Cassia Resource Management Plan

Record of Decision

Decision: It is my decision to implement the Preferred Alternative and amend the Cassia Resource Management Plan to designate the five areas in this document as ACEC or RNA/ACEC.

A corridor 660 feet wide and 7 1/2 miles in length along the Oregon-California Trail shall be designated an ACEC. A corridor 660 feet wide and 2 1/2 miles in length along the Granite Pass to Goose Creek portion of the California Trail shall be designated an ACEC. Three areas shall be designated as RNA/ACEC, they are: 110 acres on Goose Creek Mesa; 240 acres at City of Rocks; and 620 acres in Jim Sage Canyon.

Rationale: The subject lands meet the planning criteria for ACEC designation and the criteria necessary for RNA designation. The unique natural and cultural resource values will be protected and enhanced on these sites. Two of these areas will also be sources of future study.

Finding of No Significant Impact: The Environmental Assessment has been analyzed and a finding of no significant impact has resulted. It is concluded that the proposed action will not adversely affect the quality of the human environment. Preparation of an environmental impact statement pursuant to Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 is not required for this action.

Recommended:

[redacted]
Date

John S. Davis
Burley District Manager

Approved:

[redacted]
Date

Delmar D. Vail
Idaho State Director

ID-020-87-32

Cassia Resource Management Plan
Research Natural Area/Area of Critical Environmental Concern
Amendment and Environmental Analysis

I. Introduction

A. Purpose and Need:

The Cassia Resource Management Plan (RMP) was completed on January 24, 1985. The plan made no decisions to designate Research Natural Areas (RNAs) or Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs).

The University of Idaho, acting with the Nature Conservancy, has identified three areas to be designated as RNA/ACEC's. The Burley District Archaeologist has nominated two other areas for ACEC designation. These lands are not identified in the RMP as RNA or ACEC.

A need exists to amend the Cassia RMP to allow for the evaluation and designation of subject lands. These designations are considered to be in the public's interest. Two of the areas, Oregon-California Trail Junction and Granite Pass to Goose Creek, will provide for the protection of a part of America's history. The designation of the other areas will provide rangeland users and managers with information on rangeland conditions with changes in use. These areas are Jim Sage, City of Rocks, and Goose Creek Mesa.

RNA/ACEC designation is not a "withdrawal." Mining and land entries are not prohibited through designation, due to regulations. Such withdrawals are separate actions.

B. Location:

Appendix 1 shows general and specific location. All proposed locations are within the Snake River Resource Area, Burley District.

Specific locations are as follows:

1) The Oregon-California Trail Junction Proposed ACEC: T.10S., R.27E., Sections 10, 11, 12, 17, 18, and T.10S., R.26E., Sections 13 and 14. Includes approximately 600 acres;

2) Granite Pass to Goose Creek Proposed ACEC: T.16S., R.22E., Section 33 to T.16S., R.22E., Section 30. Includes approximately 200 acres;

3) Goose Creek Mesa Proposed RNA/ACEC: T.16S., R.21E., Section 17. Includes approximately 110 acres;

4) City of Rocks Proposed RNA/ACEC: R.15S., R.24E., Sections 19 and 30. Includes approximately 240 acres;

5) Jim Sage Proposed RNA/ACEC: T.15S., R.25E., S1/2NE1/4, SE1/4NW1/4, E1/2, SE1/4 Section 10; SW1/4NW1/4 W1/2SW1/4, Section 11; W1/2NW1/4 Section 14; and NE1/4, N1/2 NW1/4 Section 15. Approximately 620 acres.

C. Planning Process:

The Cassia RMP was prepared in accordance with BLM manual procedures and involved public participation. The RMP was approved by the Idaho State Director on January 24, 1985, and has been published and distributed to all interested parties.
The RMP made no specific recommendations for the subject lands regarding RNA/ACEC designation. These lands are within management areas which are being managed for multiple use.

Upon concurrence of this plan amendment by the State Director, a public notice summarizing the amendment and probable environmental impacts will be published in the local newspaper. If no protests are filed, the decision will be made part of the Cassia RMP, clearly identified as an amendment and implementation will follow.

D. Conformance:

This Cassia RMP amendment is consistent with Cassia County's Resource and Standards Guide. This amendment meets the "consistency" requirements found in 43 CFR 1610.3-2.

II. Planning Issues and Criteria

A. Planning Issues:

The planning issue here is whether these proposed areas meet the criteria for RNA/ACEC designation and whether they will be so designated.

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) defines ACECs as "areas within the public lands where special management attention is required (when such areas are developed or used or where no development 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 safety from natural hazards." (Section 103(a).)

43 CFR 8223.0-6 states:

> "Areas established as research natural areas shall be of sufficient number and size to adequately provide for scientific study, research, and demonstration purposes."

