

WREZ Environment & Lands Work Group
Categorization Criteria

PURPOSE: To categorize the development WREZ “Qualified Resource Area” maps based on environmental, land use and wildlife criteria.

Core premises of the Categorization Criteria:

- (a) Categorization of areas as “avoidance” or “higher sensitivity” does not represent a binding preclusion from future development unless specifically outlined in statute or regulation. These areas are solely used to categorize Qualified Study Areas.
- (b) These categorizations are not intended to replace, supplement, or reverse any project site specific placement or associated permit or other land use mechanism. Future projects, whether placed in renewable energy zones or not, will need to undergo the appropriate environmental and permitting reviews.
- (c) These categorizations will not directly apply, at this time, to the placement of transmission lines or associated infrastructure, and another work process will be undertaken later in the renewable energy zone identification process to determine which of these land type determinations also apply to transmission siting.
- (d) The categorization will represent the Environment & Lands Working Group’s and State Task Group’s current understanding as of this point in time. The Environment & Lands Working Group and State Task Group recognize these designations may change in the future from any new or revised ruling of a court with jurisdiction, or change in statute, regulation, executive order, or record of decision from a federal entity but has determined that the best knowledge of the state of protections that exist at the present time is appropriate for the renewable energy zone effort.
- (e) Environment & Lands Working Group and State Task Group analysis of land types will be limited to application toward utility-scale wind, solar, and geothermal resources primarily, and hydropower and biomass in specific instances.
- (f) For the purpose of this categorization effort if any feature can be listed under more than one category it will default to the highest category for which it meets the criteria.
- (g) Identification of lands was limited to:
 - a. the United States located in the Western Interconnection;
 - b. areas of Baja, Mexico within the Western Interconnection; and
 - c. Alberta and British Columbia, Canada.

CATEGORIZATION CRITERIA

Qualified Resource Areas (QRAs) (most current maps available in January 2009) will be categorized into one of five categories using the following criteria:

1) Exclusion Areas

Designated lands where statute, regulation or other legal instrument (e.g. conservation easement) precludes development

- WREZ ZITA resource exclusions will also be applied through another WG process (urban areas, slope, watersheds, wetlands, military use)

2) Avoidance Areas

Lands criteria:

- Areas that should be avoided based on purpose, policy, or restrictions.

- Examples: [per list of initial avoid areas]
 - BLM Areas of Critical Environmental Concern for wind (IM 2009-043) and solar (ROD not signed) development
 - BLM National Landscape Conservation System Units for solar development except as specifically excepted
 - BLM Visual Resource Management Class 1 and Class II
 - BLM RMP designated lands which may have development constraints, such as:
 - Seasonal restriction areas
 - ROW avoidance areas
 - Special Recreation Management Areas
 - OHV open areas
 - No Surface Occupancy Restriction areas
 - Research Natural Areas
 - Wildlife Management Areas (and Sikes Act tracts)
 - Lands inventoried by BLM and found to have wilderness characteristics
 - BLM lands managed for wilderness characteristics
 - State Parks
 - State non-surface occupancy (NSO) or designated avoidance areas
 - USFS Inventoried Roadless Areas in the 10th Circuit
 - Canadian Forces Bases

Wildlife criteria [avoid based on risk to wildlife]:

- Wildlife corridors and crucial habitat for a species that is endangered, vulnerable or threatened, or otherwise determined by the state should be avoided.
- Known risk to wildlife that is unmitigatable or too expensive to make mitigation efforts feasible, examples:
 - Significant wildlife concentration areas (as defined in data request)
 - Unique and/or rare ecosystems
 - Important biodiversity areas as defined on a state-by-state basis
 - State Wildlife Action Plan “Focus Areas” as determined on a state-by-state basis.

3) Higher Sensitivity

These areas include important values and although development may be possible, such development would pose a higher risk , and would necessitate a corresponding higher level of mitigation.

Lands criteria:

- Sensitive environmental resources
- Purpose and policy restrictions, speaks to higher sensitivity rating as opposed to avoidance rating
 - Examples: areas that contain features that require mitigation at project scale

Wildlife criteria [reflects sensitivity or risk to wildlife]:

- Evidence of significantly impacted wildlife (similar to avoid, but difference is the legal status of species and whether it is direct or indirect impact)
- Known wildlife corridors. Example: Medium-priority Wildlife Linkage Areas identified by Oregon Wildlife Movement Strategy
- Areas with significant regulatory impediments to development [recommended by WGWC]
- Wildlife corridors or crucial habitat identified in State Wildlife Action Plans and other state wildlife management or conservation plans
 - Species of greatest conservation need: Areas where there is a known concentration of these species.
 - Important habitat for T&E species
 - Community conservation areas
- Contiguous, unfragmented habitat
- Ecosystems of concern

4) **Lower Sensitivity Areas**

Lands criteria:

- Lands of low restoration opportunity and high human disturbance
- Lands zoned industrial/commercial
- Lands within 1 mile of existing transmission corridors
- Lands with highly mixed and fragmented ownership

Wildlife criteria:

NOTE: No lands will be categorized as “lower sensitivity” based on wildlife criteria.

5) **Areas with Insufficient Data**

Note that other categories may take precedence over these criteria. For example if an area is mapped under this category as non-natural land cover but also contains occurrences of sensitive species, the sensitive species presence will take precedence in determining the categorization (e.g., area of higher sensitivity).

Lands Criteria:

- Lands for which there is a lack of information about the nature of the risk to the land. This would include areas where current land use is unknown.

Wildlife Criteria:

- Lands for which there is a lack of information about the nature of the risk to wildlife
 - Areas mapped as non-native land cover and low modeled ecological integrity
- Likely to contain sensitive species (through modeling effort)
 - Areas modeled to have probable distributions of sensitive species categories.
 - Areas of mapped native ecosystem types (natural and semi-natural land cover) and moderate to high modeled ecological integrity