas provide supporting habitat types and act as a buffer which supports the integrity of the river habitat areas.

Historic/Cultural – Numerous, extensive prehistoric camps and villages border the river.”

In 1995, BLM completed a comprehensive management plan for the New River ACEC. The plan’s foremost theme is to conserve the values of the ACEC for the enjoyment of present and future generations. Equally important is BLM’s commitment to adaptive management of the New River area. The backbone of the plan is its goals and objectives, which together establish the management direction and set forth specific resource values to be addressed:

## Original Management Goals

**Goal 1** – Manage habitat for biodiversity (i.e., a full range of native species, habitats, and ecological processes) and ecosystem health with special emphasis on sensitive wildlife and botanical species.

**Goal 2** – Protect significant cultural resources from human disturbance or destruction.

**Goal 3** – Manage for recreational activities to the extent compatible with Goals 1 and 2.

**Goal 4** – Promote opportunities for education, interpretation, and nature appreciation to the extent compatible with Goals 1 and 2.

### **Original Management Objectives**

**Objective 1** – Maintain, enhance, or restore ecosystem health, and ensure management supports a variety of habitats at different successional levels, particularly, but not limited to, those which are necessary for special status species using the area.

**Objective 2** – Establish suitable water flow and quality, and maintain areas in a condition supportive of a healthy aquatic ecosystem.

**Objective 3** – Protect and interpret important cultural resources at New River.

**Objective 4** – Accommodate low-impact recreational use at New River while providing a variety of experience opportunities to help meet existing and anticipated demands.

**Objective 5** – Promote awareness and appreciation for New River’s many resource values, especially those significant to its ACEC designation; also foster a “Leave No Trace” / “Minimum Impact” land use ethic and similar attitudes in visitors at New River.

**Objective 6** – Provide adequate use supervision, visitor facilities, services, signing, and programs to protect resources and support planned visitor use activities and levels.

**Objective 7** – Provide reasonable access to visitor use areas and the river with minimal impact on natural and cultural resources and visitor experiences.

**Objective 8** – Facilitate improved management of the New River area through monitoring and research to learn more about the natural and cultural resources of the area.

### **Management Plan Update**

In the fall of 2003, BLM determined that a plan update was needed to clarify the management direction of the ACEC, to report accomplishments and on-going management actions, and to provide up-to-date resource information. A BLM interdisciplinary team was then formed to complete the update. Since the plan update does not change the intent of the original management plan or propose any new actions that create impacts, a new environmental assessment is not required.

The plan update includes a rewording of goals 3 and 4 in order to better integrate the goals of providing recreation, environmental education, and interpretation opportunities with the primary goals of protecting natural and cultural resources of the New River area. The rewording of these goals better defines BLM’s management direction of the ACEC, rather than simply state that these opportunities should be managed to the extent compatible with goals 1 and 2. The new wording of goals 3 and 4 is as follows:

**Goal 3** – Manage for recreational activities that are compatible with protecting cultural resources and managing habitat for biodiversity and ecosystem health.

**Goal 4** – Use environmental education and interpretation as a tool to manage visitor impacts and to broaden the appreciation and stewardship of the New River ACEC.

The plan update also includes a re-organization of the original plan's objectives to improve readability of the document. The update includes two new objectives that have been separated out of the original eight objectives. They include:

**Objective 9** – Facilitate cooperative management of the New River area to better protect resource values through coordination and collaboration with others.

This objective was separated out from Objective 6: Site Administration and Development, due to the growing importance of working cooperatively to effectively manage the greater New River ecosystem. Collaborating with other agencies, county governments, non-profit organizations, institutions, local residents, and adjacent landowners has become critical to addressing the complex issues at New River.

**Objective 10** – Develop an effective acquisition strategy in collaboration with willing landowners to improve overall protection and public benefit of the New River area.

This objective was separated out from Objective 1: Wildlife and Plant Resources. Since the greater New River ecosystem extends across a complex pattern of federal, state, county, and private ownership, a strategy is needed to insure protection of resource values located on lands outside the ACEC boundary. Although BLM has already acquired private lands available from willing sellers, a variety of other acquisition options still exist, especially conservation easements. With such a flexible approach, an effective strategy should be able to adapt to market changes, shifts in public attitudes, funding opportunities, and policy changes.

Another re-organization of the original objectives includes separating out project-specific monitoring actions from Objective 8: Monitoring and Research, and incorporating them in with their associated objective.