B. Planning Criteria:

To be considered as an ACEC an area must meet the Relevance and Importance criteria as defined by the CFR. 43 CFR 1610.7-2 defines "Relevance" and "Importance" as follows:

"(1) Relevance. There shall be present a significant historic, cultural, or scenic value; a fish and wildlife resource or other natural system or process; or natural hazard."

"(2) Importance. The above described value, resource, system, process, or hazard shall have substantial significance and values. This generally requires qualities of more than local significance, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern. A natural hazard can be important if it is a significant threat to human life or property."

43 CFR 8223.0-5 defines an RNA as:

> "(a) "Research natural area" means an area that is established and maintained for the primary purpose of research and education because the land has one or more of the following characteristics: (1) A typical representation of a common plant or animal association; (2) an unusual plant or animal association; (3) a threatened or endangered plant or animal species; (4) a typical representation of common geological, soil, or water features; or (5) outstanding or unusual geologic, soil, or water features."

Three areas are recommended for RNA/ACEC designation. This dual designation is recommended for two reasons. RNA designation is designed to be used for research purposes, three of the proposed areas are to become research sites; therefore, the RNA designation. The addition of the ACEC designation will allow more specific management guidelines to apply to these areas.

All five of these areas have been determined to meet the "relevance" and "importance" requirements as outlined in 43 CFR 1610.7-2.

1) Oregon-California Trail Junction

Relevance

Approximately 7 1/2 miles of slightly-disturbed ruts between the Raft River and Cotterel Mountains constitute the best remaining segment of the Oregon Trail on the Burley District.

Importance

This trail was traveled by almost all emigrants bound for California up to 1849. The preserved ruts in the desert are presently a part of the proposed Oregon-California Trail Historic District National Register nomination.

2) Granite Pass to Goose Creek

Relevance

The California Trail was used by about 200,000 emigrants, mostly after 1848. The number represents almost all of the emigrant

traffic to California because other routes were very expensive. All of the emigrants on the California Trail used the Granite Pass portion of the trail, there were no cutoffs around it. Granite Pass itself is not included in the ACEC. After leaving Granite Pass, the proposed ACEC corridor represents the main route traveled by the emigrants. The rapid influx of people into California after 1848 led to the West becoming a major political force and completed the westward destiny of the nation.

Importance

The California Trail is nationally recognized among historians and the informed, general public as the route that led to the settlement of California by large numbers of Americans and ultimately to statehood. Granite Pass was the only viable route for the early travelers through Middle Mountain. After leaving the pass, most emigrants followed the trail along the proposed ACEC route. The alternate route was through the Utah desert; however, this route consumed too much time, often stranding settlers in fall snowstorms. The Donner party used the Utah desert route, only to be stranded in a snowstorm on Donner Summit, California, in which at least one half of the party perished.

3) Goose Creek Mesa

Relevance

Goose Creek Mesa is representative of several range types which occur in the Basin and Range geomorphic province of southern Idaho. These types include black sagebrush (*Artemisia nova*)/Nevada bluegrass (*Poa nevadensis*) and mountain big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata* ssp *vaseyana*)/bluebunch wheatgrass (*Agropyron spicatum*).

Importance

The vegetation in this area shows little sign of grazing and is in good ecological condition. Lack of water and the existence of rimrock make this area unusable for grazing. The University of Idaho and the Nature Conservancy have nominated this area for use as a range habitat reference site.

4) Jim Sage

Relevance

This area contains one of the most northern populations of single leaf pinyon pine (*Pinus monophylla*) in a pinyon pine-Utah juniper (*Juniperus osteosperma*) forest type. The area also consists of Basin and Range vegetative habitat types including mountain big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata* ssp *vaseyana*), Idaho fescue (*Festuca idahoensis*), Great basin wildrye (*Elymus cinerus*), bluebunch wheatgrass (*Agropyron spicatum*), and chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*).

Importance

This area was nominated by the University of Idaho and the Nature Conservancy to serve as a range and woodland reference site. Due to its steep terrain, this area is generally not utilized for grazing.

5. City of Rocks

Relevance

This area contains one of the most northern populations of single leaf pinyon pine (Pinus monophylla) in a pinyon pine-Utah juniper (Juniperus osteosperma) forest type. The area also consists of Basin and Range vegetative habitat types including mountain big sagebrush (Artemisia tridentata ssp vaseyana), Idaho fescue (Festuca idahoensis), Great basin wildrye (Elymus cinerus), blue- bunch wheatgrass (Agropyron spicatum), and chokecherry (Prunus virginiana).

Importance

This area was nominated by the University of Idaho and the Nature Conservancy to serve as a range and woodland reference site. Due to its steep terrain, this area is generally not utilized for grazing.

III. Analysis and Justification

Oregon-California Trail Junction

It is recommended that a corridor 660 feet wide along seven miles of the Oregon Trail (excluding state and private land) be designated as an ACEC. Designation will bring more attention to the historical nature of the area and permit protection of the site through an aggressive sign program and public awareness.

