



# SUMMARY

## Draft Resource Protection Study / Environmental Impact Statement

June 2007

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.

The results of the study and its preliminary recommendations are presented herein. For additional details and analysis, the complete study, known as the *Draft Resource Protection Study/Environmental Impact Statement* (RPS/EIS) is available for review (see back page of this brochure).

Your comments are vital to the process and will be considered as the study and recommendations are finalized. Upon completion, the National Park Service and the Bureau of Reclamation will jointly prepare an accompanying *Report to Congress*.

Please let us know what you think by becoming and remaining involved. This is 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. It offers a variety of recreational opportunities in a spectacular geological setting.

Curecanti was authorized by Congress for construction in 1956 as the Wayne N. Aspinall Storage Unit of the Colorado River Storage Project (CRSP), and consists of three dams, their reservoirs and related facilities. The Bureau of Reclamation, the agency with primary jurisdiction for the project, acquired most of the lands for the project in the 1960s. These lands were the minimum needed 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, the Bureau of Reclamation (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.



## PRIMARY EMPHASIS OF THE STUDY

This study is about identifying ways that will allow the National Park Service to 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 is also about the formal establishment of Curecanti as a congressionally legislated NRA, for permanence of resource conservation and public recreation.

This study is not about making recommendations pertaining to water rights or operations of Reclamation projects; infringing on the rights of landowners; or making any recommendation that would use condemnation or other tools not in partnership and cooperation with private landowners.

For both alternatives in the Draft RPS/EIS, Reclamation and Western would continue their administrative jurisdiction and responsibilities within and adjacent to the NRA, including construction, operations, maintenance, replacement, and additions, 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 consult with each other, as necessary and appropriate. Thus, there would be no adverse impacts to Reclamation and Western responsibilities under either alternative.



*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 considered necessary and appropriate for detailed assessment. Other alternatives that were considered, and the reasons for not analyzing them in detail, are described in the Draft RPS/EIS.

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 Draft 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 MOA would need to be revised to reflect 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 (The Proposed Action):** This alternative recommends that the NRA be formally established by Congress. A net total of 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 are for improved management efficiencies and expanded recreational opportunities within the NRA.



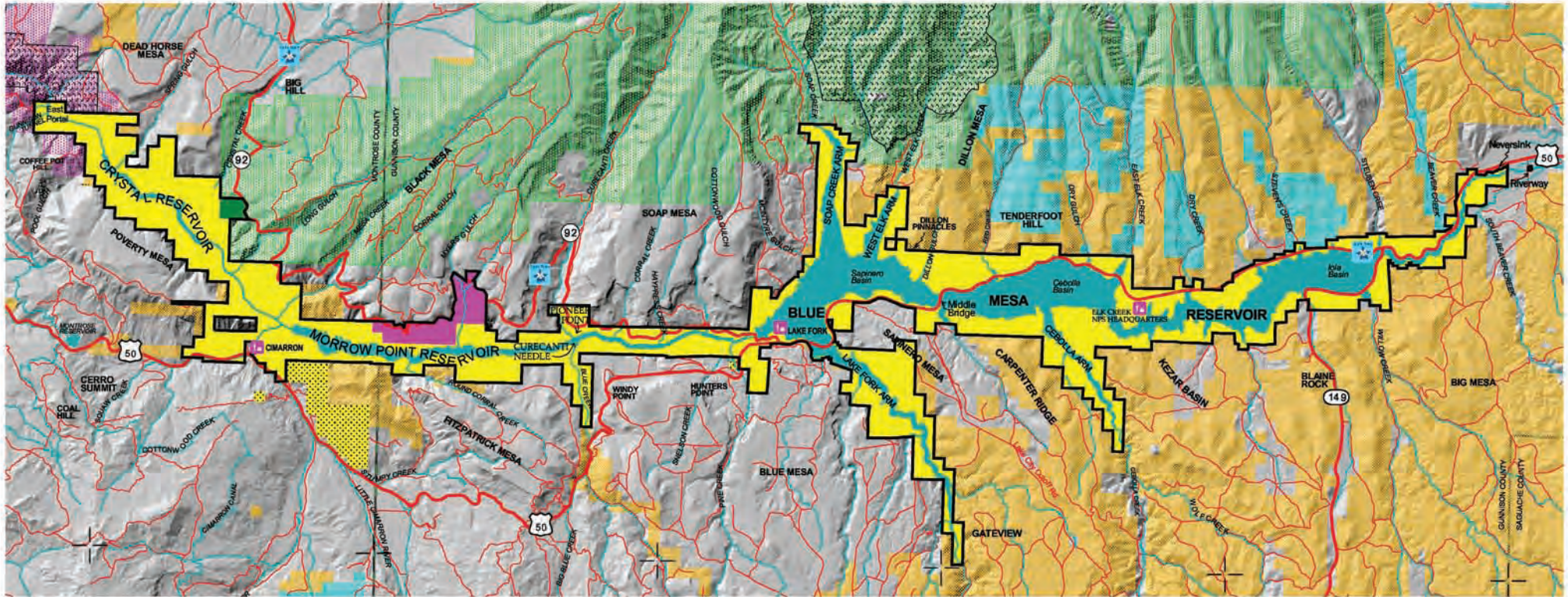
*Autumn colors abound along Colorado Highway 92 above Morrow Point Reservoir*

