

Curecanti National Recreation Area

Gunnison and Montrose Counties, Colorado



Curecanti Resource Protection Study

A Study Requested by the United States Congress
(Public Law 106-76, October 21, 1999)

Exploring Opportunities and Alternatives
for Resource Conservation
Within and Surrounding
Curecanti National Recreation Area





What is Curecanti?

The Curecanti Project, also known as the Wayne N. Aspinall Storage Unit, was authorized by the Colorado River Storage Project Act of 1956 (CRSPA). The project purposes include:

- Water storage
- Irrigation
- Flood control
- Power generation
- Recreation
- Conservation





What is Curecanti?

Between 1962 and 1976 three dams were constructed along the Gunnison River, which created the three reservoirs shown on the map below. The dams and reservoirs serve to fulfill the CRSPA project purposes.



Over time, the area became known as Curecanti National Recreation Area (NRA). Although the NRA has not yet been legislatively established, and does not have a legislated boundary, Congress provides annual funding for operations.

Unique Project Features



Blue Mesa Dam and Reservoir

Especially important for water storage, Blue Mesa contains the largest body of water in Colorado, and offers outstanding water-based recreational opportunities in a spectacular geological setting



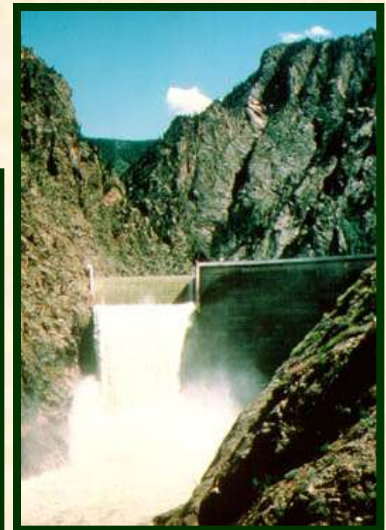
Morrow Point Dam and Reservoir

The largest power producer of the three dams, Morrow Point's canyon setting offers a unique recreational experience



Crystal Dam and Reservoir

Crystal's narrow canyon setting offers opportunities for solitude, while the dam regulates river flows through Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park and Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area, which are downstream of Curecanti NRA



How is Curecanti Administered?



Curecanti NRA is jointly managed and operated.

The [Bureau of Reclamation \(Reclamation\)](#) manages the dams, reservoirs, power generation and related facilities; in accordance with the CRSPA.



[Western Area Power Administration \(Western\)](#) is responsible for marketing and distributing the power generated at the dams, and manages the transmission corridors and lines; in accordance with the Department of Energy Organization Act of 1977.



The [National Park Service \(NPS\)](#) manages the natural and cultural resources; visitor use, recreation, and education; and related facilities; in accordance with a 1965 Memorandum of Agreement between Reclamation and NPS.



How Are the Lands Now Being Managed?



In the 1960s, Reclamation acquired private land and placed withdrawals on public land.

The land acquired and withdrawn was the minimal needed for the dams and reservoirs, with no consideration of what land might be necessary and appropriate for a National Recreation Area.

Today, within the NRA, NPS manages the natural and cultural resources and the recreational use of most of the Reclamation lands. The U.S Forest Service (USFS) co-manages with NPS a small portion of that land (200 acres), and NPS manages 1,150 acres of non-Reclamation lands.

Surrounding the NRA, much of the land is managed by the Bureau of Land Management, the Colorado Division of Wildlife, Reclamation, and USFS. The rest of the land adjacent to and surrounding the NRA (about half) is in private ownership.

Why this Study?



Prior to formal establishment of the NRA, including a legislated boundary, Congress thought it advisable to request a study of Curecanti area land and resources.

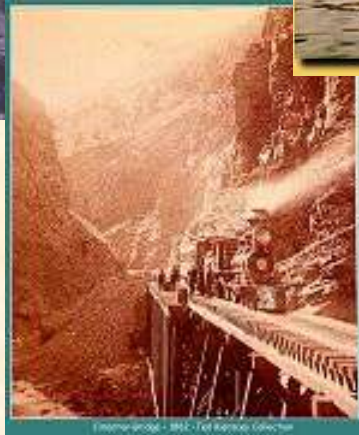
The request was made a part of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park Act (October 1999).

The Resource Protection Study and accompanying Environmental Impact Statement (RPS/EIS) are in response to that Congressional request.

