



SUMMARY

Final Resource Protection Study / Environmental Impact Statement

August 2008

In 1999, Congress requested the National Park Service to conduct a study and make recommendations that would better conserve the natural, cultural, recreational, and scenic resources within and surrounding Curecanti National Recreation Area (NRA).

A summary of the results of the study and its recommendations are presented herein. For additional details and analysis, the complete document, known as the *Final Resource Protection Study/Environmental Impact Statement* (RPS/EIS), is available at locations described on the last page of this brochure.

No sooner than thirty days following distribution of the Final RPS/EIS, a Record of Decision will be released, which will document the National Park Service's selected alternative.

A *Report to Congress* that presents the study's findings and recommendations, jointly prepared by the National Park Service and the Bureau of Reclamation (the cooperating agency on the EIS), will then be forwarded to Congress through the Department of the Interior.

We appreciate the participation, comments, and support of the numerous agencies, organizations, NRA visitors, landowners, members of the general public, and other stakeholders throughout the study. This has been a rare opportunity to be part of conserving the valuable resources in the Curecanti area for future generations.

Superintendent
Curecanti National Recreation Area

BACKGROUND OF CURECANTI

Curecanti National Recreation Area (NRA) is comprised of 41,790 acres of federal lands and waters, stretching approximately 40 miles along the Gunnison river basin in Gunnison and Montrose Counties, Colorado. It offers a variety of recreational opportunities in a spectacular geological setting.



The roots of Curecanti began in 1956 when Congress authorized the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to construct the Wayne N. Aspinall Storage Unit of the Colorado River Storage Project (CRSP), which consists of three dams, their reservoirs, and related facilities. Reclamation acquired most of the needed lands in the 1960s. These lands were the minimum required for the primary purposes of the project, with little or no consideration given to potential opportunities for land-based recreation that might be associated with an emerging NRA.

Today, pursuant to a 1965 Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), and other applicable laws and regulations, Reclamation manages two ongoing projects in the NRA and their dams, reservoirs, power plants, access roads, and related facilities; Western Area Power Administration (Western) manages electrical

transmission lines and related facilities; and the National Park Service (NPS) manages the natural and cultural resources, opportunities for public recreation and resource understanding, and associated facilities. It should be noted, however, that the NRA has never been legislatively established as a unit of the national park system, and has no legislated boundary.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study is being conducted in response to a request by Congress (Public Law 106-76) to:

- (1) assess the natural, cultural, recreational, and scenic resource value and character of the land within and surrounding Curecanti NRA (including open vistas, wildlife habitat, and other public benefits);
- (2) identify practicable alternatives that protect the resource value and character of the land within and surrounding the Curecanti NRA;
- (3) recommend a variety of economically feasible and viable tools to achieve the purposes described in paragraphs (1) and (2); and
- (4) estimate the costs of implementing the approaches recommended by the study.

NPS, with Reclamation as a cooperating agency, has conducted the study to identify methods and tools that could be used to ensure the long-term conservation of surrounding natural, cultural, recreational, and scenic resources; continued and expanded visitor use, enjoyment, and understanding; and continued and/or expanded recreational opportunities. The study also evaluated whether or not to recommend to Congress that the NRA be formally established with a legislated boundary, and what agency or agencies should be responsible for managing the NRA.

PRIMARY EMPHASIS OF THE STUDY

This study identified ways in which the National Park Service could work in partnership with agencies and local governments, and other entities and landowners, to more effectively conserve the natural, cultural, recreational, and scenic resources and character of the land within and surrounding Curecanti NRA. It evaluated whether or not the NPS should seek formal establishment of Curecanti as a congressionally legislated NRA, for permanence of resource conservation and public recreation.

The study excluded any considerations pertaining to water rights or operations of Reclamation projects; any recommendation that would infringe on the rights of landowners; and any recommendation that would use condemnation or other tools not in partnership and cooperation with private landowners.

