

Oregon Plants, Oregon Places: BLM Botanical Areas

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Welcome! I invite you to explore the botanical treasures on Oregon public lands administered by the US Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Start with an armchair tour as you read about a sampling of special places known as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). BLM botanists and ACEC coordinators have prepared nine written tours for you of their favorite ACEC areas. These serve as just a glimpse of the many botanical trips that you may wish to plan for exploring plants and places in the nine BLM districts in Oregon.

In Oregon, BLM manages over 17 million acres of public lands. Scattered throughout these millions of acres are 200 ACECs. Over 90% of them are designated for their special botanical features, including unique or outstanding plant communities. These 200 areas harbor a multitude of rare, endemic, or relic plants, many left in refugia from earlier times. ACEC sites range from sea level at Yaquina Head Outstanding Natural Area (a special subset of the ACEC designation) to the top of Steens Mountain at 9,670 feet. North, south, east, and west, you will find magnificent areas filled with botanical treasures hidden away on public lands. Some sites are as small as ten acres, but their importance vastly exceeds their size. These small areas may encompass the only known population of a listed plant, or protect one of only a few populations, providing the opportunity for implementation of a recovery plan. (Unlike animals, plants listed under the Endangered Species Act receive protection only on public lands.) Other ACEC areas sprawl over thousands of acres of remote, open landscape, and encompass a variety of plant communities that can provide countless hours of botanical exploration.

Since you may be wondering, "What is an Area of Critical Environmental Concern?" I will define ACECs and their special role in land use planning on the public lands. The ACEC designation comes to us through Section 2202 (c) (3) of Public Law 940579, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976. The Act defines an ACEC as an area "within the public lands where special management attention is required to protect and prevent irreparable damage to important historic, cultural, or scenic values; fish and wildlife resources or other natural systems or processes; or to protect life and safety from natural hazards." Botanical resources fall under "other natural systems or processes." BLM's 1613 Planning Manual describes Natural Process or System as "endangered, sensitive, or threatened plant species; rare, endemic, or relic plants or plant communities which are terrestrial, aquatic or riparian; or rare geological features."

An ACEC designation indicates that BLM recognizes the significant values of the area and intends to manage it to protect and enhance those resource values. Designation and management apply only to public lands. Private lands within or adjacent to ACEC boundaries are not affected by these designations or management prescriptions. In addition to identifying areas to be designated as

ACECs, BLM's Resource Management Plans (RMP) outline management objectives and prescriptions for each ACEC. An activity plan may be prepared for the ACEC when additional management direction, beyond that included in the RMP, becomes necessary to meet management objectives, deal with public uses, or respond to applications for land use authorizations. Development of the activity plan follows the general objectives outlined in the designation.

Management prescriptions may include the following activities: posting boundaries, installing information signs, inventory and monitoring, acquisition of access, and resolution of unauthorized uses. Where appropriate or necessary, additional lands may be acquired from willing parties to meet management objectives. An example of land acquisition is Beatty Creek RNA, where over 600 acres were acquired through land exchange. Although land acquisitions can take years of planning and negotiation, they are an essential tool for protecting intact communities.

The ACEC designation is also an umbrella for two other types of special areas on public lands: Research Natural Areas (RNA) and Outstanding Natural Areas (ONA). "Research Natural Area" means an area that is established and maintained for the primary purpose of research and education. RNAs are a nation-wide interagency program. The Pacific Northwest's first RNA was designated in 1931 by the US Forest Service on part of the Metolus River. Although the BLM began setting aside RNAs later than the Forest Service, by 1987 it had established 27 RNAs, and today has 64 designated RNAs. These areas protect both unique and typical "benchmark" terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. The Oregon Natural Heritage Program maintains a list of plant community cells that represent all plant communities in Oregon, for which RNAs are established to protect.

RNAs serve as outdoor laboratories and as baselines for comparing the effects of human manipulations in similar settings. Access and use are more restricted in an RNA than in an ACEC. If you are planning a group trip to an RNA, please call the appropriate BLM district office before visiting. Group numbers are limited, camping is not allowed, and other restrictions may apply. The most exclusive restrictions are found at The Island RNA in central Oregon. Access is by permit, and only to documented researchers and officially sponsored groups. Public recreational use is limited because of past adverse impacts to the ecological research values.