The Proposed Action also recommends that Congress establish a Conservation Opportunity Area (COA) outside of the legislated boundary. The COA would consist of 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, including conservation easements and fee simple ownership, from willing landowners. 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, many 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
<b>PERTAINING TO RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES:</b>	
Land within Curecanti National Recreation Area (NRA) would continue to be the minimum acquired by the Bureau of Reclamation for the Curecanti 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.
<b>PERTAINING TO CONSERVATION OF NATURAL, CULTURAL, AND SCENIC RESOURCES:</b>	
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.
<b>PERTAINING TO NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE:</b>	
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.
<b>PERTAINING TO MANAGEMENT EFFICIENCIES AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS:</b>	
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.
<b>PERTAINING TO ADVERSE AND BENEFICIAL IMPACTS ON THE ENVIRONMENT:</b>	
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.
<b>PERTAINING TO IMPLEMENTATION COSTS:</b>	
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 Draft 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 the dams, reservoirs, power plants, access roads, and other related 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

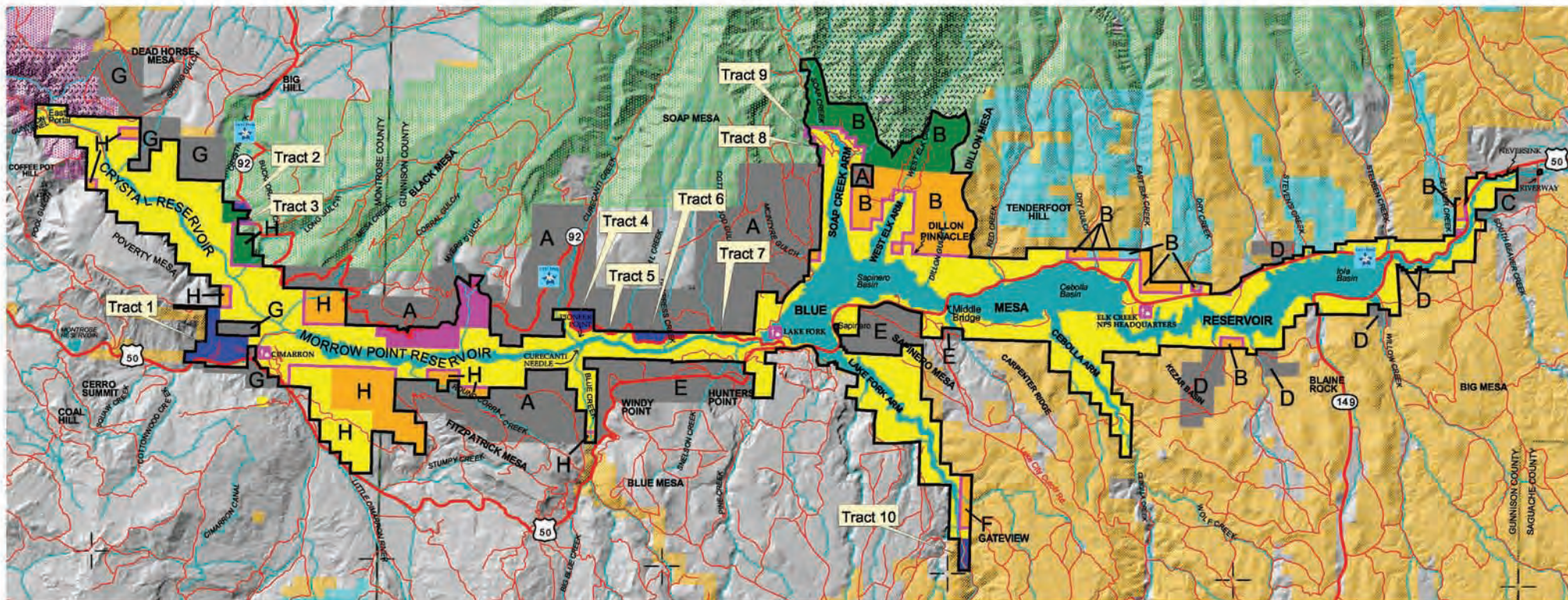
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NPS Disclaimer Information: Property boundaries shown on this map are intended for study purposes only, and are not intended to be definitive regarding land ownership. County and agency land records will be used to verify ownership and definitively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