For both alternatives in the Resource Protection Study, the Bureau of Reclamation and Western Area Power Administration would continue their administrative jurisdiction and responsibilities within and adjacent to the national recreation area. These include construction, operation, maintenance, replacements, and additions; and the agencies and their assigns would continue to have unrestricted access to their lands and land interests, water and water interests, and facilities, consistent with Reclamation law and other applicable laws and

regulations. Formal establishment of the area as an NRA under Alternative 2 would not amend or supplement existing Reclamation law applicable to their projects. Reclamation, Western, and NPS would continue to consult with each other, as necessary and appropriate. Thus, there would be no adverse impacts to Reclamation and Western responsibilities under either alternative.

PUBLIC AND AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

In developing the Proposed Action, and to receive input from all interested parties, the National Park Service has conducted more than 60 meetings throughout the project with local, state, and federal elected officials and/or their staffs; neighboring state and federal land management agencies; American Indian tribes; adjacent private landowners; other stakeholders; and the general public. This process began in 2000 by gathering information through public and agency scoping meetings, included three newsletters and use of the NRA and NPS planning websites, and resulted in the release of the *Draft Resource Protection Study/Environmental Impact Statement* in July 2007 for review and comment. A summary of those comments appears on the back page of this brochure.



In the Proposed Action, the National Park Service continues to manage the natural, cultural, and recreational resources; and the Bureau of Reclamation continues to manage their projects at Curecanti National Recreation Area.

THE ALTERNATIVES

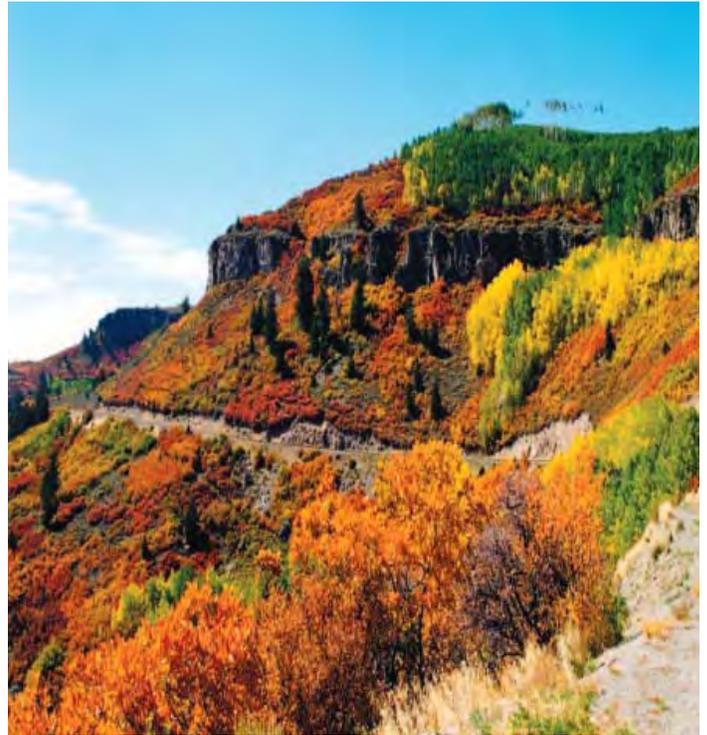
Numerous alternatives for management were considered during the course of the study. However, only two alternatives were deemed necessary and appropriate for detailed assessment. Other alternatives that were considered, and the reasons for not analyzing them in detail, are described in the *Final Resource Protection Study/ Environmental Impact Statement*.

The alternatives include Alternative 1: No Action (Continuation of Existing Conditions); and Alternative 2: Proposed Action. The alternatives are shown on the two alternative maps, and their primary differences are summarized in the table in this brochure. The impacts of the alternatives are described in detail in the Final RPS/EIS.

Under both alternatives, operational responsibilities of both Reclamation and NPS would remain essentially unchanged from how the NRA is now being managed. However, it is anticipated that under Alternative 2 the 1965 Memorandum of Agreement between Reclamation and NPS would need to be revised to reflect new legislative requirements.

Alternative 1 (No Action): Under the No Action alternative, the NRA would consist of essentially the same area without a legislated boundary. Many of the tools that could be applied under the Proposed Action towards long-term conservation of important resources on lands surrounding the NRA would not be authorized under No Action. This would result in a greater expectation that some important resources, especially scenic resources, would deteriorate over the long term.

