

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**Bureau of Land Management**

[MT-020-1610-00]

Notice of Availability**AGENCY:** Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Montana/Dakotas, Interior.**ACTION:** Notice.

SUMMARY: In accordance with section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, an environmental assessment has been prepared for proposed Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) on BLM-administered surface estate in the South Dakota Resource Area, Dakotas District, North Dakota; and the Billings and Powder River Resource Areas, Miles City District, Montana. The document will amend three Resource Management Plans: Billings (1983), Powder River (1984) and South Dakota (1985). The Environmental Assessment and Draft Resource Management Plan Amendment evaluates the relevance and importance of areas nominated for ACEC designation in portions of the following counties: Carbon, Carter, Custer, Golden Valley, Musselshell, Powder River, Rosebud, Treasure, Yellowstone (Montana); Big Horn (Wyoming); and Fall River (South Dakota). The amendment is a comprehensive plan for managing the areas BLM proposes for ACEC designation.

DATES: Comments on BLM's management prescriptions for areas proposed for ACEC designation should be submitted to BLM on or before March 9, 1998.

ADDRESS: All comments should be sent to the following address: BLM, Tim Murphy, District Manager, 111 Garryowen Road, Miles City, Montana 59301.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mary Bloom, Team Leader, at (406) 233-2826.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: A Notice of Intent to plan was filed in the **Federal Register** on April 6, 1995. The public was asked to submit nominations, issues and alternatives. All comments received were considered in the preparation of the plan.

The environmental assessment and draft resource management plan amendment analyzes three alternatives to resolve the issues. Each alternative represents a complete management plan. The alternatives are summarized as (1) No Action, where no areas of critical environmental concern would be designated, (2) Protection For Relevant and Important Values and (3)

the Preferred Alternative, which may be a previous alternative, a combination of, or a new alternative.

One area nominated, Pompeys Pillar, has already been planned for and designated in BLM's 1996 "Pompeys Pillar Resource Management Plan Amendment and Environmental Assessment Record of Decision". That document approved the designation and management for Pompeys Pillar Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

The Area of Critical Environmental Concern Environmental Assessment and Draft Resource Management Plan Amendment evaluates 21 areas of critical environmental concern nominations. BLM proposes designation and special management for 12 areas. Six areas did not meet the relevance and/or importance criteria. Three areas were considered but not analyzed in detail. The 12 areas proposed for designation are:

1. The *Bridger Fossil* area (575 public surface acres) in Carbon County would be designated an area of critical environmental concern. This significant fossil area would be retained in public ownership and managed to enhance and protect the paleontological resources. Management actions affecting this area are: rights-of-way, and mineral material sales and permits would be allowed with stipulations; oil and gas leasing would be allowed with a Controlled Surface Use stipulation; underground explosives for geophysical exploration for oil and gas would not be allowed, other geophysical exploration methods for oil and gas would be allowed if the method would not damage the paleontology resource; livestock grazing would be allowed; and off-road vehicle use would be limited to designated roads and trails.

2. *Castle Butte* (185 public surface acres) in Yellowstone County would be designated an area of critical environmental concern. The area would be retained in public ownership and managed to enhance and protect significant cultural resources. Management actions affecting this area are: fire would be managed with conditional fire suppression; wood product sales and geophysical exploration for oil and gas would be allowed; rights-of-way would be allowed when they avoid the significant cultural resource sites; livestock grazing and range improvements would be allowed; and off-road vehicle use would be limited to designated roads and trails.

3. The *East Pryor Mountains* (29,500 public surface acres) in Carbon County, Montana and Big Horn County, Wyoming would be designated an area

of critical environmental concern. The area would be retained in public ownership and managed for its wild horse and wildlife values, and long-term conservation and recreational use for the public. Management actions affecting this area are: fire would be managed with conditional fire suppression; wood product sales, rights-of-way, livestock grazing, mineral material sales and permits, geophysical exploration for oil and gas, and oil and gas leasing would not be allowed; locatable minerals would be withdrawn from entry; and off-road vehicle use would be limited to the designated trails.

4. *Meeteetse Spires* (960 public surface acres) in Carbon County would be designated an area of critical environmental concern. The area would be retained in public ownership and managed to enhance and protect the rare plants and scenery in the area, and to help protect the public from dangerous cliffs. Management actions affecting this area are: an easement across state land (T. 8 S., R. 20 E., Section 36) would be obtained; fire would be managed with conditional fire suppression; selected timber harvests may be periodically necessary to protect the area's overall resource value; wood product sales would not be allowed; livestock grazing, except for sheep, would be allowed; rights-of-way, oil and gas leasing, and mineral material sales and permits would not be allowed; locatable minerals would be withdrawn from entry; in the sensitive plant area, geophysical exploration for oil and gas would not be allowed by any method; on the remaining area, geophysical exploration would be accessed by air only; exploration would be shot holes and above-ground shots, vibroseis would not be allowed; and off-road vehicle use would be limited to designated roads and trails.

5. *Petroglyph Canyon* (240 public surface acres) in Carbon County would be designated an area of critical environmental concern. This significant site would be retained in public ownership and managed to protect and enhance the cultural resources. Management actions affecting this area are: wood product sales, rights-of-way, oil and gas leasing and geophysical exploration would not be allowed; livestock grazing and range improvements would be allowed; and locatable minerals would be withdrawn from entry. The area would be closed to off-road vehicle use.