Other changes to the original management plan include the elimination of Part Four: Cost Estimates, since a majority of the projects described in this part of the plan have already been implemented (e.g., facilities and other infrastructure development). This part of the plan also proved to be of little use, due to its general approach to estimating costs of projects. As well, the yearly budget for the ACEC is driven primarily by available funding, and priority projects are carried out as funds are allocated.

Appendix B of the original management plan has also been eliminated. This appendix included people and organizations that provided comments or assisted in the initial planning effort for the ACEC. It also listed all individuals and organizations who received a draft copy of the original plan. For purposes of the plan update, this appendix is not necessary.

Vegetation and wildlife use area maps found in Part Two and Appendix D of the original management plan have been omitted. These maps have been replaced by more detailed maps that pertain to specific projects or management actions.

The Recreation section in Part Two has been expanded to incorporate an adequate discussion to meet the needs of an SRMA plan for New River. The rationale for expanding this section is so that a separate SRMA plan is not necessary. This not only improves efficiency but ensures recreation management is

compatible with the goals and objectives of the New River ACEC. The SRMA designation acknowledges BLM's commitment to provide specific recreation activities and experience opportunities at New River in a manner that is compatible with protecting the natural and cultural resource values of the ACEC.

In order to better define the recreation setting of the New River ACEC, two new terms are used throughout this management plan update – roaded natural and semi-primitive non-motorized. These classifications will aid the BLM in the future management of the ACEC by establishing a set of conceptual controls for guiding visitor use. See the Recreation section in Part Two for details about these settings.

The plan update includes four new appendices that provide more detailed information about the natural systems of New River and BLM's management approach to the area:

**Appendix B**, Hydrology of New River, describes some of the results of BLM's monitoring efforts of the river system since the original plan was developed. These monitoring efforts were the basis for some of the management actions that have been implemented since completion of the original plan.

**Appendix G**, General Rules and Regulations, summarizes key rules that have been developed from various management actions described in Part Three, *The Management Program*. These have been created to better manage visitation in order to protect the unique natural, cultural, and recreation settings (i.e., roaded natural and semi-primitive non-motorized) of the area.

**Appendix H**, Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines for Managing Recreational Use, has been developed to guide recreational use management at New River in order to avoid unacceptable impacts to the natural, cultural, and recreation settings of the area. This process is similar to the Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) planning system developed by the U.S. Forest Service for wilderness areas (Stankey et al. 1985).

**Appendix I**, Glossary, has been developed to aid the reader in understanding scientific terms and uncommon words used throughout the plan.

## Accomplishments

In designing the original plan (1995), a number of management actions were analyzed to determine how to best achieve the goals and objectives of the ACEC. Since then, a majority of these actions have been accomplished, including a wide-range of restoration, monitoring, and visitor-use related projects. The following highlights a few of the projects that have been implemented to date:

- BLM continues to implement a coastal dune restoration project on the foredune west of New River. Since 1998, over 200 acres of European beach grass have been removed to improve habitat for the Western Snowy Plover and a variety of rare, native plant species.
- BLM has collaborated with adjacent ranchers to develop cooperative management agreements that protect over four and a half miles of riparian and coastal dune habitat along New River and Floras Lake outlet from livestock use on both public and private lands.
- BLM is working with the adjacent ranchers and a variety of state and federal agencies to find more appropriate locations for breaching New River that improve estuarine habitat for coho salmon and other rare species while providing adequate flood alleviation on adjacent pastureland.

- BLM is coordinating with a number of institutions and agencies to protect and re-introduce rare native plants back into the New River ecosystem, including the western lily and pink sand-verbena.
- BLM is conducting a wide range of monitoring projects to better understand the natural environment of the area and how these systems are influenced by human interaction. A comprehensive monitoring and evaluation process is in place to ensure that the natural, cultural, and recreation settings of New River are protected for future generations.
- BLM is collaborating with Curry County on a cooperative management agreement for Floras Lake that improves protection of the Western Snowy Plover by seasonally restricting public access to higher quality nesting habitat located on county lands. In turn, the BLM-administered beach adjacent to Floras Lake is open for public recreation during the plover nesting season if no plovers are present in this area.
- The Ellen Warring Learning Center was constructed at the Storm Ranch portion of the ACEC. This facility is the focal point for interpretation and educational activities for the public. A kiosk and a number of outdoor interpretive displays have been placed throughout the ACEC to provide self-guided learning opportunities for visitors.
- Public access has been improved at the Storm Ranch, Floras Lake, Fourmile Creek, and Lost Lake portions of the ACEC. A variety of trails, foot bridges, boat launches, and a universally accessible wildlife viewing platform provide a range of low-impact recreational opportunities for visitors to enjoy the area.