Alternative 2 (Proposed Action): This alternative recommends that the NRA be legislatively established by Congress. The legislation would designate the National Park Service to be responsible for managing the natural, cultural, and recreational resources, visitor use and education, and associated facilities. A net total of approximately 10,040 acres of mutually agreed-upon adjacent federal and state agency lands would be added to the NRA within a legislated boundary; and some acres would be transferred from the NRA to the U.S. Forest Service. Potential future transfers to the Bureau of Land Management are also recommended. The purpose of additions to and transfers from the NRA



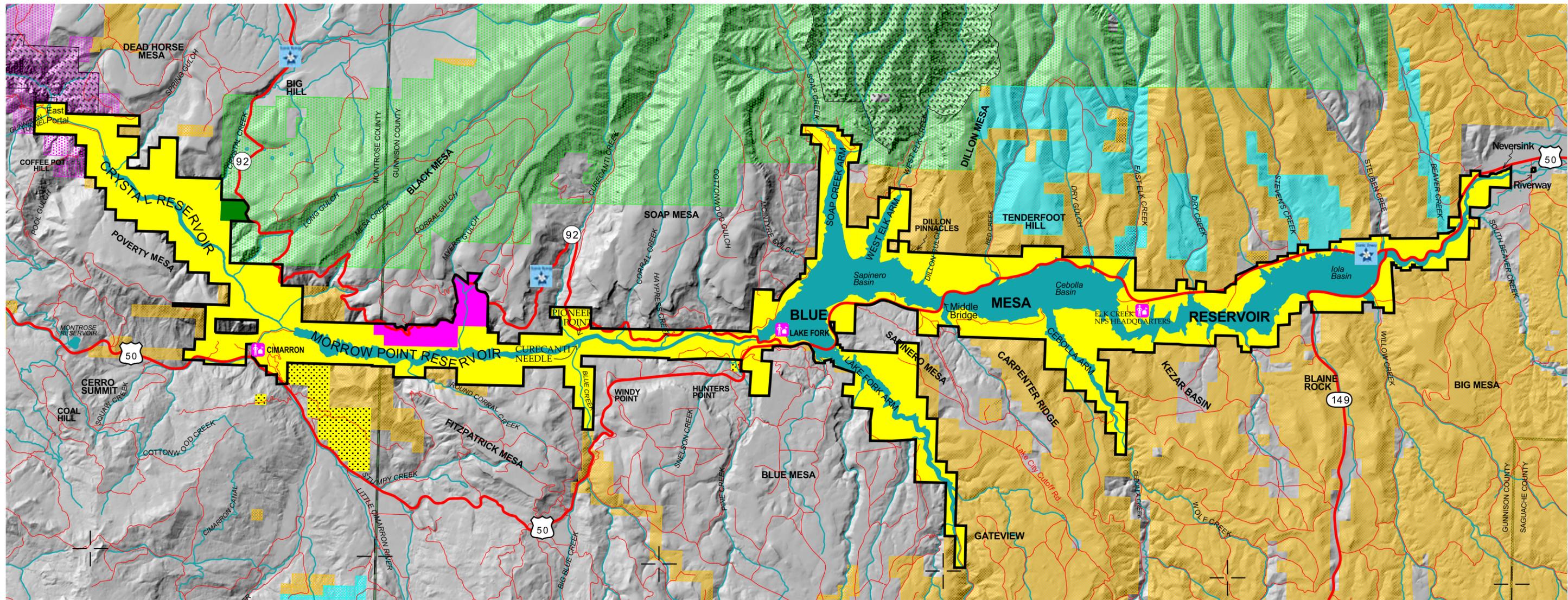
Autumn colors abound along Colorado Highway 92 above Morrow Point Reservoir

are for improved management efficiencies and expanded recreational opportunities within the NRA.

The Proposed Action also recommends that Congress establish a Conservation Opportunity Area (COA) outside of the legislated boundary. The COA would consist of approximately 24,300 acres of private land where NPS would be authorized to implement and assist in implementing a variety of tools with cooperating landowners that would promote the long-term conservation of important resources. These tools would include, but not be limited to, acquiring interests in land from willing landowners, including conservation easements and fee simple ownership. Much of the COA would remain in private ownership; however, increased opportunities for working in partnership with landowners would create opportunities for resource conservation. Implementation would occur over many years, and would be dependent upon the willingness of neighboring landowners. The study recognizes that the availability of federal funds for acquiring interests in land may be limited. However, some of the goals and objectives of Alternative 2 would still be achievable through the application of other tools that could be used to provide incentives to willing landowners for conserving resources.

