

**OVERFLOW WETLANDS AREA OF
CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL
CONCERN
ACTIVITY PLAN**

SEPTEMBER 2003

**ROSWELL FIELD OFFICE
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

ROSWELL, NEW MEXICO

Activity Plan Approval

I have reviewed this proposed activity plan, including the accompanying environmental assessment, and have determined that the activity plan is in conformance with the 1997 Roswell Resource Management Plan. It is my decision to implement the activity plan for the Overflow Wetlands Area of Critical Environmental Concern.



T. R. Kreager
Assistant Field Manager, Resources

12/8/03

Date

OVERFLOW WETLANDS AREA OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN ACTIVITY PLAN

Management Goal

Established by the 1997 Roswell Resource Management Plan (RMP), the goal of managing the Overflow Wetlands Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) is to protect the biological and scenic values of the Overflow Wetlands Wildlife Habitat Area, which provide critical habitat for threatened and endangered fish species and supports a significant riparian/wetland community.

The ACEC includes about 7,014 surface acres and 3,000 acres of federal mineral estate. The breakdown of ownership is 1,720 acres of State Trust Lands, 2,107 acres of private land, and 3,187 acres of public land. Management prescriptions apply only to public lands within an ACEC.

The wetlands and Pecos River are the focal points of the ACEC. The Pecos River meanders south for about 5.0 miles through the west portion of the ACEC with about 2.5 miles traversing public land. A wide floodplain borders both sides of the Pecos River within the ACEC. The wetland area trends southwest from the Lea Lake area for about 3.5 miles before entering the Pecos River at the most southern point. There are four points along the river where water from the wetlands enter the Pecos River, three outflows are located on public land and one on State land.

ACEC Activity Plan

To resolve conflicts between existing resources and their uses, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) asked for public input, issues and concerns regarding management of this ACEC. BLM developed this Plan based on that public involvement. This plan details the outline for the ACEC found in the 1997 RMP. Detailed project plans for the ACEC must conform to this plan and the RMP.

This Plan was a collaborative effort between BLM and private parties that have an interest in the lands located within the ACEC. The Roswell Field Office of BLM announced its intention to develop an activity plan for the Overflow Wetlands ACEC on February 20, 2002. An invitation letter inviting the public to attend an Open House (a scoping/planning meeting) was sent out on February 28, 2002. This initial meeting was designed to provide information on the Overflow Wetlands ACEC and to obtain community input for the development of a management plan for the ACEC. Subsequent meetings took place to gather public comments and concerns

Participants in these meetings included:

Steve Patterson
Brent Bullock
Jim Montgomery

Cheryl Patterson
David Stuart
Ed Schott

Beverly Coors
Bruce Stubbs
Rick Sadler

Sandy Sadler
Coy Dictson
Cate Erbaugh
Art Creswell

Keith L. Schremple
Mac McFerraz
Robert Larsen

Lewis Derrick
Jim Pierce
Tim Jennings

BLM made two presentations to the Chaves County Public Lands Advisory Committee regarding this activity plan to obtain the committee's views and comments. BLM also coordinated with the New Mexico State Land Office, meeting with Jim Northcutt, Jennifer Parody, Dick Williford, and Mark Naranjo regarding management within the ACEC.

BLM planning team members included:

Tim Kreager
Pat Flanary
John Spain
Jerry Dutchover

Dan Baggao
Paul Happel
Howard Parman

Mike McGee
Mike Bilbo
Irene Gonzales

Vision Statement

Using the input from the public comments, the Planning Team developed this vision statement:

In 20 years, the Overflow Wetlands ACEC should include a properly functioning river with predominately native riparian vegetation along its banks. Under this activity plan BLM will establish, maintain or enhance habitat and environmental conditions for a number of plants, birds, animals and fish. Varied habitat types such as upland grasslands, karst features (sinkholes), floodplains, wetlands and the Pecos River, will continue to contribute to the biodiversity of the Pecos River valley. This includes appreciative human visitors who will enjoy and respect the area and its inhabitants. BLM will strive for a public use level that will not degrade or destroy the naturalness or quality of the resource.