The Act Requires NPS to:



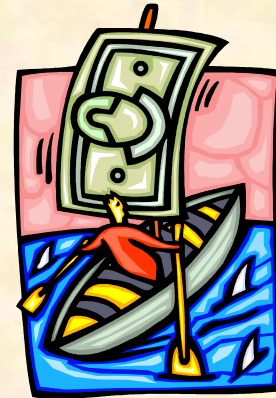
- 1) Assess the natural, cultural, recreational and scenic resource value and character of land within and surrounding Curecanti;



The Act also Requires NPS to:



- 2) Identify practicable alternatives that protect resource value and character;
- 3) Recommend a variety of tools to achieve the above; and
- 4) Estimate costs to implement recommendations.





Study Progress to Date

Public and agency scoping, focus groups, and work sessions; and communication and meetings with private landowners, and elected officials and staff – beginning spring 2000, and continuing throughout the project.



Collection of resource data – summer 2000 to spring 2003.

Reclamation becomes a “cooperating agency” for the environmental impact statement (EIS) – spring 2001.

Study Progress to Date



Newsletter #1 published, presenting project status, and soliciting input – spring 2001.

Newsletter #2 published, announcing open houses and soliciting additional input on unmet land-based recreation potential – winter 2002.

Open House for the Curecanti Resource Protection Study

You're invited to attend one or more of the public open houses we are holding in conjunction with the Resource Protection Study for Curecanti National Recreation Area (NRA). The purpose of the open houses is to exchange ideas regarding the unmet potential of land-based and lake tributary-based recreation and resource education in areas within and surrounding the NRA. Your ideas regarding other facets of the study will also be welcome. These ideas will be used to generate alternatives that will better protect the natural, cultural, recreational and scenic resource value and character of the land within and surrounding Curecanti.

If you are interested in enhancing recreational opportunities, and in helping to determine how better to protect the spectacular resources of the Curecanti area for today and into the future, please join us at the open houses.

Gunnison Open House

Tuesday, March 6
3:00 p.m.—7:00 p.m.
Aspinall-Wilson Center
909 Escalante Drive

Hotchkiss Open House

Wednesday, March 6
3:00 p.m.—7:00 p.m.
Hotchkiss Public Library
Memorial Hall
1st and Main Streets

Montrose Open House

Thursday, March 7
3:00 p.m.—7:00 p.m.
Montrose Pavilion
1800 Pavilion Road



Dear Friends,

We would like to bring you up to date on this important endeavor to seek long-term solutions for protecting the resource values which make Curecanti such a great place to recreate and explore.

The Resource Protection Study is being conducted in response to a request from the Congress to assess the natural, cultural, recreational and scenic resource value and character of the land within and surrounding the Curecanti National Recreation Area. Park staff, in cooperation with staff from the National Park Service Intermountain Region, are moving forward with the study.

The Bureau of Reclamation is a designated cooperating agency for the study and environmental impact statement. Decisions made will be consistent with Reclamation law.

This newsletter will tell you about work done to date, and will give you an opportunity to comment. Your ideas are important, and we would be pleased to hear from you about issues you believe our study should look at, including recreational opportunities or special places you would like to make us aware of. To assist you in this endeavor, an insert is provided with instructions for commenting. Or, you may direct correspondence relating to the Resource Protection Study to:

Curecanti Resource Protection Study
c/o Dave Roberts, Management Assistant
National Park Service
2465 South Townsend
Montrose, CO 81401
or email to: dave_roberts@nps.gov

Best Regards,

Sheridan Steele
Superintendent
Curecanti NRA

Newsletter #1
Spring 2001

Inside this issue:

Background on the Resource Protection Study	1
Curecanti Area Conservation Plan	2
Purpose and Significance	3
The Park Mission	5
Curecanti Resource Protection Study Area Map	6-7
Scoping Issues and Concerns	8
Data Collection and Analysis	8
Curecanti Area Photo Atlas	9
What Else Awaits?	11
We Need Your Input!	11