Approximately 7 1/2 miles of slightly-disturbed ruts between the Raft River and Cotterel Mountains constitute the best remaining segment of the Oregon Trail on the Burley District. This trail also includes a portion of the junction of the Oregon-California Trail. This trail was traveled by almost all emigrants bound for Oregon. After the opening of the Hudspeth's Cutoff, traffic along the Oregon-California Trail was greatly reduced. For Oregon bound emigrants, this section of trail represented just another river crossing. The preserved ruts in the desert are presently a part of the proposed Oregon-California Trail Historic District National Register nomination.

The Idaho Chapter of the Oregon-California Tails Association has requested that the Burley District "adopt" segments of historic trails, on public land, within its boundaries. The purpose of the adoption is to research the trail's history and document ownership.

ACEC designation is consistent with existing management goals as written in the Cassia RMP Management Area 12A (Appendix B-1). ACEC designation will give priority to this area.

Granite Pass to Goose Creek

It is recommended that a corridor 660 feet wide along 2 1/2 miles of the California Trail segment called Granite Pass to Goose Creek (excluding private land) be designated an ACEC. Designation will attract attention to the historical significance of the area and permit protection of the site through an aggressive sign program and public awareness.

The California Trail segment between Granite Pass and Birch Creek contains some undisturbed remains of the trial and evokes a historical feeling for the trail and the people who crossed it. Granite Pass provided access for wagons from Raft River to Goose Creek, and on to the Humboldt River in northern Nevada.

The Granite Pass segment of the California Trail provided access for wagons between Raft River and Goose Creek was well as the Humboldt River in Neveda. A trail further south across western Utah and Nevada was not possible because of the lack of water. Beginning in 1843, wagon traffic started on the California Trail and Granite Pass was used from the start even though the emigrants were in Mexican territory for a few miles of this route. In 1848, this area came to the U.S. via treaty after the Mexican/American War.

The decent into Birch Creek was considered to be extremely difficult. Wagon wheels were locked and ropes were used to decend several times. Several trees in the area may still be standing which exhibit rope burns from lowering wagons down the steep slopes. Small portions of the trail in this area have been used for low use-two track roads; however, the basic integrity of the trail has not been damaged. This segment is the last remaining portion of the California Trail in Idaho that does not have any major, modern intrusions.

Designation will call attention to this area and provide additional funds for the purpose of supporting the "adoption" two which the District has agreed. ACEC designation will provide attention to the historical value of the trail that is a part of Idaho and the U.S.A.'s history.

ACEC designation is consistent with existing management goals as written in the Cassia RMP Management Area 4 (Appendix 2-B). ACEC designation will give priority to this area.

Goose Creek Mesa

Goose Creek Mesa was selected to represent examples of several range types that occur in the Basin and Range geomorphic province of southern Idaho. The predominant vegetation

throughout much of the area is a black sage steppe in which Nevada bluegrass is the predominant bunchgrass. Scattered Utah juniper trees occur throughout most of the mesa, but in some areas they occur in sufficient numbers to create a woodland setting. In the woodland situation, black sage and Nevada bluegrass are still the shrub and understory dominants. Mountain big sagebrush and bluebunch wheatgrass occur in swales. All of these types are characterized by an abundance of forbs.

Caicco and Wellner have identified a need for this area to be included in an RNA/ACEC network to provide the range of natural diversity in Idaho. This area shows little sign of grazing and is therefore in a natural state. This area's best use is that of a range reference site. With the RNA/ACEC designation, rangeland managers will be able to reference this site when making rangeland improvements. A reference site is used like a "control" in an experiment. Land, insect, and wildlife treatments can be checked against the reference site. RNA/ACEC designation of this area is necessary for the protection of the integrity of the existing condition as well as to provide a reference point from which to make land management decisions.

The purpose of RNA/ACEC designation is to preserve the vegetation in its existing, near relict condition. This area is not grazed due to physical boundaries and lack of water. Special management will be activities necessary to maintain the area's present condition.

4) City of Rocks

It is proposed that this area be designated as an RNA/ACEC. Designation will afford some protection to the present vegetation as an area for reference study sites.

The special management requirements of this RNA/ACEC plan are for the purpose of protecting an existing resource value; therefore, there is little need for subsequent mitigating measures.

This area also contains undisturbed examples of several range habitat types of the Basin and Range geomorphic province of Southern Idaho. All of the vegetation types are developed on a variety of either igneous or high-grade metamorphic substrates. These situations are needed in an RNA/ACEC network to include the range of natural diversity in Idaho (Wellner and Johnson, 1974 as reported in Caicco and Wellner, 1983).

The purpose and need for this area to be designated as an RNA/ACEC, as stated above, is most importantly for its pinyon pine and range vegetation. The undisturbed condition of the range habitat is needed to provide rangeland managers with reference site. Such a site will be used to compare rangeland treatments with a non-treated areas.