The Overflow Wetlands ACEC in the 1997 Roswell RMP

The 1997 Roswell RMP lists the following management prescriptions for the ACEC:

- About 700 acres of wetlands, 170 acres of buffer around the wetlands, and 170 acres of escarpment will be protected by applying "no surface occupancy" restrictions to future oil and gas leases. The remainder of public lands in the ACEC will be open to future leasing with subject to the Surface Use and Occupancy Requirements described in Appendix 1 of the RMP.
- About 700 acres of wetlands, 170 acres of buffer around the wetlands, and 170 acres of escarpment will be closed to the disposal of salable minerals and to the leasing of solid minerals, and will be withdrawn from entry under the land laws (including the 1872 Mining Law). These actions will reduce disturbance of the wetlands and surrounding habitat for wildlife species

dependent on the area either seasonally (wintering waterfowl) or yearlong (threatened or endangered aquatic species).

- Major rights-of-way would be excluded on about 3,000 acres of public land with the Overflow Wetlands ACEC to benefit wildlife species dependent on the area either seasonally (i.e., wintering waterfowl) or yearlong (i.e., threatened or endangered aquatic species).
- Legal access (easements) to the Overflow Wetlands will be acquired to resolve conflicts and enhance management in situations where existing roads that originate from county or state roads are interrupted by private or state land inholdings. The need for acquiring easements will be evaluated on a case-by case basis, because land acquisitions may eliminate the need for some easements.
- About 1,700 acres of state land and 1,600 acres of private land with riparian/wetland values will be acquired if opportunities arise. Any lands acquired will be managed according to the prescriptions of this plan.
- Public grazing leases or permits affecting about 3,000 acres of public land currently in Allotments 65060, 65062, and 65069 will be adjusted to improve habitat for wintering waterfowl habitat. Adjustments may include changes in stocking rate and seasons of use, such as reducing year-long grazing to grazing between March 1 and June 30. The grazing lease on Allotment 65041 will be canceled.
- Saltcedar treatments will be conducted on public land in selected riparian-wetland areas using prescribed fire, or mechanical or chemical controls, except that chemicals will not be applied aerially.
- The Overflow Wetlands ACEC will be developed to showcase one of New Mexico's prime wetland areas. Developments may include nature trails with wooden walkways and observation overlooks, restroom facilities, picnic tables, trash containers, parking areas, bulletin boards, and upgrading existing access roads.
- About 700 acres of wetlands, 170 acres of buffer around the wetlands, and 170 acres of escarpment will be designated closed to OHV use. The use of OHVs on about 2,100 acres will be limited to designated roads and trails.
- The BLM will recommend to the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish that the wetlands be designated as a "No Minnow Seining Area" to prevent the taking of the Pecos pupfish.
- Public fishing opportunities will be considered for development along the Pecos River on public lands in the areas listed below. Development may include physical access to fishing sites, parking areas, and fence crossings.

T. 12 S., R. 26 E.,
Section 5: W1/2W1/2
Section 17: W1/2NE1/4,SE1/4

Section 20: NE1/4NE1/4NE1/4

- The ACEC generally will continue to be open to waterfowl hunting, but hunting may be limited to certain areas. A closure to waterfowl hunting on public lands within one-half mile of the sandhill crane roost at the Southwest Pond will be proposed to the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, in order to protect that important crane roosting area. Other human disturbances on public lands in that zone will be closed or restricted from October through March. Other areas within the ACEC could be restricted or closed to hunting in the future. Any actions involving hunting, hunting restrictions, or special designations, will be coordinated with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. Fences could be constructed around the Southwest Pond to delineate the restricted area, and on other lands that may require special management.
- Riparian and aquatic habitats will be protected by acquiring water rights, entering into cooperative agreements for management of those habitats, or other methods.
- As many as 300 acres of additional riparian/wetland habitat will be developed. Development may include constructing low berms and dikes, seeding or planting native riparian vegetation, and modifying existing channels. Suitability criteria for development include, but are not limited to, areas with seasonal surface waters indicative of a high water table or subsurface clay layer; areas with the potential of supporting cottonwood tree groves; and areas that have been or would be subject to vegetation manipulation (salt cedar control, prescribed fire, riparian pasture development).
- Chemical fire retardant and heavy equipment such as bulldozers and road graders will not be used for wildfire suppression.