Study Progress to Date



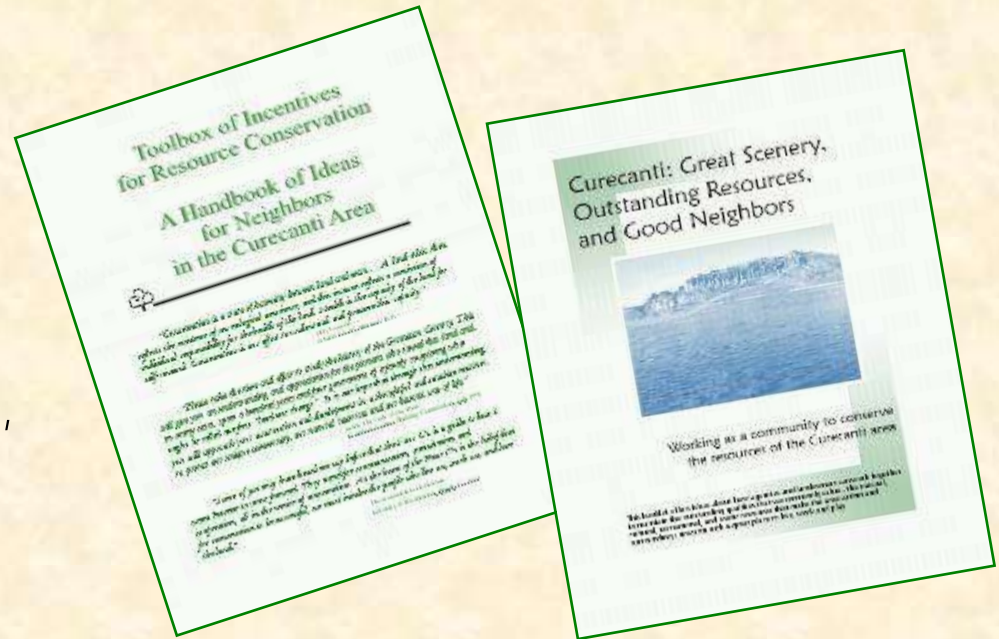
Joint Agency Management Effort (JAME) initiated by RPS – wherein NPS, other neighboring federal, state, and local government agencies, and American Indian Tribes, are working in partnership to address resource management and visitor use issues of mutual concern that extend beyond the NRA – spring 2002 to present.



Study Progress to Date



Publication of “Toolbox of Incentives for Resource Conservation,” and NRA neighbor booklet – documents produced as part of the RPS to present ideas about how private landowners; local communities; and city, county, state, and federal agencies, including NPS; can work in partnership to manage their lands for more effective resource conservation in the Curecanti area – spring 2003.