6. *Stark Site* (800 public surface acres) in Musselshell County would be designated an area of critical environmental concern. The area would

be retained in public ownership and managed to enhance and protect significant cultural resources. Management actions affecting this area are: fire would be managed with conditional fire suppression; wood product sales, livestock grazing and range improvements would be allowed; rights-of-way, and mineral material sales and permits would not be allowed; oil and gas leasing would be allowed with a No Surface Occupancy stipulation; the area would be closed to geophysical exploration for oil and gas on the cultural resource sites and allowed (surface methods and vibroseis) in the remainder of the area; and off-road vehicle use would be limited to designated roads and trails.

7. *Weatherman Draw* (4,268 public surface acres) in Carbon County would be designated an area of critical environmental concern. This significant cultural site would be retained in public ownership and managed to enhance and protect the cultural resources. Management actions affecting this area are: fire would be managed with conditional fire suppression; wood product sales would not be allowed; rights-of-way associated with valid existing oil or gas lease rights would be allowed with restrictions, other rights-of-way would not be allowed; livestock grazing would be allowed; range improvements would be allowed when they do not conflict with the area of critical environmental concern values; locatable minerals would be withdrawn from entry; mineral material sales and permits would not be allowed; oil and gas leasing would be allowed with a No Surface Occupancy stipulation with no waiver, exception or modification provisions; geophysical exploration for oil and gas would be closed; and off-road vehicle use would be limited to authorized use.

8. *Battle Butte* (120 public surface acres) in Rosebud County would be designated an area of critical environmental concern. This historic battlefield would be retained in public ownership and managed to enhance and protect the cultural resources. Management actions affecting the area are: fire would be managed with conditional fire suppression; livestock grazing and range improvements would be allowed; rights-of-way, coal leasing, and mineral material sales and permits would not be allowed; oil and gas leasing would be allowed with a No Surface Occupancy stipulation; geophysical exploration for oil and gas would be allowed on designated roads and trails with restrictions; and off-road vehicle use would be limited to designated roads and trails.

9. *Finger Buttes* (6,206 public surface acres) in Carter County would be designated an area of critical environmental concern. The area would be retained in public ownership and managed for its scenic values. Management actions affecting this area are: fire would be managed with conditional fire suppression; wood product sales would be allowed with restrictions; rights-of-way would avoid the area; livestock grazing and range improvements would be allowed; mineral material sales and permits and nonenergy leasable mineral leasing would not be allowed; oil and gas leasing would be allowed with a Controlled Surface Use stipulation; geophysical exploration for oil and gas would be allowed on designated roads and trails with restrictions; and off-road vehicle use would be limited to designated roads and trails.

10. *Howrey Island* (321 public surface acres) in Treasure County would be designated an area of critical environmental concern. The area would be retained in public ownership and managed for its special wildlife habitat. Management actions affecting this area are: fire would be managed with conditional fire suppression; wood product sales would be allowed with restrictions; rights-of-way would not be allowed; livestock grazing would be allowed; range improvements would be allowed when they do not degrade the area's values; and off-road vehicles would be limited to the BLM road except from February 15th to June 1st. During that time, no vehicles would be allowed, including on the BLM road.

11. *Reynolds Battlefield* (336 public surface acres) in Powder River County would be designated an area of critical environmental concern. This historic battlefield would be retained in public ownership and managed to enhance and protect the cultural resources. Management actions affecting the area are: fire would be managed with conditional fire suppression; timber sales and wood product sales would be allowed with restrictions; rights-of-way would avoid the area; livestock grazing and range improvements would be allowed; coal leasing and mineral material sales and permits would not be allowed; oil and gas leasing would be allowed with a No Surface Occupancy stipulation; geophysical exploration for oil and gas would be allowed on designated roads and trails with restrictions; and off-road vehicle use would be limited to designated roads and trails.

12. The *Fossil Cycad* area (320 public surface acres) in Fall River County, South Dakota, would be designated an

area of critical environmental concern. The surface and minerals would be retained in public ownership and managed to protect and enhance significant paleontological resources. Management actions affecting this area are: fire would be managed with conditional fire suppression; timber sales, wood product sales, and geophysical exploration for oil and gas would not be allowed; rights-of-way would be allowed with stipulations; oil and gas leasing would be allowed with a No Surface Occupancy stipulation; livestock grazing would be allowed; locatable minerals would be withdrawn from entry; and off-road vehicle use would be limited to designated roads and trails.

This notice meets the requirements of 43 CFR 1610.7-2 for designation of areas of critical environmental concern.

Dated: December 16, 1997.

Timothy M. Murphy,
District Manager.

[FR Doc. 97-33719 Filed 12-24-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-DN-P

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

[CA-360-1020-00]

Notice of Resource Advisory Council Meeting

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Northwest California Resource Advisory Council, Ukiah, California.

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: Pursuant to the authorities in the Federal Advisory Committees Act (Public Law 92-463) and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (Public Law 94-579), the U.S. Bureau of Land Management's Northwest California Resource Advisory Council will meet Thursday and Friday, Feb. 5 and 6, 1998, at the BLM's Clear Lake Field Office, 2550 North State Street, Ukiah.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The meeting begins at 10 a.m. Feb. 5. Agenda items include discussion of a proposal to close Black Sands Beach to motor vehicle access, the status of an environmental impact statement on Healthy Rangeland Standards and Guidelines, discussion of recreation user fees, the status of planning in the Sacramento River Bend Area of Critical Environmental Concern, reports on the status of the plan amendment for South Cow Mountain, and reports from the managers of BLM's Arcata, Clear Lake and Redding field offices. Public