The following tasks or projects have been accomplished since 1997:

- Constructing fish barriers on the main outflow channels to prevent sheepshead minnow invasion into the wetlands
- Salt cedar control projects continue
- The grazing lease on Allotment 65041 was canceled.
- The restrictions on fire retardant and heavy equipment for fire suppression have been included in the Roswell Field Office fire suppression plans
- The BLM has recommended to the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and the ACEC is designated as a "No Minnow Seining Area" to prevent the taking of the Pecos pupfish
- Major rights-of-way are excluded on about 3,000 acres of public land of the ACEC
- The RMP closed the ACEC to entry for locatable minerals, solid mineral leasing and mineral material disposal (see pages 14-20 of the 1997 RMP)
- The RMP closed 1,040 acres of the ACEC to off-highway vehicle (OHV) use and limited OHVs to designated roads and trails on 2,100 acres of the ACEC

Water Rights

The BLM does not have water rights associated with the flows discharged from Lea Lake. There are two developed water wells on a 200-acre parcel of land recently acquired by the BLM. Three acre-feet per year per well is authorized by the State Engineer for domestic use. It is the intent of the BLM to maintain these wells for wildlife use, and to allow the flexibility to provide off-river water to livestock, in the event livestock are allowed to temporarily graze lands within the ACEC.

Development and Human Activity within the ACEC

Two major rights-of-way cross the ACEC, the Transwestern Pipeline and SPS power transmission line. A smaller residential power line used to service the residence that was destroyed by the Vineyard Fire. The buried Transwestern Pipeline, constructed in 1959, is comprised of a 66-foot wide right-of-way along the majority of the route that encompasses two large pipelines. At the river crossing, the right-of-way width is 250 feet to accommodate three large pipelines.

Range improvements on the recently acquired 200-acre Hays parcel include a water well with a small windmill, small set of corrals, and a few drinking tubs. The well is not operational at this time. Another water well was once operated with a submersible pump which then supplied a large steel storage tank and steel water trough. The only other range improvements are boundary and internal pasture fences.

An 80-acre private inholding is located near the center of the ACEC and serves as a yearlong private residence. There are a number of building structures, machinery and vehicles at the location. A residential powerline has been constructed from Highway 409 to the residence. A two-track road from Highway 409 leads to the main access road to the residence.

Overflow Wetlands ACEC Activity Plan Issues and Concerns

The participants in the public meetings identified the following issues and concerns regarding management of the public lands within the ACEC:

- Preservation of natural wetlands
- Pecos Pupfish Conservation Agreement
- Listing the Pecos sunflower as a threatened species
- Protection of waterfowl, crane and shorebird populations
- Continuation of waterfowl hunting
- Sheepshead minnow invasion
- Saltcedar invasion
- Possible land acquisitions by BLM
- Existing major rights-of-way and access routes
- Easement acquisitions
- Urban interface & wildfire potential
- Increasing water flows from Lea Lake

Appearance of new sinkholes (karst activity)
Livestock grazing management
Pecos River Contract, water obligations to Texas

Issue – Preservation of natural wetlands

The ACEC was established to protect the biological values of the area. The area includes significant wetland/riparian areas. BLM will not create new wetlands based on impoundments or diversions. Instead, BLM will focus on restoring wetland/riparian areas within the ACEC based on naturally occurring water flows across the ACEC.

Issue – Pecos Pupfish Conservation Agreement and the sheepshead minnow invasion

The conservation agreement is an alternative to listing the Pecos pupfish (Cyprinodon pecosensis) as a threatened species. Signatories to the agreement are BLM; the Texas parks and Wildlife Department; the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish; the New Mexico Energy, Minerals & Natural Resources Department; the New Mexico Department of Agriculture; the New Mexico Environment Department; the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer; and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The agreement obligates the signatories to certain management actions within their jurisdictions to protect the pupfish.

