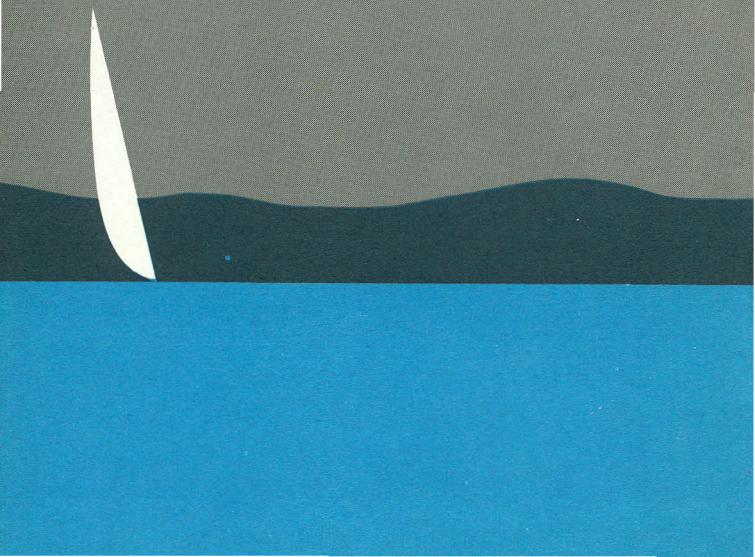


curecanti

national recreation area • colorado



The Curecanti Unit—one of four principal authorized elements of the Colorado River Storage Project—is comprised of three reservoirs in the deep canyons of the Gunnison River in western Colorado. It was named for the Ute Indian Chief, Curicata, who with his twin brother, Kanneatche, roamed and hunted over the Colorado territory.

The reservoirs formed by Blue Mesa and Morrow Point Dams provide recreational benefits of national significance. Construction on Crystal Dam has not yet begun. When Congress authorized the Colorado River Storage Project in 1956, it also directed the Secretary of the Interior to investigate, plan, construct, operate, and maintain recreational facilities on the reservoirs thus created.

The Bureau of Reclamation is constructing and will administer the dams and powerplants. The National Park Service administers the recreation area, supervising activities, plans, and development within the area. Both are agencies of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Within this province is a variety of scenery sufficient to satisfy nearly every vacationer's taste—forested country in the Gunnison and San Isabel National Forests immediately to the north and east, in the Sawatch Range to the northeast, and in the rugged San Juan Mountains to the south and southwest. The precipitous gorge through which the Gunnison River flows in Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Monument, adjacent to the Curecanti Unit on the west, is one of the dramatic highlights of the region.

Blue Mesa Dam and Lake

Blue Mesa Dam is made up of three sections: the central core, impervious to water; the next layer, almost impervious; and the outside layer, of larger rock and riprap on the upstream face, withstands wave action. It was built by compacting thin layers to a high density in an inverted wedge-shape only 30 feet wide at its crest but 1,600 feet wide at its base.

Although it is only 342 feet high, Blue Mesa Dam backs up the largest body of water in Colorado—20-mile-long Blue Mesa Lake, containing more than 940,000 acre-feet of water. The lake offers much water-oriented recreation: boating, exploring, fishing, and camping, all within Colorado's superlative mesa country. Development, however, is in an early stage.

Morrow Point Dam and Lake

Morrow Point Dam was completed in 1967. Morrow Point Lake, 11½ miles long, now occupies a section of the world-famous Black Canyon. Work on an access for boaters, campers, and fishermen is under way. However, at present, only hardy hikers are able to visit the area.

Prehistory and History

The discovery of artifacts, burials, and habitations indicates that prehistoric Indians lived in the area that now includes Curecanti National Recreation Area.

When Spanish explorers arrived in 1776, they found Ute Indians living in the area. The Utes were still here when miners and ranchers appeared. The ranchers stayed; but the miners and Indians, for the most part, moved on. The Gunnison River Valley was an approach to the Great Basin occasionally used by 18th-century Spanish explorers based in New Mexico; it was a popular stream with the American fur trappers of the early 19th century; and it was part of one of several proposed transcontinental railroad routes explored in the 1850's by the Army's Pacific Railroad Surveys. The river is named for Capt. John W. Gunnison, whose 40th-parallel survey of 1853 was terminated by an Indian attack in Utah that took his life.

The Rio Grande Railroad came into Gunnison, Colo., in 1881. In 1882, the Denver, Rio Grande and Western completed its roadbed to Cimarron, a route which took it past the present site of Blue Mesa Dam and 15 miles down the Black Canyon. The old railroad bed can be seen from an observation point below the dam, but most of it is now under water.

THE NATURAL SCENE

Geology

Curecanti's geology is a story of volcanic outpourings and the powerful forces and tremendous heat of metamorphism. The subsequent bandsaw action of rushing streams incised the Gunnison deep into the landscape.

Gentle slopes, benches, and occasional steep cliff faces characterize most of the landscape seen from the surface of Blue Mesa Lake. From the axis of the lake are views up canyons and valleys to forest-covered mountain slopes, dramatically eroded cliff faces, and snowclad peaks.