5) Jim Sage

It is proposed that the area be designated as an RNA/ACEC. This designation is consistent with the existing management of the area. Designation of the area will allow for the protection of Jim Sage spring-head. Designation will also provide a source for the study of native grasses and natural wetland processes.

This spring and its associated two point one (2.1) miles of wetland/riparian area is unique to the public lands in this area because of its size and its natural state. The water surfaces from several springs that combine to form a consistent, flowing stream of eight tenths (.8) cubic feet per second (cfs). This supports a two mile long community of diverse, native riparian vegetation before it sinks into the ground. Protection through the ACEC designation combined with physically fencing the spring head will provide for an excellent example of a spring fed riparian community in its natural state.

The proposed area also is home to two types of sagebrush which do not normally occur together, Artemisia nova (black sagebrush) and Artemisia arbuscula (low sagebrush). Black sagebrush is normally restricted to eastern Idaho and occurs on shallow, calcareous soils that are generally derived from limestone. This species is at its extreme northern distribution in Idaho, being much more prevalent in Utah and Nevada (Beetle 1960, as reported in Hironaka and Fosberg 1979). Low sagebrush is usually found on rocky, sterile soils. Further, the two species are generally not found on the same site. However, both of these species of sagebrush are found on the volcanic, rocky soils on Jim Sage.

Additionally, this area was selected to represent undisturbed examples of several range habitat types of the Basin and Range geomorphic province of Southern Idaho. The predominant vegetation throughout much of the areas is a Utah juniper woodland in which various admixtures of singleleaf pinyon pine occurs. The shrub layer in this woodland is dominated by mountain big sagebrush, and the understory by bluebunch wheatgrass. A portion of the area has been burned, creating an excellent fire mosaic pattern in which juniper appears to be re-establishing itself slowly. Together, these situations are needed in an RAN/ACEC network to include the range of natural diversity in Idaho (Caicco and Wellner 1983).

The purpose of including an area of natural vegetation in an RNA/ACEC network is to provide rangeland managers with a reference site for use as a control when making rangeland decisions and to assure future generations unmodified examples of unique and diversified ecotypes. The combination of all the above statements make this area a good choice for RNA/ACEC designation.

Few special management requirements will be made on this area. The largest portion of this area will be kept in as near relict condition as possible. The smaller area around the spring-head will require a fence to relieve heavy livestock use from altering the entire subject area.

The construction of a pole exclosure surrounding the spring-heads and approximately 30 acres will protect the riparian and associated wetland areas from use. The exclosure will also allow for future development of a pond. Future development of the water, downstream from the exclosure, will be permitted.

IV. Alternatives, Including the Proposed Action

A. Alternative 1 - Preferred Alternative.

The preferred alternative is to amend the Cassia RMP to include RNA/ACEC designation for Goose Creek Mesa, City of Rocks, and Jim Sage; ACEC designation for the Oregon-California Trail Junction; and ACEC designation for the Granite Pass to Goose Creek portion of the California Trail.

1) Oregon-California Trail Junction

A corridor 660 feet wide by seven and one-half miles in length, as described in Fig. 2 and 3 Appendix 1, will be designated an ACEC. Management guidance for this area shall come from the Cassia RMP decisions for Management Area 12A (Appendix 2-A).

Lands acquired through Required Actions, 'D', will be managed under this decision as well.

The special management requirements of this ACEC plan are primarily for the purpose of protecting or enhancing the environmental resource; therefore, there is little need for subsequent mitigating measures.

2) Granite Pass to Goose Creek

A corridor 660 feet wide by 2 1/2 miles in length, as described in Fig. 4, Appendix 1, will be designated an ACEC. Management guidance for this area shall come from the Cassia RMP decisions for Management Area 4 (Appendix 2-B).

Required Actions: 'H', will be amended to read: "Activities which alter the natural vegetation will not be permitted. The harvest of woodland products is not permitted."

Special management requirements of this ACEC plan are primarily for the purpose of protecting the resource; therefore, there is little need for subsequent mitigating measures.

3) Goose Creek Mesa

An area 110 acres in size, as described in Fig. 5, Appendix 1, will be designated an RNA/ACEC.

Management of the area will be guided by the Cassia RMP Management Area 3 (Appendix 2-E).

Required Action: 'G', will be amended to read: "Activities which alter the natural vegetation will not be permitted. The harvest of woodland products is not permitted."

Required Action: 'F', will be amended to read: "No harvest of woodland products within the RNA/ACEC."

Special management requirements of this RNA/ACEC plan are primarily for the purpose of protecting the resource; therefore, there is little need for subsequent mitigating measures.

4) City of Rocks

An area 240 acres in size, as described in Fig. 6, Appendix 1, will be designated an RNA/ACEC.

Management of this area shall be guided by the Cassia RMP, Management Area 8 and 8b- City of Rocks (Appendix 2-C).

Required Actions 'B' shall be amended to read: "Limited suppression. Prescribed burning is permitted as a part of vegetation study within the RNA/ACEC boundary."