Among the threats to the pupfish is hybridization with the sheepshead minnow (Cyprinodon variegatus), a native to the Gulf and Atlantic coasts. The management prescriptions of constructing fish barriers and “no minnow seining” are designed to protect pupfish populations within the ACEC from sheepshead minnow intrusion.

Issue – Listing the Pecos sunflower as a threatened species

The listing of the Pecos or puzzle sunflower (Helianthus paradoxus) is an action under the jurisdiction of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. For a discussion of this species within the ACEC, see the accompanying environmental assessment.

Issue – Livestock grazing management

For a discussion of this issue, see the accompanying environmental assessment.

Issue – Increasing water flows from Lea Lake and the Pecos River Contract, water obligations to Texas

As stated above, BLM will not create new wetlands based on impoundments or diversions. Instead, BLM will focus on restoring wetland/riparian areas within the ACEC based on naturally occurring water flows across the ACEC. BLM is cognizant of the water needs to fulfill New Mexico’s water obligations under the Pecos River Contract. BLM believes proper management of the ACEC through salt cedar removal, and native wetland/riparian restoration can positively contribute in this issue.

Concern – protection of waterfowl, crane & shorebird populations and continued waterfowl hunting within the ACEC

The maintenance and enhancement of habitat within the ACEC should promote bird populations dependent on wetlands and riparian areas. Salt cedar removal projects should contribute to this effort. Actual protection of waterfowl, cranes and shorebirds is under this jurisdiction of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. Protection is also a function of law enforcement patrol by Game and Fish Rangers and cooperating BLM law enforcement officials.

The ACEC represent one of the few areas of public land adjacent to the Pecos River. BLM is aware that conflicts between waterfowl hunters and wildlife viewers may exist during certain times of the year. BLM will monitor these conflicts and adjust management of the ACEC as necessary.

Concern – Salt cedar invasion

BLM has past and current projects to remove salt cedar from public lands and there are mechanisms in place for treatment of salt cedar on adjacent lands with the cooperation of the landowner. The RMP allows for salt cedar treatments to be conducted on public land in selected riparian-wetland areas using prescribed fire, or mechanical or chemical controls, except that chemicals will not be applied aurally. The necessary environmental analysis is in place for the continuation of salt cedar removal projects.

Concern – Possible land acquisitions by BLM

According to the RMP, about 1,700 acres of state land and 1,600 acres of private land with riparian/wetland values have been identified for acquisition if opportunities arise. BLM will only deal with willing parties. If the State of New Mexico or a private landowner is not willing, then possible acquisitions in the form of purchases or exchanges will not take place.

Concern – Existing major rights-of-way, access routes and easement acquisitions

Existing rights-of-way will be managed according to the terms and condition of the particular right-of-way permit. For a discussion of proposed road closures and road access to the ACEC, see the accompanying environmental assessment. Where BLM needs an easement across either State lands or private lands, BLM will deal with only those who are willing to grant such an easement. BLM will not enter the condemnation process in order to obtain an easement.

Concern – The urban interface and wildfire potential

Wildfires have occurred in the area. These are usually human-caused, wind-driven incidents, generally moving from the southwest to the northeast. The presence of riparian vegetation and wet areas have slowed fire spread and aided in the control of wildfires in the area. BLM is a signatory to the Joint Powers Agreement in which state (including county and volunteer fire fighting units) and federal agencies agree to cooperate in the suppression of wildfires. BLM fire staff will continue to monitor fuels within the ACEC take steps to reduce the hazards of wildfire.

Concern – Appearance of new sinkholes

BLM is aware the ACEC lies within an area where the geologic process can produce sinkholes. BLM will monitor the ACEC for the appearance of new sinkholes and assess their potential dangers to visitors to the ACEC. Possible mitigation measures include fencing to prevent access to sinkholes and closure of some areas within the ACEC.

Planning Process

The 1997 RMP superseded all previous BLM land use plans. This Activity Plan, when approved, implements the management prescribed in the RMP. Using the public participation in BLM's planning process, four goals and seven objectives were established for the Overflow Wetlands. These management goals and objectives are listed below, followed by details on each objective, including reasons for action and specific planned actions. The impacts of some, but not all, implementation actions are analyzed in the accompanying environmental analysis. Should further impact analysis be necessary to implement this activity plan, the appropriate analysis, including public participation, will take place.