The shores of the lake display evidence of what must have been one of the most dramatic geological events in this part of the country. Eroded into spires, pillars, and cones is a soft volcanic material called breccia. Deposits of this material originated from the explosive destruction of previously formed volcanic cones.

Later volcanic activity capped the breccia with layers of superheated volcanic ash which welded it into a rock that is highly resistant to erosion. These rocks form the vertical cliffs just below the mesa tops.

The steep walls of the upper Black Canyon of the Gunnison, although less spectacular than those within that National Monument, are intricately dissected by the forces of weathering and erosion. Their appearance changes with the viewer's position and with the varying light on the sculptured surfaces.

Plants

The slopes and flats are covered by low-growing vegetation, mostly sagebrush, grass, and some shrub live oak. Trees are restricted almost entirely to cottonwoods along stream channels and to conifers, such as blue spruce and Douglas-fir, on some sheltered northern slopes. The rocky outcrops so common in the area have many colorful lichens growing on them.

Animals

The lands along the lake and river in the Blue Mesa area are extremely important wintering grounds for deer and elk. Drivers are cautioned to watch for these animals, especially on U.S. 50. Small mammals, such as chipmunks, golden-mantled ground squirrels, marmots, prairie dogs, and beaver, are found in various places around Blue Mesa Lake. Pocket gophers, wood rats, and deer mice are common.

The Gunnison River has long been recognized as a nationally significant trout stream; Blue Mesa Lake has been stocked with rainbow trout, kokanee salmon, and a few lake trout, Morrow Point Lake, with kokanee salmon and lake trout.

More than 170 species of birds have been recorded. This number will undoubtedly increase when all the birds, especially those requiring a water habitat, have been identified.

FOR SAFETY

In boating:

When launching or loading your boat, only the driver should remain in the car.

Be alert to changes in weather and wind. Sudden strong winds are common and can arise without warning. Be ready to head for shore when these changes occur.

Don't overcrowd. An overloaded boat is uncomfortable and unsafe. Conform to the manufacturer's recommended capacity rating.

Carry Coast Guard-approved life preservers for each person on board. Never hesitate to have all persons wear life preservers whenever circumstances cause the slightest doubt of safety.

Be sure that all aboard know what to do in an emergency and where to find safety equipment.

You are responsible for damage caused by your wake. When passing boats, swimmers, or shore facilities, keep your distance.

Learn the "Rules of the Road"—who has the right-of-way and the meaning of buoys.

Bring all refuse to launching ramps where receptacles are available.

Report any accident to the nearest ranger or ranger station.

All boat operators must make sure that their equipment meets standards set forth by Colorado and the National Park Service.

In water skiing:

The law requires that there must be a second person in the boat to act as observer. This will permit watching both the skier and the waters ahead.

Do not tow a skier in channels or within 500 feet of harbors, swimming beaches, and mooring areas, or within 100 feet of any person swimming or diving.

Make sure that the skier is wearing a proper lifesaving device. If he tumbles, the boat should approach him from the left side. An approved life-preserver jacket must be in the boat for each water skier.

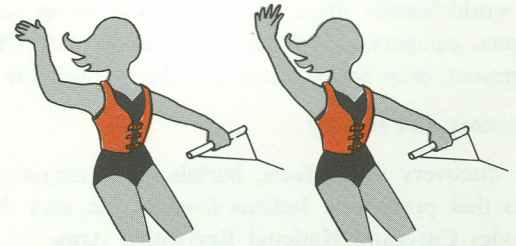
In taking the skier on board, be careful not to swamp your boat. In smaller craft, it is normally safer to take a person aboard at the stern—motor turned off.

ADMINISTRATION

Curecanti National Recreation Area is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, through agreement with the Bureau of Reclamation.

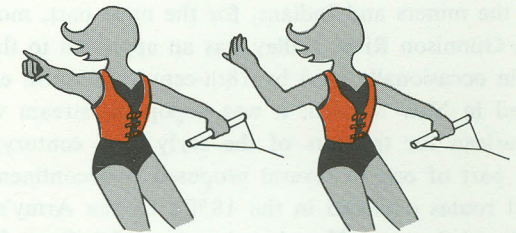
A superintendent, whose address is 334 South 10th St., Montrose, CO 81401, is in charge.

These water skiing signals are recommended by the American Water Ski Association:



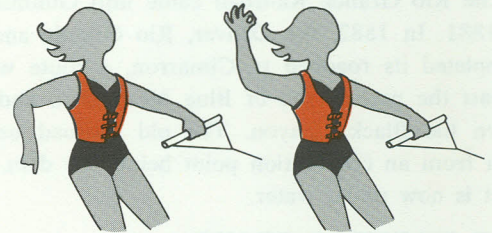
TURN

STOP



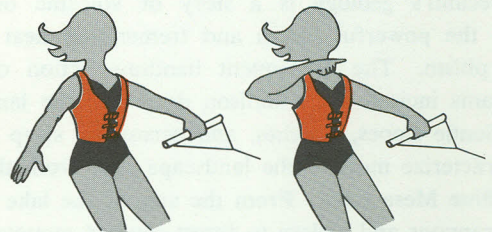
WHIP OFF

FASTER



BACK TO DOCK

SPEED O.K.