Required Actions 'C' shall be amended to read: "No grazing of livestock permitted within the boundary of the ACEC."

Required Actions 8b 'B' shall be amended to read: "No recreational facilities shall be constructed within the ACEC boundary."

Required Actions 8b 'E' shall be amended to read: "Closed to the sale and free use disposal of mineral materials within the RNA/ACEC boundary."

Required Action 'H' shall be amended to read: "Harvest of woodland products is not permitted within the boundary of the ACEC."

5) Jim Sage

A 620 acre area, as described in Fig. 7, Appendix 1, will be designated an RNA/ACEC.

A pole exclosure as described in Fig. 7, Appendix 1, will be constructed around the Jim Sage spring-head and surrounding 30 acres of wetlands.

ID-020-87-32

Cassia Resource Management Plan
Research Natural Area/Area of Critical Environmental Concern
Amendment and Environmental Analysis

I. Introduction

A. Purpose and Need:

The Cassia Resource Management Plan (RMP) was completed on January 24, 1985. The plan made no decisions to designate Research Natural Areas (RNAs) or Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs).

The University of Idaho, acting with the Nature Conservancy, has identified three areas to be designated as RNA/ACEC's. The Burley District Archaeologist has nominated two other areas for ACEC designation. These lands are not identified in the RMP as RNA or ACEC.

A need exists to amend the Cassia RMP to allow for the evaluation and designation of subject lands. These designations are considered to be in the public's interest. Two of the areas, Oregon-California Trail Junction and Granite Pass to Goose Creek, will provide for the protection of a part of America's history. The designation of the other areas will provide rangeland users and managers with information on rangeland conditions with changes in use. These areas are Jim Sage, City of Rocks, and Goose Creek Mesa.

RNA/ACEC designation is not a "withdrawal." Mining and land entries are not prohibited through designation, due to regulations. Such withdrawals are separate actions.

B. Location:

Appendix 1 shows general and specific location. All proposed locations are within the Snake River Resource Area, Burley District.

Specific locations are as follows:

1) The Oregon-California Trail Junction Proposed ACEC: T.10S., R.27E., Sections 10, 11, 12, 17, 18, and T.10S., R.26E., Sections 13 and 14. Includes approximately 600 acres;

2) Granite Pass to Goose Creek Proposed ACEC: T.16S., R.22E., Section 33 to T.16S., R.22E., Section 30. Includes approximately 200 acres;

3) Goose Creek Mesa Proposed RNA/ACEC: T.16S., R.21E., Section 17. Includes approximately 110 acres;

4) City of Rocks Proposed RNA/ACEC: R.15S., R.24E., Sections 19 and 30. Includes approximately 240 acres;

5) Jim Sage Proposed RNA/ACEC: T.15S., R.25E., S1/2NE1/4, SE1/4NW1/4, E1/2, SE1/4 Section 10; SW1/4NW1/4 W1/2SW1/4, Section 11; W1/2NW1/4 Section 14; and NE1/4, N1/2 NW1/4 Section 15. Approximately 620 acres.

C. Planning Process:

The Cassia RMP was prepared in accordance with BLM manual procedures and involved public participation. The RMP was approved by the Idaho State Director on January 24, 1985, and has been published and distributed to all interested parties.
The RMP made no specific recommendations for the subject lands regarding RNA/ACEC designation. These lands are within management areas which are being managed for multiple use.

Upon concurrence of this plan amendment by the State Director, a public notice summarizing the amendment and probable environmental impacts will be published in the local newspaper. If no protests are filed, the decision will be made part of the Cassia RMP, clearly identified as an amendment and implementation will follow.

D. Conformance:

This Cassia RMP amendment is consistent with Cassia County's Resource and Standards Guide. This amendment meets the "consistency" requirements found in 43 CFR 1610.3-2.

II. Planning Issues and Criteria

A. Planning Issues:

The planning issue here is whether these proposed areas meet the criteria for RNA/ACEC designation and whether they will be so designated.

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) defines ACECs as "areas within the public lands where special management attention is required (when such areas are developed or used or where no development 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 safety from natural hazards." (Section 103(a).)

43 CFR 8223.0-6 states:

> "Areas established as research natural areas shall be of sufficient number and size to adequately provide for scientific study, research, and demonstration purposes."

B. Planning Criteria:

To be considered as an ACEC an area must meet the Relevance and Importance criteria as defined by the CFR. 43 CFR 1610.7-2 defines "Relevance" and "Importance" as follows:

"(1) Relevance. There shall be present a significant historic, cultural, or scenic value; a fish and wildlife resource or other natural system or process; or natural hazard."

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43 CFR 8223.0-5 defines an RNA as:

> "(a) "Research natural area" means an area that is established and maintained for the primary purpose of research and education because the land has one or more of the following characteristics: (1) A typical representation of a common plant or animal association; (2) an unusual plant or animal association; (3) a threatened or endangered plant or animal species; (4) a typical representation of common geological, soil, or water features; or (5) outstanding or unusual geologic, soil, or water features."