Study Progress to Date

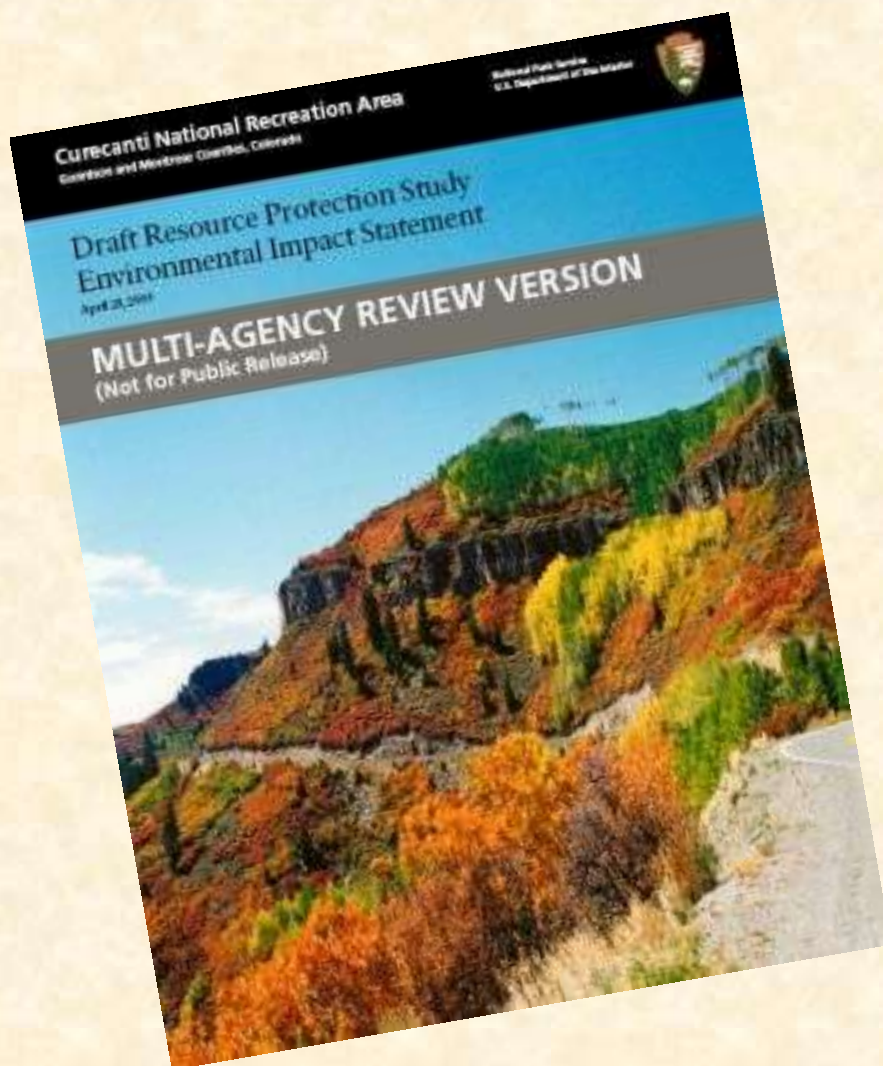


Meetings and contacts with neighboring landowners – spring 2003 to present.

Development of preliminary alternatives, and publication of Newsletter #3 to seek public comment on the alternatives – summer to fall 2003.

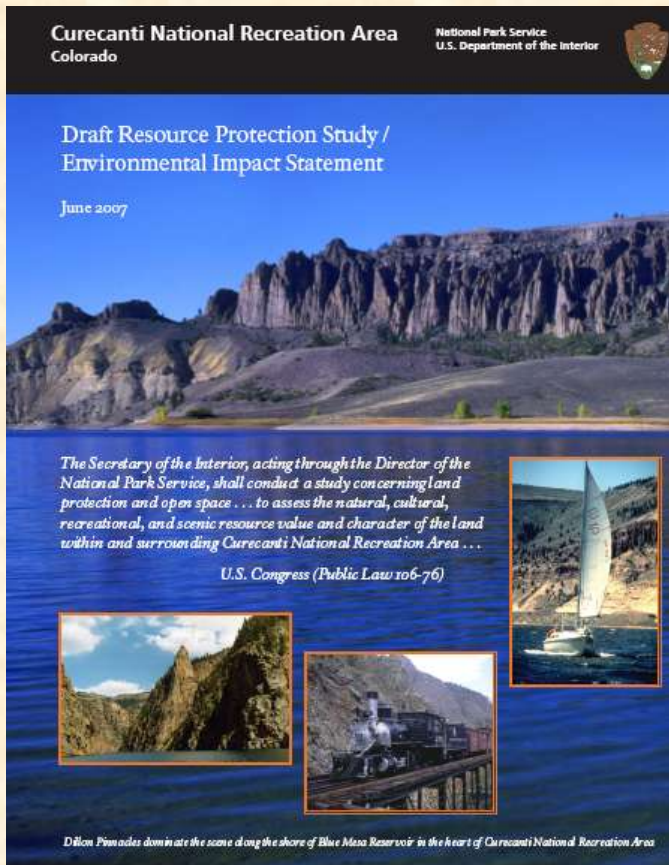


Study Progress to Date



Preparation of Draft RPS/EIS, multi-agency review, and redraft to incorporate agency comments – winter 2004 to fall 2006.

Study Progress to Date



Release of the Draft RPS/EIS, dated June 2007, for a 90-day public review and comment period – July to October 2007.

Of those providing comment, 63% supported Alternative 2 (Proposed Action); 26% were neutral, not specifying which alternative was favored; and 11% supported Alternative 1 (No Action).