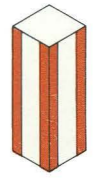
SLOWER

CUT MOTOR








uniform state waterway marking system

buoys

		
ALL-BLACK BUOY, indicates boat should pass between it and its companion all-red buoy.	ALL-RED BUOY, indicates boat should pass between it and its all-black buoy.	BLACK-TOPPED WHITE BUOY, indicates boat should pass to north or east (cardinal system).
		
RED-TOPPED WHITE BUOY, indicates boat should pass to south or west (cardinal system).	ANCHOR BUOY	RED-STRIPED WHITE BUOY, indicates boat should not pass between buoy and nearest shore (cardinal system).

signs

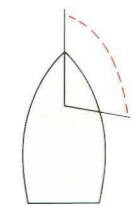
		
DIVER'S FLAG, indicates presence of a diver.	SQUARE OR RECTANGLE gives information, names, distances, permitted activities, etc.	
		
DIAMOND SHAPE warns of DANGER	DIAMOND SHAPE with cross means BOATS KEEP OUT	CIRCLE marks CONTROL AREA "as indicated"

whistle signals

ONE LONG BLAST: Warning signal (coming out of slip).
 ONE SHORT BLAST: (meeting)—Pass on my port side.
 (crossing)—(by vessel to starboard) I intend to hold my course and speed (overtaking)—I wish to pass on your starboard side.
 TWO SHORT BLASTS: (meeting)—Pass on my starboard side.
 (overtaking)—I wish to pass on your port side.
 THREE SHORT BLASTS: Engines in reverse.
 FOUR OR MORE BLASTS: Danger signal.
 When answering a signal whistle, use same signal to indicate approval. Use danger signal if you feel it is unsafe.

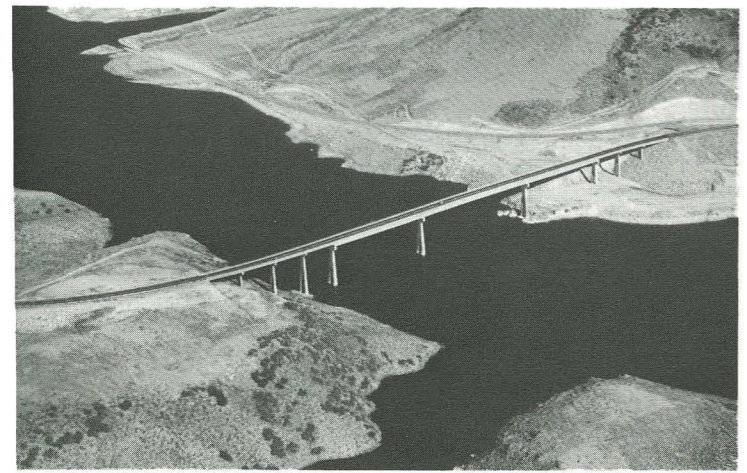
port

Yield right-of-way to boats in your DANGER ZONE!



starboard

DANGER ZONE (Dead ahead to 2 points abaft your starboard beam)



ABOUT YOUR VISIT

U.S. 50, a major east-west transcontinental route, parallels the length of Blue Mesa Lake.

Airlines and buslines serve Gunnison and Montrose, Colo. You will find accommodations and services in Gunnison, Montrose, and other nearby towns.

The normal visitor season is from mid-May to mid-October.

The area has long, cold winters and short, beautiful summers, often punctuated by violent thunderstorms. Late spring and early summer are dry. Moisture, mostly from snow, comes in winter and early spring.

In winter, temperatures are well below zero, at times dipping to -40° F. The temperature rarely exceeds 85° F. in summer, and nights are cool.

The National Park Service has constructed an access road, parking facilities, a picnic area, and a launching ramp at Iola. At Elk Creek, an access road, parking facilities, visitor center, campground, and launching ramp have been provided.

Regulations

We urge you to observe the following:

Camping, in designated areas only, is limited to 14 days.

Boat launching. There are three developed launching ramps on Blue Mesa Lake. The Elk Creek ramp is southeast of the Elk Creek camping area; the Iola ramp is on the southeast end of the lake just off Colo. 149; the Lake Fork ramp is near Blue Mesa Dam, just north of U.S. 50.

Fishing in Blue Mesa Lake is governed by Colorado regulations, and a Colorado license is required. Before fishing, please check current regulations.

Hunting and trapping are permitted at Curecanti in accordance with Federal, State, and local laws except in developed and/or concentrated public-use areas designated by the superintendent. Check for location of these areas.

Swimming. If you plan to swim, be well acquainted with the area. Blue Mesa Lake has many rock ledges not visible from the surface that make diving into unexplored waters hazardous. Do not swim from unanchored boats, boat docks, or launching ramps!

Firearms. Carrying or using loaded firearms or explosives in developed and/or concentrated public-use areas is not allowed.

Pets must be kept under physical control when in developed and/or concentrated public-use areas.

Vehicles are allowed on designated roads only.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service