



Foundation Document Overview

Curecanti National Recreation Area

Colorado



Contact Information

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Purpose



Curecanti National Recreation Area protects an abundance of natural, historic, and archeological features in a western landscape encompassing canyons, pinnacles, cliffs, rivers, reservoirs, and mesas, while offering opportunities for recreation, public benefit, and personal reflection.



Significance

Significance statements express why Curecanti National Recreation Area resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Curecanti provides an array of recreational opportunities based on three high-altitude reservoirs, tied together by the Gunnison River, and set in the Rocky Mountains featuring a Kokanee salmon and lake trout fishery that draws recreationists from around the country.
- Blue Mesa Reservoir, cradled by mesas and iconic pinnacles within a high desert landscape, is the largest body of water in Colorado. Morrow Point and Crystal are two remote, fjord-like reservoirs located in the upper Black Canyon of the Gunnison that provide premier backcountry flat-water recreational opportunities.
- Globally and regionally imperiled cottonwood-riparian woodlands found within Curecanti provide habitats for sensitive species such as great blue herons and river otters.
- Eroded landscapes of Curecanti continue to reveal fossil-rich exposures of Late Jurassic and Early Cretaceous paleoenvironments (160–100 million years ago) including the remains of at least six dinosaur genera found in the renowned Morrison Formation.
- The association and density of archeological sites in Curecanti National Recreation Area provide physical evidence of 10,000 years of human adaptation to changing environments in the Gunnison River Basin.
- The continuum of human occupation is demonstrated through artifacts, structures, oral histories, and landscape modifications associated with traditional cultures, railroading, mining, ranching, irrigation, water storage, and hydropower development.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Archeology.**
- **Geology and paleontology.**
- **Aquatic resources.**
- **Recreation.**
- **Scenic views.**
- **Riparian plant and wildlife communities.**



Curecanti National Recreation Area contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Upland wildlife species.**
- **Cultural sites and landscapes.**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park— they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from — and should reflect — park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Human History.** Curecanti National Recreation Area holds stories from 10,000 years of human presence, revealing a continuum of changing cultures, values, and technologies.
- **Water.** The three reservoirs of Curecanti National Recreation Area represent the conflicts, sacrifices, and benefits associated with water use in the West and other arid climates.
- **Geology.** Geologic forces shape the dynamic landscape of Curecanti National Recreation Area and continue to reveal scenic vistas, unique rock exposures, and paleontological environments.
- **Recreation.** Curecanti National Recreation Area offers a vast array of recreational opportunities attracting visitors seeking challenge, rejuvenation, togetherness, and/or solitude. These experiences can forge lifelong connections to place.
- **Natural History.** Curecanti National Recreation Area contains examples of ecosystems characteristic of native Colorado as well as a human-made reservoir system; these habitats provide outstanding opportunities to experience and appreciate a diversity of life.
- **Human Influence.** Curecanti National Recreation Area is an example of the struggle inherent in balancing the needs of human populations while maintaining diverse natural habitats.



Description

Curecanti National Recreation Area is located on the Western Slope of the Rocky Mountains in west-central Colorado. The recreation area encompasses a series of three reservoirs (Blue Mesa, Morrow Point, and Crystal reservoirs) along the once free-flowing Gunnison River. The reservoirs and surrounding lands that make up Curecanti today are a destination for land- and water-based recreation high in the Rocky Mountains. Best known for salmon and trout fishing, Curecanti also offers opportunities for hiking, boating, camping, and bird watching. Blue Mesa Reservoir, the largest body of water in Colorado, is within Curecanti National Recreation Area, which also features a variety of diverse ecosystems.

Curecanti is situated in the transition between the Colorado Plateau and Rocky Mountain provinces and hosts riparian habitats, steep canyons, sagebrush hillsides, and areas of ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, and aspen. The area is mostly high desert characterized by eroded sedimentary rocks and volcanic breccia. Summers are pleasant with temperatures typically in the 70s. Winters can be cold, with temperatures frequently dropping into the -20s.

Approximately 40 miles of the Gunnison River, including the reservoirs, create the centerpiece of the park and approximately 20 of those miles are within the easternmost portion of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison.