Planned actions are designed to be consistent with the activity plan's goals and to help meet one or more objectives. Due to the interrelationship of the various resources, many actions may apply to more than one objective.

A description of the climate, topography, surface hydrology, soils, and hydrogeology of the ACEC can be found in the accompanying environmental assessment, as can discussions of livestock grazing management and threatened and endangered species.

Management Goals for the Overflow Wetlands ACEC

As interest in New Mexico's water resource issues increased since establishment of the ACEC, it became apparent that sound management planning for the Overflow Wetlands would be needed to address these issues while meeting the needs of a variety of terrestrial and aquatic wildlife species and plants that inhabit the ACEC. With the assistance of public comments the Planning Team development the following management goals:

Goal 1- Protect, enhance and manage terrestrial and aquatic habitats for biodiversity and ecological processes with emphasis on special status and sensitive wildlife and plant species.

Goal 2 - Promote and develop opportunities for education, interpretation and nature appreciation compatible with Goal 1.

Goal 3 - Manage for recreational activities to the extent that it is compatible with Goals 1 and 2.

Goal 4 – Contribute to New Mexico's long-term water delivery requirements and maintain or exceed New Mexico water quality standards compatible with Goal 1, 2 and 3.

Objectives and Action

The management objectives would improve habitat components of aquatic, wetland-riparian and upland areas, for various wildlife and plant species dependent on this ecosystem; therefore, enhancing the ecological biodiversity of the area and of the middle Pecos River Valley.

Objective 1 – *Manage, protect, maintain and enhance all riparian, wetland and aquatic habitats within the ACEC which support a variety of wildlife and plant species for all or part of their life cycles.*

Action Rationale

BLM is required to follow federal laws and regulations and its policy is to prevent the need to list fish, wildlife, and plants under the Endangered Species Act. Furthermore, BLM is directed to encourage management which will lead to the successful recovery and eventual delisting of already listed species.

Exotic vegetation, such as salt cedar, is replacing native vegetation and opportunistically becoming established on grassland sites, drainages, and wetland margins. It is firmly established along the Pecos River. This spread of exotic vegetation alters habitat and interferes with natural succession. Resource and vegetative management is necessary to maintain the natural communities, successional processes and ecosystem health.

Continue to evaluate livestock management practices to ensure the practices are compatible with soil, water, wetland-riparian and fisheries objectives.

Evaluate human recreation activities and propose locations that eliminate or reduce conflicting recreation uses.

Planned Actions for Objective 1

Maintain all existing fences constructed on public lands.

Construct new fish barriers on outflow channels, where deemed necessary to prevent sheepshead minnow invasion into the wetlands.

Maintain existing fish barriers on the main outflow channels or modify existing barriers.

Selectively control salt cedar wherever it occurs within the ACEC by mechanical removal (chainsaws, heavy machinery), herbicide treatment with an approved herbicide by hand application, prescribed fires, and combinations of treatment methods.

Plant suitable vegetation cover in areas affected by treatment, if deemed necessary. Such plants may include alkali sacaton, black willow, and other native species.

Coordinate with the State Land Office and grazing permittees to cooperatively improve wetland-riparian habitat on the following State lands within the ACEC:

T. 11 S., R. 25 E., Section 36:W1/2

T. 12 S. R. 26 E., Section 16:W1/2

Remove the public lands in Spring Pasture of Allotment No. 65069, Calumet Ranch, from the grazing allotment to serve as a buffer area for the wetlands proper. The public lands in the Spring Pasture total approximately 440 acres and are located in Section 9 and 10, Township 12 South, Range 26 east. See the map titled “Overflow Wetlands ACEC Grazing Allotments.” In the same grazing allotment, negotiate with the State to re-align pasture fences to exclude a portion of state land in Section 16 to protect wetland-riparian resources in concert with ACEC overall management objectives.

Continue to research the possibilities about acquiring state and private lands with riparian/wetland values if opportunities arise. Any lands acquired would be managed according to the prescriptions of this plan.