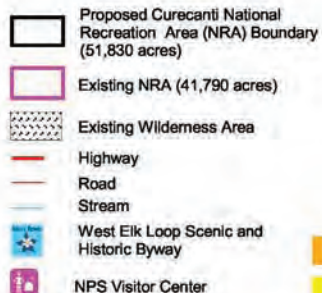
## ALTERNATIVE 2: PROPOSED ACTION

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). 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. 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 the dams, reservoirs, power plants, access roads, and other related 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 withdrawn 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.



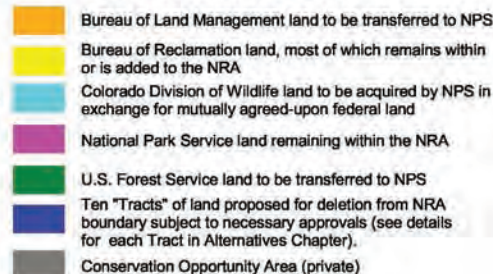
### LAND EXTERNAL TO PROPOSAL



### "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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## HOW TO SUBMIT COMMENTS

Comments on the Draft Resource Protection Study/Environmental Impact Statement may be made per the instructions below. Although you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

- Comment via the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website available on the Internet. Go to <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/>; under “Choose a Park” select “Curecanti National Recreation Area” and click on “Go”; click on “Curecanti National Recreation Area Resource Protection Study”; in the left column, click on “Open for Public Comment” and follow the directions.
- Mail written comments to Curecanti Resource Protection Study Comments, Attn: Dave Roberts, 2465 South Townsend Avenue, Montrose, CO 81401.

If you have additional questions about this project, including the last day to submit comments, or locations and times of meetings, you may visit the park’s website at

[www.nps.gov/cure](http://www.nps.gov/cure), and click on “Management;” or you may contact one of the following individuals:

Dave Roberts, Management Assistant (970) 240-5432  
Connie Rudd, Superintendent (970) 641-2337 ext. 220  
Jeff Heywood, Project Leader (303) 969-2835

## THE NEXT STEP IN THE STUDY PROCESS

After analyzing all the written comments we receive on the Draft RPS/EIS, the study team will make necessary and appropriate changes, and release a Final Resource Protection Study/Environmental Impact Statement. The Final RPS/EIS will contain a summary of the comments we’ve received on the Draft. Following a 30-day period during which the public may lodge written objections, we will release a Record of Decision and submit a report to Congress containing both the findings and recommendations.

We’re on the web at [www.nps.gov/cure](http://www.nps.gov/cure)