Three areas are recommended for RNA/ACEC designation. This dual designation is recommended for two reasons. RNA designation is designed to be used for research purposes, three of the proposed areas are to become research sites; therefore, the RNA designation. The addition of the ACEC designation will allow more specific management guidelines to apply to these areas.

All five of these areas have been determined to meet the "relevance" and "importance" requirements as outlined in 43 CFR 1610.7-2.

1) Oregon-California Trail Junction

Relevance

Approximately 7 1/2 miles of slightly-disturbed ruts between the Raft River and Cotterel Mountains constitute the best remaining segment of the Oregon Trail on the Burley District.

Importance

This trail was traveled by almost all emigrants bound for California up to 1849. The preserved ruts in the desert are presently a part of the proposed Oregon-California Trail Historic District National Register nomination.

2) Granite Pass to Goose Creek

Relevance

The California Trail was used by about 200,000 emigrants, mostly after 1848. The number represents almost all of the emigrant

traffic to California because other routes were very expensive. All of the emigrants on the California Trail used the Granite Pass portion of the trail, there were no cutoffs around it. Granite Pass itself is not included in the ACEC. After leaving Granite Pass, the proposed ACEC corridor represents the main route traveled by the emigrants. The rapid influx of people into California after 1848 led to the West becoming a major political force and completed the westward destiny of the nation.

Importance

The California Trail is nationally recognized among historians and the informed, general public as the route that led to the settlement of California by large numbers of Americans and ultimately to statehood. Granite Pass was the only viable route for the early travelers through Middle Mountain. After leaving the pass, most emigrants followed the trail along the proposed ACEC route. The alternate route was through the Utah desert; however, this route consumed too much time, often stranding settlers in fall snowstorms. The Donner party used the Utah desert route, only to be stranded in a snowstorm on Donner Summit, California, in which at least one half of the party perished.

3) Goose Creek Mesa

Relevance

Goose Creek Mesa is representative of several range types which occur in the Basin and Range geomorphic province of southern Idaho. These types include black sagebrush (*Artemisia nova*)/Nevada bluegrass (*Poa nevadensis*) and mountain big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata* ssp *vaseyana*)/bluebunch wheatgrass (*Agropyron spicatum*).

Importance

The vegetation in this area shows little sign of grazing and is in good ecological condition. Lack of water and the existence of rimrock make this area unusable for grazing. The University of Idaho and the Nature Conservancy have nominated this area for use as a range habitat reference site.

4) Jim Sage

Relevance

This area contains one of the most northern populations of single leaf pinyon pine (*Pinus monophylla*) in a pinyon pine-Utah juniper (*Juniperus osteosperma*) forest type. The area also consists of Basin and Range vegetative habitat types including mountain big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata* ssp *vaseyana*), Idaho fescue (*Festuca idahoensis*), Great basin wildrye (*Elymus cinerus*), bluebunch wheatgrass (*Agropyron spicatum*), and chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*).

Importance

This area was nominated by the University of Idaho and the Nature Conservancy to serve as a range and woodland reference site. Due to its steep terrain, this area is generally not utilized for grazing.

5. City of Rocks

Relevance

This area contains one of the most northern populations of single leaf pinyon pine (Pinus monophylla) in a pinyon pine-Utah juniper (Juniperus osteosperma) forest type. The area also consists of Basin and Range vegetative habitat types including mountain big sagebrush (Artemisia tridentata ssp vaseyana), Idaho fescue (Festuca idahoensis), Great basin wildrye (Elymus cinerus), blue- bunch wheatgrass (Agropyron spicatum), and chokecherry (Prunus virginiana).

Importance

This area was nominated by the University of Idaho and the Nature Conservancy to serve as a range and woodland reference site. Due to its steep terrain, this area is generally not utilized for grazing.

III. Analysis and Justification

Oregon-California Trail Junction

It is recommended that a corridor 660 feet wide along seven miles of the Oregon Trail (excluding state and private land) be designated as an ACEC. Designation will bring more attention to the historical nature of the area and permit protection of the site through an aggressive sign program and public awareness.

Approximately 7 1/2 miles of slightly-disturbed ruts between the Raft River and Cotterel Mountains constitute the best remaining segment of the Oregon Trail on the Burley District. This trail also includes a portion of the junction of the Oregon-California Trail. This trail was traveled by almost all emigrants bound for Oregon. After the opening of the Hudspeth's Cutoff, traffic along the Oregon-California Trail was greatly reduced. For Oregon bound emigrants, this section of trail represented just another river crossing. The preserved ruts in the desert are presently a part of the proposed Oregon-California Trail Historic District National Register nomination.

The Idaho Chapter of the Oregon-California Tails Association has requested that the Burley District "adopt" segments of historic trails, on public land, within its boundaries. The purpose of the adoption is to research the trail's history and document ownership.