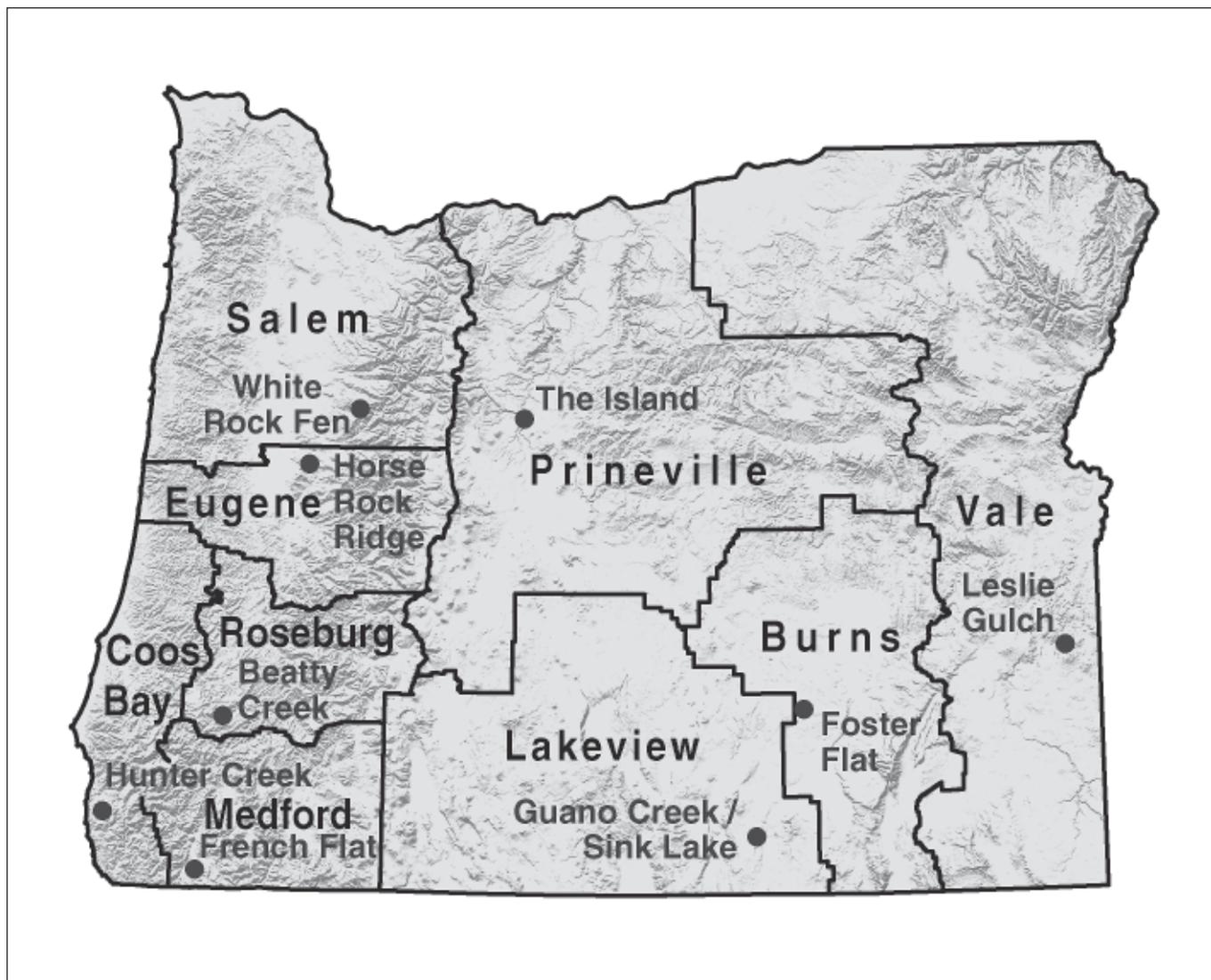
ONAs are areas that are essentially RNAs, but have an established recreational use, which is usually hiking. Upper Table Rock in southwestern Oregon is an example of an ONA that receives extensive use. During the spring flowering season, student groups from elementary to college level create a steady stream on the trail to the top of the rock. These areas are designated as ONAs as long as the recreational use does not adversely impact resource values. Soon an interactive list of the ACECs in Oregon and

Washington will be available on the OR/WA BLM Internet web page (<http://www.or.blm.gov>) where you can view a description of the area and a map of each ACEC.

I hope you enjoy your botanical forays on the public lands. I encourage you to check BLM district web pages for botanical information and ACEC information. You may also call the districts if you need addition help. Dedicated work by BLM staff, the Oregon botanists, and ACEC coordinators has made these ACECs possible. In addition, the support and the commitment of the Oregon BLM managers has been critical to designation of BLM's 200 ACECs. As land use plans continue to be revised and re-written, please take an active role in the planning process. For it is through the planning process that these special areas are designated. If you

enjoy your foray and appreciate this type of land use designation for our botanical resources and unique plant communities, please let BLM managers know. As spring draws near, gather your *Kalmiopsis*, maps, field guides, and calendar to plan a variety of botanical explorations. Have a wonderful time.

[Ed. note: This year Joan was honored with the "Karl Urban Celebrating Wildflowers Award," in recognition of her extraordinary dedication and creativity toward the National Celebrating Wildflowers Program that promotes the understanding and appreciation of the nation's botanical resources. See *Kalmiopsis* 9:26 for Karl's biography and background on this award.]



This map of the nine BLM districts in Oregon shows the location of each of the ACECs featured in the articles that follow.