

## **BLM Backcountry Conservation Areas (FAQ)**

The Backcountry Conservation Area is a Bureau of Land Management administrative management allocation used by the agency to maintain and enhance habitat for recreationally important fish and wildlife species and to expand public access for hunting, angling, and other forms of wildlife-dependent recreation. A broad and diverse cross-section of sportsmen's conservation organizations are united in strong support for BLM's adoption and utilization of this innovative and important planning tool.

When applied, Backcountry Conservation Areas allow the BLM to prioritize habitat management actions such as restoring riparian areas and streams, controlling invasive species, managing vegetation, improving fish passage, reducing the risk of wildfires, and increasing forage. The application of Backcountry Conservation Areas also directs agency staff to prioritize public access through road and trail maintenance, transportation management planning, and partnerships with adjacent landowners to expand public lands access.

BLM field offices have the ability to consider and adopt Backcountry Conservation Areas in resource management plans as a means to implement the hunting and fishing directives set forth in [Executive Order 13443](#) and Secretarial Orders [3347](#), [3356](#), and [3362](#).

### **History of process and support**

Sportsmen and women have long recognized the need to add special management emphasis to BLM public lands with high-quality wildlife habitats and sporting opportunities. Beginning in 2011 — in response to a flurry of BLM land-use plan amendments in areas important to sportsmen and women — hunters and anglers began to engage in BLM public planning processes, encouraging the agency to consider a new approach to multiple-use management for these high-value public lands. Many thought that a balanced, sportsmen-focused management tool could provide special management emphasis to benefit premier wildlife habitat and support recreational access, while also serving the needs of local communities and other public land stakeholders. In response to these suggestions, the BLM in 2017 issued formal guidance for the consideration and adoption of Backcountry Conservation Areas in land-use plans.

In Montana, the TRCP and several of our local partner organizations have been involved with the resource management plan revisions in Lewistown and Missoula since public scoping first began in 2014 and 2016, respectively. Throughout the planning processes, we have worked with local business owners, county commissioners, tribes, timber interests, grazing allotment holders, landowners, local business owners, and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to find common ground and agree upon practical, common-sense measures to conserve our best sporting destinations.

In 2019, the Lewistown and Missoula draft resource management plans considered Backcountry Conservation Areas as a potential management option for certain public lands with high recreation value and public comments were resoundingly supportive of them. Hunters and anglers are delighted to see Backcountry Conservation Areas included in the Lewistown and Missoula proposed RMPs, and the TRCP joins other organizations in thanking BLM and Interior Department leadership

for recognizing the need to add special management emphasis to maintain the opportunities found in our best public land hunting and fishing areas.

Today, Backcountry Conservation Areas enjoy the support of more than 100 local, state, and national sportsmen's organizations; the national Hunting and Shooting Sports Conservation Council, a federal advisory body that provides recommendations to the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture on natural resource management; more than 200 hunting- and fishing-focused businesses; 50 now-retired BLM career staff; state fish and wildlife agencies in Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, and Oregon; 150 wildlife professionals; local county commissioners in Colorado, Nevada, and Montana; and two off-road vehicle-based organizations.