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

Action Rationale

Because of the concern for meeting annual water deliveries to Texas, the ACEC has become a focal point for water resource management. The existence of the Overflow Wetlands, and the diversity of aquatic and terrestrial wildlife species and plants, remains contingent upon the continued supply of water from Lea Lake. Wetland-riparian areas comprise about 0.21 percent of the 12.9 million acres of public lands in New Mexico, yet these unique areas are among the most important ecosystems in the Southwest. Protection and management of the ACEC requires coordination and cooperation between several State and federal agencies, county government, private landowners, and private companies such as Transwestern Pipeline Company and Xcel Energy who maintain large existing rights-of-way through the ACEC.

The BLM has a responsibility to conserve special status species and the ecosystems upon which they depend. The Pecos pupfish is a federal candidate species that was proposed for listing by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. A multi-agency Conservation Agreement was entered into that outlined actions to be implemented by the various agencies to protect the species and its habitat. The agreement was accepted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for their determination to consider further action on the listing of the species. The decision was to leave the pupfish as a candidate species based on the Conservation Agreement, but periodical reviews would still be conducted to determine if listing is warranted based on the implementation or non-implementation of those actions outlined in the Conservation Agreement.

Many organisms in the ACEC depend on a clean, year-round water source. Maintenance of good perennial water quality and quantity is essential to ensure healthy and productive plant and animal communities.

Continued local development and water use on nearby lands will affect water flow quantity and quality and the health and diversity of the ACEC's ecosystem.

Peak flow from Lea Lake recorded in January 2003 was 18.8 cfs (cubic feet per second) or roughly 13.5 million gallons per day. The influx of additional water dramatically enhanced wetland habitat within the ACEC, increasing aquatic habitat for waterfowl and shorebirds, endemic fish species including the Pecos pupfish, aquatic invertebrates and, of recent interest, dragonfly populations.

Planned Actions for Objective 2

Install stream gauging stations within the Pecos River channel at the following locations:

- T. 11 S., R. 25 E., Section 36, in cooperation with the State Land Office
- T. 12 S., R. 26 E., Section 4
- T. 12 S., R. 26 E., Section 5
- T. 12 S., R. 26 E., Section 17
- T. 12 S., R. 26 E., Section 20

Restoration of riparian/wetland habitat will utilize the naturally occurring flows from Lea Lake and the surrounding area. Restoration action would include constructing seeding or planting native riparian vegetation, and modifying existing channels but not structures designed to impound water. Suitability criteria for restoration include, but are not limited to, areas with seasonal surface waters indicative of a high water table or subsurface clay layer; areas with the potential of supporting cottonwood tree groves; and areas that have been or would be subject to vegetation manipulation (salt cedar control, prescribed fire, riparian pasture development).

Objective 3 – *Accommodate low-impact recreational use while providing a variety of experiences and opportunities to help meet existing and future demands.*

Actions Rationale

The Overflow Wetlands ACEC is frequently visited by the public because of its proximity to Roswell and being adjacent to the Bottomless Lakes State Park. The ACEC receives an estimated 500+ user-days a year. Most users of the Overflow Wetlands come to enjoy recreational activities such as fishing, birdwatching, waterfowl hunting, nature studies, and general day use. The private lands surrounding the ACEC are used for various economic or recreational pursuits including ranching, farming, hunting, speculative purposes to re-sell, and private residences.

The Overflow Wetlands was designated as an ACEC and visitor use should be managed to maintain the area's integrity for fish, wildlife, and plants that rely on the area for survival. The natural resources and processes within the ACEC are sensitive to human presence and use. This sensitivity calls for a balance between public recreational and the needs of its resources for protection. Excessive and inappropriate recreational use and development could lead to a loss of

some of the very resources that make the Overflow Wetlands valuable and attractive to humans in the first place.

Hunting on the BLM-administered lands is a significant safety concern because of nearby housing developments and developed facilities. Any hunting recommendations would be coordinated with the New Mexico Department of Games and Fish and the New Mexico Game commission. Additionally, conflicts could arise between bird watchers and hunters during certain seasons.