THE PRIMARY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1: No Action (Continuation of Existing Conditions)	Alternative 2: The Proposed Action
PERTAINING TO RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES:	
Land within Curecanti National Recreation Area (NRA) would continue to be the minimum acquired by the Bureau of Reclamation for the Curecanti Unit, CRSP and Uncompahgre Project, and it would be less likely that access easements or additional land would be acquired, thus limiting recreational opportunities to the current land base. Hunting, fishing, and other existing recreational activities would continue, consistent with NPS policies and regulations.	Land within Curecanti National Recreation Area (NRA) would be expanded, as 10,040 acres of other agency lands would be added to NRA via transfers and exchanges, and there would be potential to acquire access easements and/or additional land from willing landowners, thus providing an expanded land base for recreational opportunities. Hunting, fishing, and other existing recreational activities would continue; however, there would be additional potential for expanded recreational activities in some areas, consistent with NPS policies and regulations.
PERTAINING TO CONSERVATION OF NATURAL, CULTURAL, AND SCENIC RESOURCES:	
The natural rural character of the land, intrinsic scenic values, and other related resource values, are less likely to be conserved, as the National Park Service (NPS) would have limited resources to work in partnership with neighbors to acquire land interests or provide technical assistance on private land surrounding the NRA.	Efforts to conserve the natural rural character of the land, intrinsic scenic values, and other resource values, would be enhanced through the cooperation of local governments and adjacent landowners, and the availability of tools, including acquisition of interests in land from willing landowners, that could be utilized within the proposed Conservation Opportunity Area (COA).
Conservation benefits, including acquisition of conservation easements and other conservation projects, are less likely to be achieved, and NPS would lack authority to expend funds on private lands surrounding the NRA.	There would be more opportunity to meet conservation goals, even if funding was not immediately available for federal acquisition of interests in land, as NPS would be authorized to use an expanded assortment of other cooperative conservation tools within the COA.
PERTAINING TO NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE:	
National significance of the NRA would not be assured. Continued development of adjacent private property would likely change the scenic and rural character of the land and related resources, adversely affecting the visitor experience.	National significance of the NRA would be more assured through cooperative conservation efforts within the COA.
PERTAINING TO MANAGEMENT EFFICIENCIES AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS:	
Confusion of jurisdictional responsibilities would continue; management efficiencies would less likely be achieved; NPS would be cautious about investing its energy and resources in the NRA, since NPS serves the area per agreement with a different agency, and its long-term presence is not assured; and the potential loss of a NPS presence could adversely affect tourism, and consequentially, local economies.	Jurisdictional responsibilities would be clarified, providing enhanced management efficiencies for all agencies involved; NPS would be more inclined to invest energy and resources in the NRA; a permanent NPS presence would be assured; and the needs of local governments related to the economic benefits of tourism in the Curecanti area would more likely be met.
PERTAINING TO ADVERSE AND BENEFICIAL IMPACTS ON THE ENVIRONMENT:	
Due to the lack of conservation tools available to NPS for working cooperatively with landowners, more adverse impacts to the natural, cultural, recreational, and scenic resources would be expected on lands within and surrounding the NRA.	Due to the availability of additional conservation tools within the COA, fewer adverse impacts and more benefits to the natural, cultural, recreational, and scenic resources would be expected, making this the environmentally preferred alternative.
PERTAINING TO IMPLEMENTATION COSTS:	
With a determination that the administrative boundary is unlikely to change, one-time costs include completion of surveys, boundary posting and fencing. That cost is expected to be \$500,000. There would be no additional recurring annual costs.	One-time costs include acquiring interests in land, including conservation easements and fee simple ownership from willing landowners; associated plans and administrative costs related to lands and partnership programs; surveys, boundary posting and fencing. Due to various factors (explained in the Final RPS/EIS), a range of costs is estimated to be from \$3,690,000 to \$14,973,000. Recurring costs for two staff positions and related expenditures are estimated to be \$160,000 per year.