ACEC designation is consistent with existing management goals as written in the Cassia RMP Management Area 12A (Appendix B-1). ACEC designation will give priority to this area.

Granite Pass to Goose Creek

It is recommended that a corridor 660 feet wide along 2 1/2 miles of the California Trail segment called Granite Pass to Goose Creek (excluding private land) be designated an ACEC. Designation will attract attention to the historical significance of the area and permit protection of the site through an aggressive sign program and public awareness.

The California Trail segment between Granite Pass and Birch Creek contains some undisturbed remains of the trial and evokes a historical feeling for the trail and the people who crossed it. Granite Pass provided access for wagons from Raft River to Goose Creek, and on to the Humboldt River in northern Nevada.

The Granite Pass segment of the California Trail provided access for wagons between Raft River and Goose Creek was well as the Humboldt River in Neveda. A trail further south across western Utah and Nevada was not possible because of the lack of water. Beginning in 1843, wagon traffic started on the California Trail and Granite Pass was used from the start even though the emigrants were in Mexican territory for a few miles of this route. In 1848, this area came to the U.S. via treaty after the Mexican/American War.

The decent into Birch Creek was considered to be extremely difficult. Wagon wheels were locked and ropes were used to decend several times. Several trees in the area may still be standing which exhibit rope burns from lowering wagons down the steep slopes. Small portions of the trail in this area have been used for low use-two track roads; however, the basic integrity of the trail has not been damaged. This segment is the last remaining portion of the California Trail in Idaho that does not have any major, modern intrusions.

Designation will call attention to this area and provide additional funds for the purpose of supporting the "adoption" two which the District has agreed. ACEC designation will provide attention to the historical value of the trail that is a part of Idaho and the U.S.A.'s history.

ACEC designation is consistent with existing management goals as written in the Cassia RMP Management Area 4 (Appendix 2-B). ACEC designation will give priority to this area.

Goose Creek Mesa

Goose Creek Mesa was selected to represent examples of several range types that occur in the Basin and Range geomorphic province of southern Idaho. The predominant vegetation

throughout much of the area is a black sage steppe in which Nevada bluegrass is the predominant bunchgrass. Scattered Utah juniper trees occur throughout most of the mesa, but in some areas they occur in sufficient numbers to create a woodland setting. In the woodland situation, black sage and Nevada bluegrass are still the shrub and understory dominants. Mountain big sagebrush and bluebunch wheatgrass occur in swales. All of these types are characterized by an abundance of forbs.

Caicco and Wellner have identified a need for this area to be included in an RNA/ACEC network to provide the range of natural diversity in Idaho. This area shows little sign of grazing and is therefore in a natural state. This area's best use is that of a range reference site. With the RNA/ACEC designation, rangeland managers will be able to reference this site when making rangeland improvements. A reference site is used like a "control" in an experiment. Land, insect, and wildlife treatments can be checked against the reference site. RNA/ACEC designation of this area is necessary for the protection of the integrity of the existing condition as well as to provide a reference point from which to make land management decisions.

The purpose of RNA/ACEC designation is to preserve the vegetation in its existing, near relict condition. This area is not grazed due to physical boundaries and lack of water. Special management will be activities necessary to maintain the area's present condition.

4) City of Rocks

It is proposed that this area be designated as an RNA/ACEC. Designation will afford some protection to the present vegetation as an area for reference study sites.

The special management requirements of this RNA/ACEC plan are for the purpose of protecting an existing resource value; therefore, there is little need for subsequent mitigating measures.

This area also contains undisturbed examples of several range habitat types of the Basin and Range geomorphic province of Southern Idaho. All of the vegetation types are developed on a variety of either igneous or high-grade metamorphic substrates. These situations are needed in an RNA/ACEC network to include the range of natural diversity in Idaho (Wellner and Johnson, 1974 as reported in Caicco and Wellner, 1983).

The purpose and need for this area to be designated as an RNA/ACEC, as stated above, is most importantly for its pinyon pine and range vegetation. The undisturbed condition of the range habitat is needed to provide rangeland managers with reference site. Such a site will be used to compare rangeland treatments with a non-treated areas.

5) Jim Sage

It is proposed that the area be designated as an RNA/ACEC. This designation is consistent with the existing management of the area. Designation of the area will allow for the protection of Jim Sage spring-head. Designation will also provide a source for the study of native grasses and natural wetland processes.

This spring and its associated two point one (2.1) miles of wetland/riparian area is unique to the public lands in this area because of its size and its natural state. The water surfaces from several springs that combine to form a consistent, flowing stream of eight tenths (.8) cubic feet per second (cfs). This supports a two mile long community of diverse, native riparian vegetation before it sinks into the ground. Protection through the ACEC designation combined with physically fencing the spring head will provide for an excellent example of a spring fed riparian community in its natural state.