Planned Actions for Objective 3

Because recreational demand occurs at the Overflow Wetland's easiest access points, recreational management will focus on the north access area adjacent to the Bottomless Lakes State Park and near the end of the south access area in the vicinity of the power transmission line.

Monitor uses within the ACEC to avoid unacceptable vegetative or soil resource impacts that may be associated with such uses.

Accommodate low-impact wildlife observation, nature study, day hiking, walking, fishing and photography. Limited amounts of low impact picnicking and bicycling will be allowed.

Prohibit uses that are excessively loud, disruptive to wildlife, interfere with the life cycle of any plant or animal (except those hunted under license), pollute or damage the ACEC, or involve excessive soil disturbance.

A portion of the ACEC is already closed to off-highway vehicle use (See Map). The remaining public lands within the ACEC would be designated as limited to existing roads and trails for off-highway vehicle use.

Close the area to target shooting.

Objective 4 – *Promote an awareness and appreciation of resource values significant to its ACEC designation.*

Actions Rationale

Opportunities currently exist for environmental education for visitors within the ACEC. The extent of these opportunities need to be determined from a feasibility study which will determine whether there is a need for facilities and, if so, what kind and how many. One of the State of New Mexico's first environmental education easements was granted to a local Roswell school and is used annually by the BLM to conduct outdoor classrooms. This opportunity can be expanded to include other schools and the local university because of its proximity to Roswell. Thresholds of use and people-impacts the area can support without resource degradation needs to be factored into the evaluation.

The need for further inventories and research have been identified by BLM specialists in light of special status species that inhabit the area, and for compliance with the Endangered Species Act, while others will identify trends in various species populations, visitor use, water quality and quantity, and more. Greater information on trends will allow for updated and future adaptive management decisions to protect the ACEC.

Planned Actions for Objective 4

To fully implement this Objective, a separate interpretive plan would be developed. This plan would include the following ideas:

Develop and interpretive program to include interpretive activities for ACEC visitors. Opportunities may range from interpretive signs to environmental education workshops and programs. Specific interpretive facilities would inspire learning and minimize impacts, fostering a “Leave No Trace” land use ethic. This may also include guided walks and evening presentations in concert with Bottomless Lakes State Park programs conducted during the summer.

Develop themes for interpretation based on the values of the ACEC. Survey educators to determine what the environmental education needs are and implement the educational program and research as appropriate and as budget allows.

Utilize the Overflow Wetlands ACEC as an outdoor classroom through BLM Outreach programs.

Objective 5 – *Provide adequate use supervision, visitor facilities, signing, and programs to protect resources and support planned visitor use activities and levels.*

Actions Rationale

Visitation to the Overflow Wetlands is expected to increase as more people become aware of the area and the population of Roswell grows. The infrastructure to support recreational uses of the ACEC while protecting the habitat of the species that inhabit the area needs to be put into place. This infrastructure would include signing and other management tools, which direct recreational use, ultimately reduce resource damage; location of trails, roads and parking; and the facilities to support visitation. In addition memoranda of understanding between agencies are needed to enhance law enforcement support for the area.

Planned Actions for Objective 5

Maintain or reconstruct the north access route beginning from the boundary between the ACEC and Bottomless Lakes State Park. Maintain or reconstruct the south access route beginning from Highway 409, then across State lands along the existing powerline right-of-way, and then entering public land.

Establish a trail for wildlife viewing and hunter access in T. 12 S., R. 26 E. Section 9.

Establish a 0.25-mile interpretive trail originating from the north access road where it crosses onto public land in T. 11 S., R. 26 E., Section 33:E1/2SE1/4. Construct the trail for the physically-impaired along an existing boundary fence between Bottomless Lakes State Park and public land.

Install directional and regulatory road signs along access routes, and interpretive signs and information boards at both parking areas.

Open fires are prohibited within the ACEC.

Fishing is acceptable (according to all applicable state and federal regulations) on the Pecos River. Fishing is prohibited within the ACEC.

The discharge of all weapons is prohibited within the ACEC, except for the use of shotguns during NMDGF approved bird and waterfowl hunting seasons.