ALTERNATIVE 1: NO ACTION (CONTINUATION OF EXISTING CONDITIONS)

This alternative would include approximately 41,790 acres within the existing National Recreation Area (NRA) boundary. The National Park Service (NPS) would continue to manage the natural, cultural, and recreational resources of the NRA, and associated facilities, pursuant to Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) law, NPS law, the 1965 Memorandum of Agreement between NPS and Reclamation (1965 MOA), and other applicable laws and regulations. Reclamation would continue to manage its project lands and land interests, water and water interests, and facilities, pursuant to Reclamation law, the 1965 MOA, and other applicable laws and regulations. There would be no Conservation Opportunity Area; and no lands would be transferred between NPS and other federal or state agencies. Compared to Alternative 2, NPS would be limited in its ability to work in partnership with adjacent private landowners in the service of resource conservation.

-  Lands and Waters Included Within Curecanti National Recreation Area (41,790 acres)
-  Existing Wilderness Area
-  Highway
-  Road
-  Stream
-  West Elk Loop Scenic and Historic Byway
-  NPS Visitor Center

EXISTING LAND STATUS

Lands Within the National Recreation Area

-  Bureau of Reclamation
-  U.S. Forest Service (co-managed by NPS and USFS)
-  National Park Service

Lands Surrounding the National Recreation Area

-  Bureau of Land Management
-  Bureau of Reclamation (management by Reclamation or other agency under agreement)
-  Colorado Division of Wildlife
-  National Park Service (Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP)
-  U.S. Forest Service
-  Private

ALTERNATIVE 1: NO ACTION (CONTINUATION OF EXISTING CONDITIONS)

**RESOURCE PROTECTION STUDY
CURECANTI NATIONAL RECREATION AREA**

Gunnison and Montrose Counties, Colorado

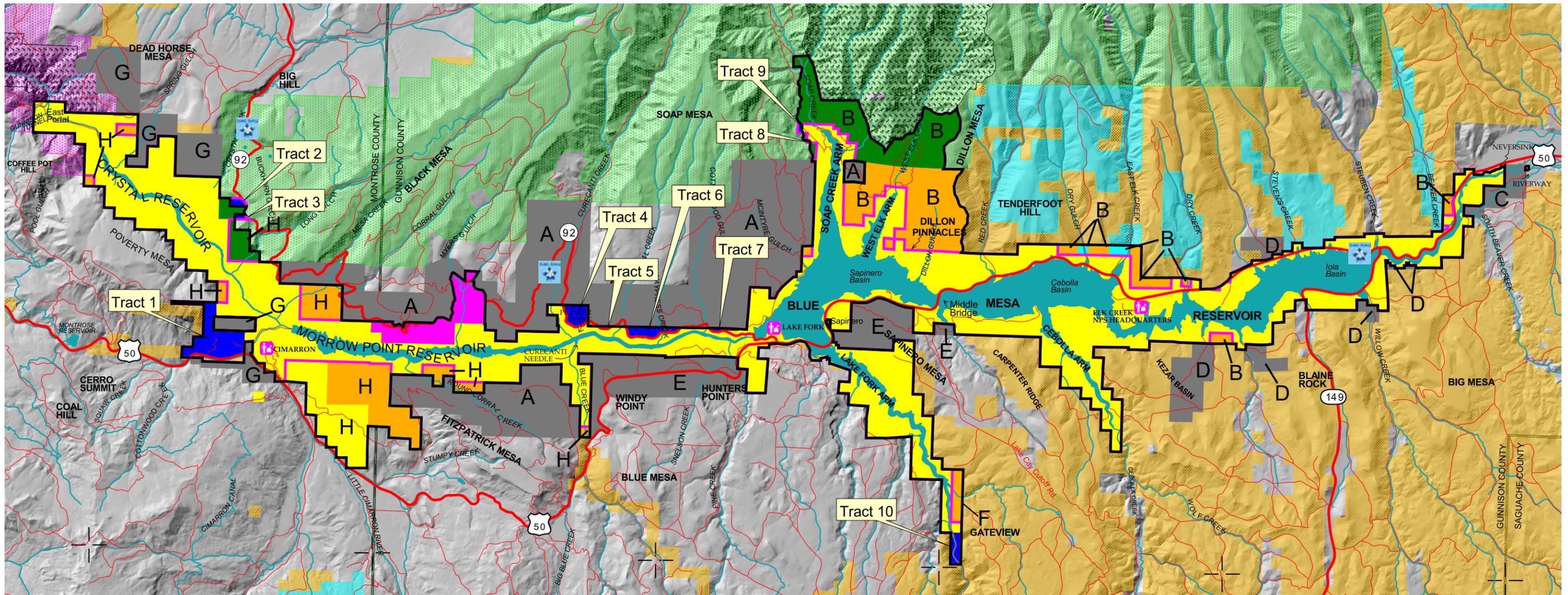
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



