



Uncompahgre Field Office Plan Resource Management Plan Amendment

US Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

January 2024

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

Project Overview

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) issued the Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO) Approved Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Record of Decision in April 2020 and received three lawsuits challenging the decision. In spring 2022, the BLM entered into a settlement agreement in which the agency agreed to initiate two plan amendment efforts in response to issues identified in the lawsuits: a statewide RMP amendment for big game and a rangewide RMP amendment for Gunnison sage-grouse. Both planning efforts are currently underway. In summer 2022, the BLM entered into settlement agreements on the remaining two lawsuits stipulating that the BLM would initiate an RMP amendment within 60 days of the Notice of Availability for whichever of the two initial planning efforts occurs later. In response to the terms, the BLM published the Notice of Intent for the Uncompahgre Field Office RMP Amendment in the Federal Register on January 5, 2024.

The BLM needs to undertake this planning process to fulfill its responsibilities under the settlement agreements that resolved litigation challenging the 2020 Uncompahgre Field Office Approved RMP. The purpose of this effort is to consider different management of oil and gas, lands with wilderness characteristics, and previously proposed and analyzed areas of critical environmental concern (ACECs) within the specific scope described in the settlement agreements.

What are Areas of Critical Environmental Concern?

An ACEC is defined in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, Section 103(a), as an area on BLM-administered lands where special management attention 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 ensure safety from natural hazards. To be designated as an ACEC, the area must meet both the criteria of

relevance and importance found in 43 Code of Federal Regulations 1610.7-2(a)(b) and as defined in [BLM Manual 1613, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern](#). In addition, designated ACECs are protected by the provisions of 43 Code of Federal Regulations 3809.11(c)(3), which requires an approved plan of operations before beginning operations greater than casual use.



Current Conditions

The BLM solicited nominations for ACECs during scoping for the UFO RMP revision in 2010, resulting in the 2013 Evaluation of Existing and Proposed ACECs report. The BLM found 23 existing and nominated areas that met the relevance and importance criteria. The 2013 ACEC report is available on the UFO RMP Amendment project website: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2026528/510>

The BLM fully considered all 23 potential ACECs for designation and management under various alternatives as part of the 2019 RMP revision (see Figure 1, Previously Proposed and Analyzed ACECs).

Under Alternative B, the BLM analyzed 15 potential ACEC designations totaling 215,500 acres. In the 2020 UFO Approve RMP, the BLM designated six ACECs totaling 30,100 acres: Adobe Badlands ACEC/ Outstanding Natural Area, Biological Soil Crust/East Paradox ACEC, Fairview South ACEC/Research Natural Area, Needle Rock ACEC/ Outstanding Natural Area, Paradox Rock Art ACEC, and San Miguel River ACEC (see Figure 2, Existing Areas of Critical Environmental Concern). The 2019 Proposed RMP/Final EIS and 2020 Approved RMP are available on that project website at <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/62103/570>



Decisions to be Made

The scope of the planning effort will consider alternative management approaches for oil and gas resources, lands with wilderness characteristics, and previously analyzed ACECs, consistent with two litigation settlement agreements. The BLM will consider an alternative that corresponds with management previously analyzed in the 2019 Uncompahgre Field Office Proposed Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement and will strive for consistency with other BLM planning efforts for Gunnison sage-grouse and Colorado big game species.



As it becomes available, updated information and documents related to the Uncompahgre Field Office RMP Amendment/EIS will be provided on the project website: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2026528/510>