## **Adaptive Management Approach**

This plan update acknowledges the need to use an adaptive management approach to compliment the specific management actions contained in the plan. As described in the original New River ACEC Management Plan, adaptive management recognizes the need to manage resources under circumstances that contain varying degrees of uncertainty and the need to adjust to new information. It provides an avenue for responsive and quick management actions, if necessary. The concept works well if three elements are present:

- Clear goals, standards, and guidelines are in place;
- There is a willingness and a process to modify these same goals, standards, and guidelines if they are not working or in error; and
- Monitoring is used to help determine the condition of the management area.

Fundamentally, adaptive management is the application of the scientific principle of feedback and adjustment, of identifying and evaluating new information, and adjusting management to achieve the goals and objectives of a plan. In the case of New River, management approaches can be adjusted quickly to benefit the area as new information and knowledge become available. This plan update provides the framework for an adaptive management approach so long as the approach is within the scope of the original environmental assessment. New actions not covered under this original assessment would be evaluated under a separate decision document.

Adaptive management has been used in a number of instances at New River since the original management plan was completed. One example is the development of cooperative management agreements (CMAs) with Curry County and adjacent ranchers to resolve resource concerns that span across multiple land ownerships. These agreements have improved protection of special status species and unique wetland and riparian habitats of the area. See Objective 9, Cooperative Management Agreements, for details about each of these CMAs. Adaptive management can also be used to adjust these cooperative management agreements if monitoring indicates that changes have caused them to become ineffective.

Other examples of adaptive management at New River include: terminating the Old Bog Trail rather than loop it through a sensitive wetland area to connect with East Muddy Lake Trail; locating the Muddy Lake wildlife viewing platform in an area that has less potential for impacting migratory birds; and not implementing the native plant garden due to feasibility concerns. Examples also include temporarily breaching New River at key locations to improve aquatic and coastal dune habitats, and replacing the dilapidated foot bridge over Floras Lake outlet to maintain public access to the beach.

In addition, two other adaptive management actions are being implemented under this plan update. The first is the decision to allow primitive beach camping by special recreation permit at a designated site within the ACEC for long-distance backpackers hiking the Oregon Coast Trail (Objective 4, Types of Recreation Use). The rationale for this is to resolve the problem of illegal camping in snowy plover nesting areas. Since most backpackers are unable to complete this section of the Oregon Coast Trail in one day, there is a tendency for them to camp within these plover nesting areas of the ACEC. The permit system will require campers to abide by special conditions designed to ensure the protection of ACEC values. Conversely, adaptive management can also be used to adjust or discontinue camping permits within the ACEC if monitoring shows extensive noncompliance has resulted in impacts to snowy plover breeding.

The adaptive management approach has also been used to adjust the design of the boat launch at Storm Ranch in a manner that is more conducive to the semi-primitive, non-motorized setting of the ACEC. Rather than have the road terminate at the water's edge, the new design limits vehicles from driving within the riparian area of New River. The new boat launch design provides easy foot access to the river for low-impact recreation activities, including: fishing, wildlife watching, sightseeing, and launching canoes, kayaks, and other non-motorized watercraft. BLM discourages access to New River with motorized boats except those powered by electric motors. This improves the naturalness of the area by restoring riparian habitat and minimizing disturbance to wildlife, which in turn enhances visitors' experience to New River.

## **Monitoring**

Monitoring is incorporated into the New River ACEC Management Plan at all levels. This monitoring is used to:

- Ensure that the management goals, objectives, and actions are being followed (implementation monitoring),
- Verify if the actions are achieving the desired results (effectiveness monitoring), and
- Determine if the underlying assumptions of the ACEC goals and objectives are sound (validation monitoring).

Monitoring may include these categories: resource management of fish, wildlife, special status species, wetland, water, geomorphology, and cultural values; livestock management; recreation and visitor use management; environmental education and interpretation; and site administration and development for visitor facilities and access.

Monitoring is a key component of adaptive management and will introduce new information that gives a clearer picture of the changing environment at New River and help make management of the area more accountable and responsive.

**Figure 1. Adaptive Management Process Flowchart**