Study Progress to Date



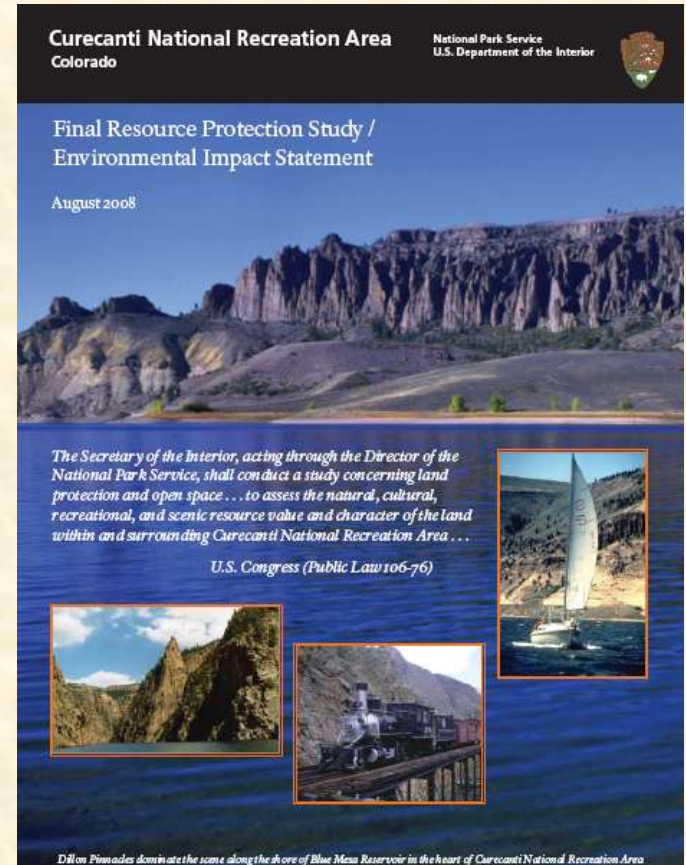
All the federal and state agencies and the two counties directly affected by the recommendations provided written comments on the Draft RPS/EIS, and all are in support of the Proposed Action (described on slides 24-26). Several organizations, members of the public, and affected landowners also provided written comment.

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. Landowners are interested in protecting their private property rights, but would consider working cooperatively with NPS in order to meet mutually agreed upon conservation goals.

Study Progress to Date



After analyzing the comments received from the review of the Draft RPS/EIS, the document was modified to address the concerns raised. The revised document, or Final RPS/EIS, was then released for a 30-day public viewing period – summer 2008.





Resource Analysis

The study team used GIS data and information from a variety of agencies, and public input. Resources evaluated include:

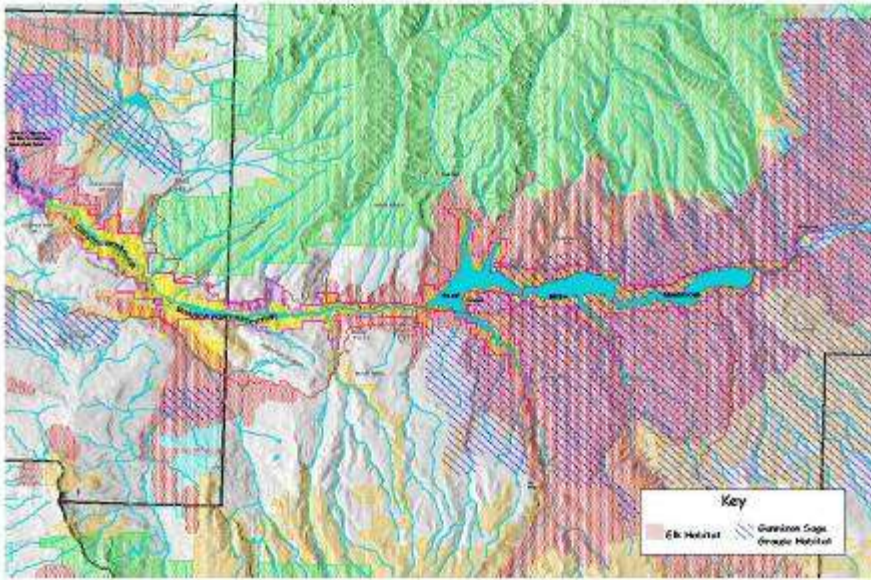
- Natural
 - Wildlife habitat
 - Areas of paleontological potential
 - Raptor habitat
 - Rare or imperiled species
- Cultural
 - Archeological and historic sites or districts
- Recreation
 - Information received from several workshops and written comments
- Scenic
 - Computer generated viewshed