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NPS Disclaimer information: Property boundaries shown on this map are intended for study purposes only, and are not intended to be definitive regarding land ownership. County and agency land records will be used to verify ownership and definitively locate property lines and boundaries.

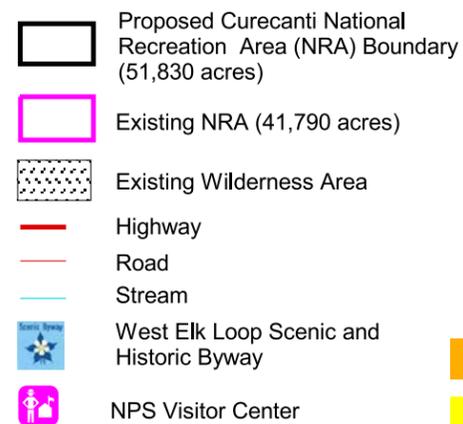




ALTERNATIVE 2: PROPOSED ACTION

This alternative would include 51,830 acres' inside a legislated National Recreation Area (NRA) boundary, and 24,300 acres outside the boundary in a Conservation Opportunity Area (COA)². The proposed boundary would include the lands and waters within the existing NRA, with the immediate addition of 10,120 acres of mutually agreed-upon federal and state agency lands, less 80 acres of lands to be immediately deleted from the NRA.³ The 34,420 acres of COA and immediate additions are defined in this study as the "Proposed Lands." The National Park Service (NPS) would manage the natural, cultural and recreational resources of the NRA, and associated facilities, pursuant to Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) law, NPS law, including new legislation establishing the NRA, a revised Memorandum of Agreement between NPS and Reclamation (revised MOA), and other applicable laws and regulations. Reclamation would manage its project lands and land interests, water and water interests, and facilities, pursuant to Reclamation law, the revised MOA, and other applicable laws and regulations. The ability of NPS to work in partnership with adjacent private land owners in the service of resource conservation would be greatly enhanced, compared to Alternative 1.

1. All acreages are approximate.
2. COA Defined: An area of private land surrounding the NRA where NPS would be authorized by Congress to use various tools to partner with neighbors to conserve resources. One of the many tools would be acquisition of interests in land, including fee simple, conservation easements, and access rights-of-way from willing sellers. NPS would be authorized to amend the NRA boundary to include properties that lie within the COA, if and when they are acquired.
3. Land adjustments with other agencies: Immediately upon passage of legislation, the following Proposed Lands would be added to the NRA --- 5,840 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land; 2,640 acres of U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land; 1,500 acres of Reclamation land; and 140 acres of Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) land that would be managed by CDOW until such time that NPS can acquire it via exchange for federal lands. Ten "Tracts" have been identified for potential deletion from the NRA (refer to Alternatives Chapter for details). The immediate net addition to the NRA would be 10,040 acres.