The proposed area also is home to two types of sagebrush which do not normally occur together, Artemisia nova (black sagebrush) and Artemisia arbuscula (low sagebrush). Black sagebrush is normally restricted to eastern Idaho and occurs on shallow, calcareous soils that are generally derived from limestone. This species is at its extreme northern distribution in Idaho, being much more prevalent in Utah and Nevada (Beetle 1960, as reported in Hironaka and Fosberg 1979). Low sagebrush is usually found on rocky, sterile soils. Further, the two species are generally not found on the same site. However, both of these species of sagebrush are found on the volcanic, rocky soils on Jim Sage.

Additionally, this area was selected to represent undisturbed examples of several range habitat types of the Basin and Range geomorphic province of Southern Idaho. The predominant vegetation throughout much of the areas is a Utah juniper woodland in which various admixtures of singleleaf pinyon pine occurs. The shrub layer in this woodland is dominated by mountain big sagebrush, and the understory by bluebunch wheatgrass. A portion of the area has been burned, creating an excellent fire mosaic pattern in which juniper appears to be re-establishing itself slowly. Together, these situations are needed in an RAN/ACEC network to include the range of natural diversity in Idaho (Caicco and Wellner 1983).

The purpose of including an area of natural vegetation in an RNA/ACEC network is to provide rangeland managers with a reference site for use as a control when making rangeland decisions and to assure future generations unmodified examples of unique and diversified ecotypes. The combination of all the above statements make this area a good choice for RNA/ACEC designation.

Few special management requirements will be made on this area. The largest portion of this area will be kept in as near relict condition as possible. The smaller area around the spring-head will require a fence to relieve heavy livestock use from altering the entire subject area.

The construction of a pole exclosure surrounding the spring-heads and approximately 30 acres will protect the riparian and associated wetland areas from use. The exclosure will also allow for future development of a pond. Future development of the water, downstream from the exclosure, will be permitted.

IV. Alternatives, Including the Proposed Action

A. Alternative 1 - Preferred Alternative.

The preferred alternative is to amend the Cassia RMP to include RNA/ACEC designation for Goose Creek Mesa, City of Rocks, and Jim Sage; ACEC designation for the Oregon-California Trail Junction; and ACEC designation for the Granite Pass to Goose Creek portion of the California Trail.

1) Oregon-California Trail Junction

A corridor 660 feet wide by seven and one-half miles in length, as described in Fig. 2 and 3 Appendix 1, will be designated an ACEC. Management guidance for this area shall come from the Cassia RMP decisions for Management Area 12A (Appendix 2-A).

Lands acquired through Required Actions, 'D', will be managed under this decision as well.

The special management requirements of this ACEC plan are primarily for the purpose of protecting or enhancing the environmental resource; therefore, there is little need for subsequent mitigating measures.

2) Granite Pass to Goose Creek

A corridor 660 feet wide by 2 1/2 miles in length, as described in Fig. 4, Appendix 1, will be designated an ACEC. Management guidance for this area shall come from the Cassia RMP decisions for Management Area 4 (Appendix 2-B).

Required Actions: 'H', will be amended to read: "Activities which alter the natural vegetation will not be permitted. The harvest of woodland products is not permitted."

Special management requirements of this ACEC plan are primarily for the purpose of protecting the resource; therefore, there is little need for subsequent mitigating measures.

3) Goose Creek Mesa

An area 110 acres in size, as described in Fig. 5, Appendix 1, will be designated an RNA/ACEC.

Management of the area will be guided by the Cassia RMP Management Area 3 (Appendix 2-E).

Required Action: 'G', will be amended to read: "Activities which alter the natural vegetation will not be permitted. The harvest of woodland products is not permitted."

Required Action: 'F', will be amended to read: "No harvest of woodland products within the RNA/ACEC."

Special management requirements of this RNA/ACEC plan are primarily for the purpose of protecting the resource; therefore, there is little need for subsequent mitigating measures.

4) City of Rocks

An area 240 acres in size, as described in Fig. 6, Appendix 1, will be designated an RNA/ACEC.

Management of this area shall be guided by the Cassia RMP, Management Area 8 and 8b- City of Rocks (Appendix 2-C).

Required Actions 'B' shall be amended to read: "Limited suppression. Prescribed burning is permitted as a part of vegetation study within the RNA/ACEC boundary."

Required Actions 'C' shall be amended to read: "No grazing of livestock permitted within the boundary of the ACEC."

Required Actions 8b 'B' shall be amended to read: "No recreational facilities shall be constructed within the ACEC boundary."

Required Actions 8b 'E' shall be amended to read: "Closed to the sale and free use disposal of mineral materials within the RNA/ACEC boundary."

Required Action 'H' shall be amended to read: "Harvest of woodland products is not permitted within the boundary of the ACEC."

5) Jim Sage

A 620 acre area, as described in Fig. 7, Appendix 1, will be designated an RNA/ACEC.

A pole exclosure as described in Fig. 7, Appendix 1, will be constructed around the Jim Sage spring-head and surrounding 30 acres of wetlands.