

**ABSTRACT**  
**Draft Resource Protection Study / Environmental Impact Statement**  
**Curecanti National Recreational Area**  
**Gunnison and Montrose Counties, Colorado**

**June 2007**

This *Draft Resource Protection Study / Environmental Impact Statement* (Draft RPS/EIS) describes and analyzes in detail two alternatives, and makes recommendations for conserving natural, cultural, recreational, and scenic resources on lands within and surrounding the area administered as the Curecanti National Recreation Area. Potential environmental consequences of the two alternatives are assessed. Additional alternatives were considered, but eliminated from detailed assessment. The study is in response to Section 11 of the *Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park and Gunnison National Conservation Area Act of 1999* (Public Law 106-76).

This RPS/EIS is being prepared by the National Park Service (NPS), with the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) as a cooperating agency. Upon completion of the EIS process, which will include a Record of Decision, a report to Congress will be jointly prepared by the National Park Service and Bureau of Reclamation, and sent through the NPS Washington Office to the Department of the Interior, to be forwarded to Congress. The report will summarize the study's findings and make recommendations. Implementation of those recommendations will then depend on congressional action. The Final RPS/EIS and the Record of Decision will accompany the report as attachments. If the Record of Decision finds that Congress should pass new legislation for the NRA, the report will identify issues to be addressed in that new legislation. In other words, the Secretary of the Interior will make the recommendation to Congress, based on recommendations developed by the National Park Service and Bureau of Reclamation.

Pursuant to Reclamation law, including the Colorado River Storage Project Act of 1956, and a 1965 Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the Bureau of Reclamation and the National Park Service, Reclamation manages two projects (including dams, reservoirs, power plants, access roads, and other related facilities) and NPS manages the natural and cultural resources, recreational use, and related facilities, all within an area that for forty years has been referred to as the Curecanti National Recreation Area (NRA). However, the area has not yet been formally designated by Congress as a national recreation area, and has no legislated boundary.

**Alternative 1: No Action (Continuation of Existing Conditions).** Under Alternative 1, The Bureau of Reclamation would continue to operate and maintain the dams, reservoirs, power plants, access roads, and related facilities at Curecanti, pursuant to Reclamation law, the 1965 MOA, and other applicable laws and regulations. The National Park Service would continue to manage the natural and cultural resources, recreational opportunities, and associated facilities within the existing NRA, pursuant to Reclamation law, NPS law, the 1965 MOA, and other applicable laws and regulations. The National Park Service would continue to cooperate with neighboring landowners in the service of resource conservation as existing staff time and funding permits. This would consist primarily of providing limited technical assistance and advice. There would be no changes in the amount of land included within the NRA, other than occasional additions that might occur due to future specific legislative authority. A permanent NPS presence would not be assured under this alternative.

One of the major impacts of Alternative 1 would be an increase in land use changes on private property surrounding the NRA. This would increase the possibility of adverse impacts on resources such as animal habitat and water quality, and the spectacular natural scenery that surrounds the NRA. In turn, this would be more likely to adversely affect the enjoyment of NRA visitors and residents alike.

**Alternative 2: The Proposed Action:** It is recommended under Alternative 2 that Congress officially establish Curecanti as a National Recreation Area with a legislated boundary, which would include approximately 10,040 acres of additional adjacent lands that are currently managed by other federal and state agencies. The 1965 MOA between the Bureau of Reclamation and the National Park Service would be revised accordingly. Under Alternative 2, Reclamation would operate and maintain the dams, reservoirs, associated power plants, access roads, and related facilities at Curecanti, pursuant to Reclamation law, the revised MOA, and other applicable laws and regulations. The National Park Service would manage the natural and cultural resources, recreational opportunities, and associated facilities within the NRA, pursuant to Reclamation law, NPS law, including the new legislation establishing the NRA, the revised MOA, and other applicable laws and regulations. It is also recommended that Congress authorize NPS to work in partnership with private landowners in a designated Conservation Opportunity Area surrounding the NRA, and employ various tools in the service of resource conservation. These tools would include, but not be limited to, acquiring interests in land from willing landowners, such as fee simple, or conservation easements. The benefit of this approach is that neighboring landowners, assisted by conservation partners, could work with the National Park Service to utilize cooperative conservation efforts that could maintain and/or improve resources such as animal habitat and water quality throughout the area; would better ensure the preservation of the area's spectacular natural scenery; and would enhance the enjoyment and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike. A permanent NPS presence would be assured under this alternative.

There would be no adverse impact to Reclamation operations under either Alternative 1 or Alternative 2.

**Environmentally Preferred Alternative.** Alternative 2, the Proposed Action, is the Environmentally Preferred Alternative.

**Note to Reviewers and Respondents.** We encourage you to provide us with written comments on this document, especially to provide your opinion with regards to the alternatives herein presented. It is the practice of the National Park Service to make all comments, including names and addresses of respondents who provide that information, available for public review following the conclusion of the planning process. However, before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While 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.

**How to Submit Comments.** Comments should be provided via the Internet at the National Park Service Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website: <http://www.parkplanning.nps.gov>. Under "Choose a Park", select "Curecanti NRA" and click on "Go"; then click on "Curecanti National Recreation Area Resource Protection Study"; then in the left column, click on "Open for Public Comment"; then follow the directions for entering comments. For members of the public without Internet access, comments may be sent in writing to Curecanti Resource Protection Study Comments, Attn: Dave Roberts, 2465 South Townsend Avenue, Montrose, CO 81401. Dates for which the comment period is open are listed on the website, and are advertised via NPS news releases and local media. Or you may contact the following people for this and other project-related information: Dave Roberts, Management Assistant, at (970) 240-5432; Connie Rudd, Superintendent, in Gunnison, CO, at (970) 641-2337 ext. 220; or Jeff Heywood, Project Leader, in Lakewood, CO, at (303) 969-2835.