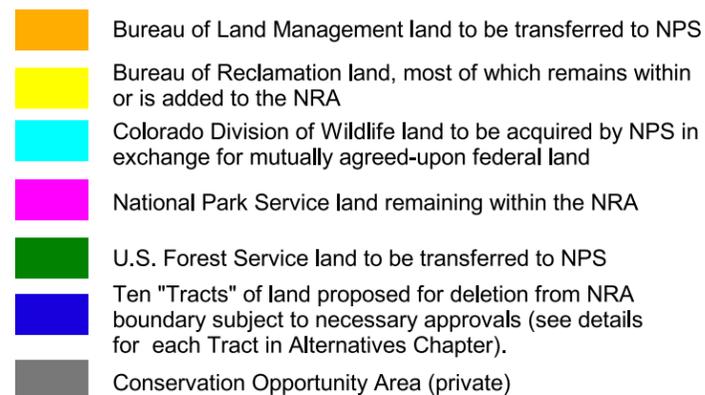
LAND EXTERNAL TO PROPOSAL



"PROPOSED LANDS" DESCRIBED BY LAND UNIT

- A. Highway 92 COA (private lands)
- B. Blue Mesa Reservoir (agency lands)
- C. Gunnison River COA (private lands)
- D. Iola Basin COA (private lands)
- E. Sapinero/Blue Mesa COA (private lands)
- F. Gateview (agency lands)
- G. West-End COA (private lands)
- H. West-End (agency lands)

PROPOSED LAND STATUS



ALTERNATIVE 2: PROPOSED ACTION

RESOURCE PROTECTION STUDY CURECANTI NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

Gunnison and Montrose Counties, Colorado

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



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COMMENTS ON DRAFT RPS/EIS

The *Draft Resource Protection Study/Environmental Impact Statement* was released in July 2007. It was posted to the NPS planning website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/cure>, and its availability was advertised in local newspapers, and in letters mailed to over 700 government entities, organizations, landowners, and other individuals. The 90-day public review period ran from July 20 to October 22. A total of 35 letters, faxes, and Internet comments were received. Of these, 63% supported Alternative 2 (Proposed Action); 26% were neutral, not specifying which alternative was favored; and 11% supported Alternative 1 (No Action). A brief summary of the comments on the Draft RPS/EIS appears below.

Bureau of Land Management, Colorado Division of Wildlife, and U.S. Forest Service are neighboring land management agencies. They have been briefed on numerous occasions throughout the study, have provided input into development of the Proposed Action, have provided written comments on the Draft RPS/EIS, and are all in support of Alternative 2, the Proposed Action.

Gunnison and Montrose County Commissioners and the City of Gunnison Council Members have expressed their support of the Proposed Action. The Gunnison County Planner is considering incorporating RPS data and recommendations into the component of the county's comprehensive master plan that will deal with the portion of the county that includes the Curecanti area.

In general, landowners with whom the study team has met were interested in the concepts being proposed by the study. Some landowners expressed the sentiment that they appreciated the goals of the RPS, as many of those goals aligned with their own desires of being good caretakers of the land. However, some landowners would

not want to open their property for public access (for example, to hikers), and many plan to remain on their property. Several landowners expressed the view that although they would be opposed to any plan that would infringe on private property rights, they would consider working cooperatively with the National Park Service in order to meet mutually agreed-upon conservation goals.

A more comprehensive listing of the comments and NPS responses to them are located in Chapter 5: Consultation and Coordination of the Final RPS/EIS. Also included in Chapter 5 are all letters from agencies and organizations in their entirety.

WHERE TO SEE FULL FINAL RPS/EIS

The full version of the *Final Resource Protection Study/Environmental Impact Statement* is available for inspection on line at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/cure>; at Curecanti's Elk Creek Visitor Center and Marina, 102 Elk Creek, Gunnison, CO 81230; Curecanti's Lake Fork Marina in Sapinero; Montrose Public Lands Center, 2505 South Townsend Avenue, Montrose, CO 81401; and at the following locations: Colorado State University Library, Fort Collins; Crawford Public Library; Delta Public Library; Gunnison County Library in Crested Butte and Gunnison; Hotchkiss Public Library; Leslie J. Savage Library, Western State College, Gunnison; Mesa County Library, Grand Junction; Montrose Regional Library, Montrose; National Park Service, 12795 West Alameda Parkway, Lakewood; and Paonia Public Library.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Please contact Superintendent, Curecanti NRA, 102 Elk Creek, Gunnison, CO 81230; Tel: (970) 641-2337.

We're on the web at www.nps.gov/cure