Special use permits, including those permits for the collection of plants or animals, may be authorized for camping, special plant harvest, animal trapping, education, or research purposes. This would also include special events. Large group activities, which in and of themselves do not focus on the ACEC, will not be permitted.

For more information about recreational use of public lands in general, developed recreation areas and ACECs, see Appendix 10, Roles of Conduct, of the Roswell RMP.

Objective 6 – *Provide reasonable access to visitor use areas and the river with minimal impacts on natural resources and visitor experiences.*

Actions Rationale

Access to the ACEC has historically been uncontrolled. Undirected visitation may degrade the ACEC's natural resources. OHV use negatively impacts wetland habitat, the fragile gypsiferous hills, and degrades the scenic and unique resource qualities of the Overflow Wetlands.

Planned Actions for Objective 6

Allow public road access to the ACEC and the Pecos River using the north and south access roads.

BLM may restrict use of the area by limiting the number of vehicles or visitors to the area if resource damage becomes evident.

Future acquired lands would be managed under the same goals and objectives.

Enforce current OHV closures on lands within the ACEC.

Monitoring and Research

Objective 7 – *Facilitate improved management through monitoring and research.*

Actions Rationale

Monitoring is an important component of adaptive management and will introduce new information to give a better picture of the changing environment at the ACEC to help make management of the area more accountable and responsive. Adaptive management includes changes in management use and actions, mitigation, and redesign or initiation of new monitoring.

Three types of monitoring will take place. Implementation monitoring to ensure that management actions are being followed, effectiveness monitoring to verify that actions are achieving the desired results, and validation monitoring to determine if the underlying assumptions of the goals and objectives are sound. Some effectiveness and most validation monitoring would be accomplished through studies and research.

Monitoring will take place in resource management of fish, wildlife, special status species, wetland-riparian areas, water quantity and quality, livestock grazing, visitor use management to include recreation, outdoor education and interpretation, and site administration and development for visitor facilities and access.

Planned Actions for Objective 7

Conduct inventories and long-term general and specific ecological studies relating to the requirements of the Pecos pupfish.

Conduct inventories and long-term general and specific ecological studies for State-listed or state sensitive wildlife and plant species.

Conduct inventories to determine the ecological condition of the wetland-riparian areas within the Overflow Wetlands.

Asses special status species reintroduction success by monitoring introduced populations.

Determine potential population trends, threats and habitat change by visually monitoring populations of all special status plants species occurring in the ACEC.

Continue to gather baseline information on flows and habitat use by all fish species.

Use aquatic invertebrate sampling techniques to monitor and evaluate general water quality in the wetlands and Pecos River.

Continue photo plots on each range study site.

Determine the ecological status (condition/trend) of wetland riparian vegetation through monitoring of key species in the “green line” along the margins of wetlands and the Pecos River. Low-level photography as well as on-the-ground plots will be examined.

Determine how the river changes as vegetation stabilization along the river improves and upland management improves.

Cross-section and gradient profiles will be documented to establish a baseline condition. Profiles will be repeated every 2-3 years.

Evaluate water quality conditions for selected physical and chemical parameters over a range of flows.

Manage resource impacts from visitor use by establishing and using the Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) system.

Use visitor surveys to help determine the effectiveness of interpretive/educational programs and facilities.

In cooperation with NMDGF, monitor hunting usage within the Overflow Wetlands ACEC.

Complete inventories of wildlife species and their habitats.

Monitor the effects of projects and/or developments on wildlife behavior and habitat use.

Document the success of habitat manipulations and/or other potential impacting management actions.

Provide opportunities and facilities for outside research projects consistent with the goals and objective of the ACEC.

Coordinate with private neighboring landowners regarding research projects which are adjacent or pertinent to their lands.

Determine the abundance/distribution of benthic and aquatic invertebrate species in the wetlands and Pecos River.

Determine the status and extent of exotic fish in the wetlands and Pecos River.

Identify the water flows needed to maintain aquatic habitat.

Study the effects that the local area drawdown of near surface freshwater aquifers for agricultural uses has on surface flows, and the risks of diminishing flow on the wetlands.

Evaluate groundwater distribution in the ACEC.