

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

August 2008

This *Final Resource Protection Study / Environmental Impact Statement* (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 Gorge 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. The EIS process will conclude with the release of a Record of Decision (ROD) that documents the National Park Service's selected alternative. The ROD will be released no sooner than 30 days following the release date of this Final RPS/EIS, which is the date that the Environmental Protection Agency's Notice of Availability appears in the Federal Register. Upon completion of the EIS process, a Report to Congress will be jointly prepared by NPS and 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 to Congress. 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; and they and their assigns would continue to have unrestricted access to their lands and land interests, water and water interests, and facilities, 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 permit. 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 the continuation of the current pattern of 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 legislatively 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; and they and their assigns would have unrestricted access to their lands and land interests, water and water interests, and facilities, pursuant to Reclamation law, the revised MOA, and other applicable laws and regulations. The new NRA 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. Such management would be 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.

Review and Comment Period for the Draft RPS / EIS. From July 17 through October 22, 2007, NPS held a public and agency review and comment period on the *Draft Resource Protection Study/ Environmental Impact Statement*. As a result, NPS received a total of 35 letters, faxes, and Internet entries on the document. Of these, 63% supported Alternative 2 (Proposed Action); 26% were neutral, not specifying which alternative was favored; and 11% supported Alternative 1 (No Action). All comments received, as well as meeting records related to this project, are being retained as a part of the project's administrative record. The comments are summarized in this Final RPS/EIS, along with NPS responses.

For more information about this document, please contact:

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