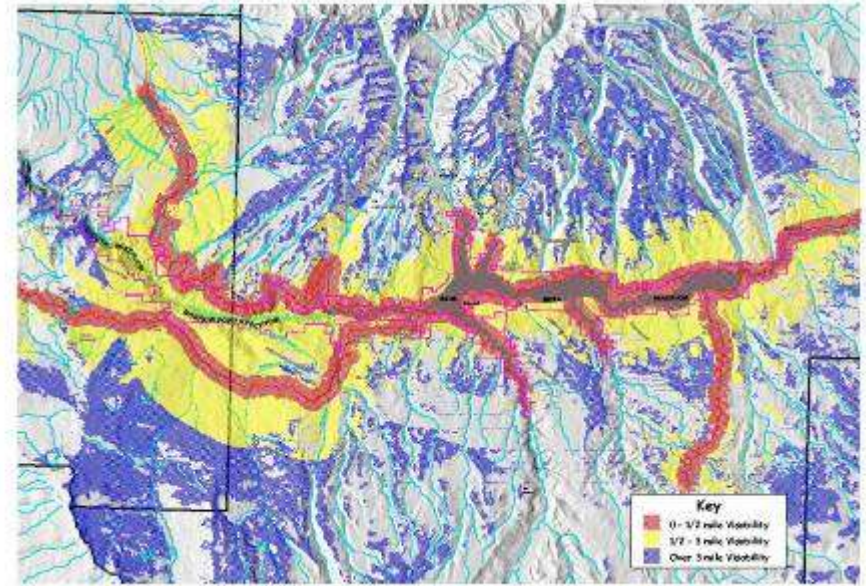
Production of Maps



From the GIS data, a series of maps were produced for evaluation and analysis.



Example showing winter elk (red) and Gunnison sage grouse (blue) habitat



Example showing results of computer generated viewshed

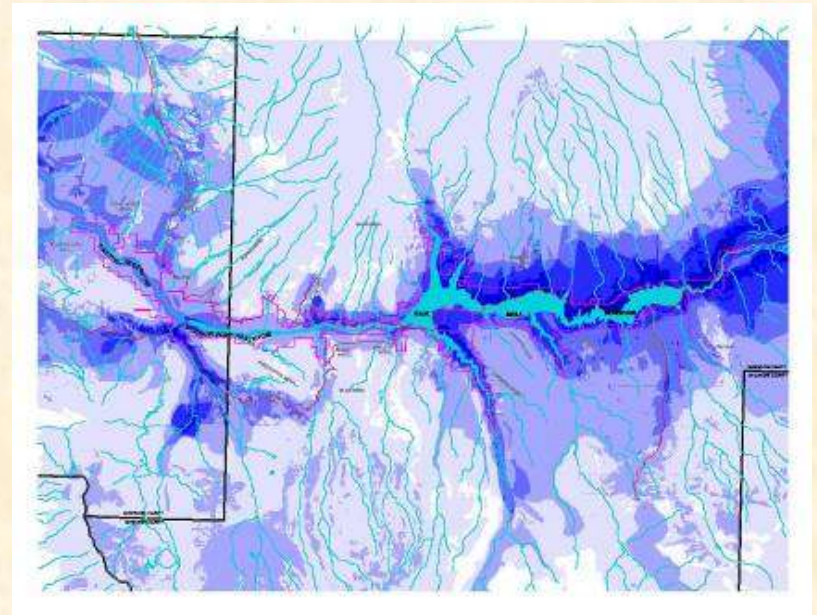


Resource Composite Map

Natural, cultural, and scenic resources were electronically combined to produce a composite map of Important Resources Surrounding Curecanti NRA.

The map shows that such resources are concentrated within and immediately surrounding the NRA.

The colors represent different levels of concentrations of one or more resources, with weightings assigned to the importance of the resources.

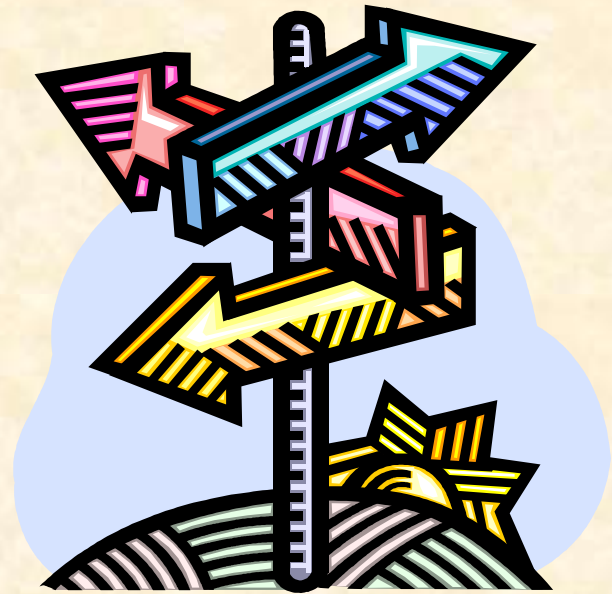


Development of Alternatives



Based on analysis of maps and resources, and feedback from the workshops, newsletters, and meetings with landowners and agencies, the study team considered several alternatives, from which two were finally selected for analysis of impacts:

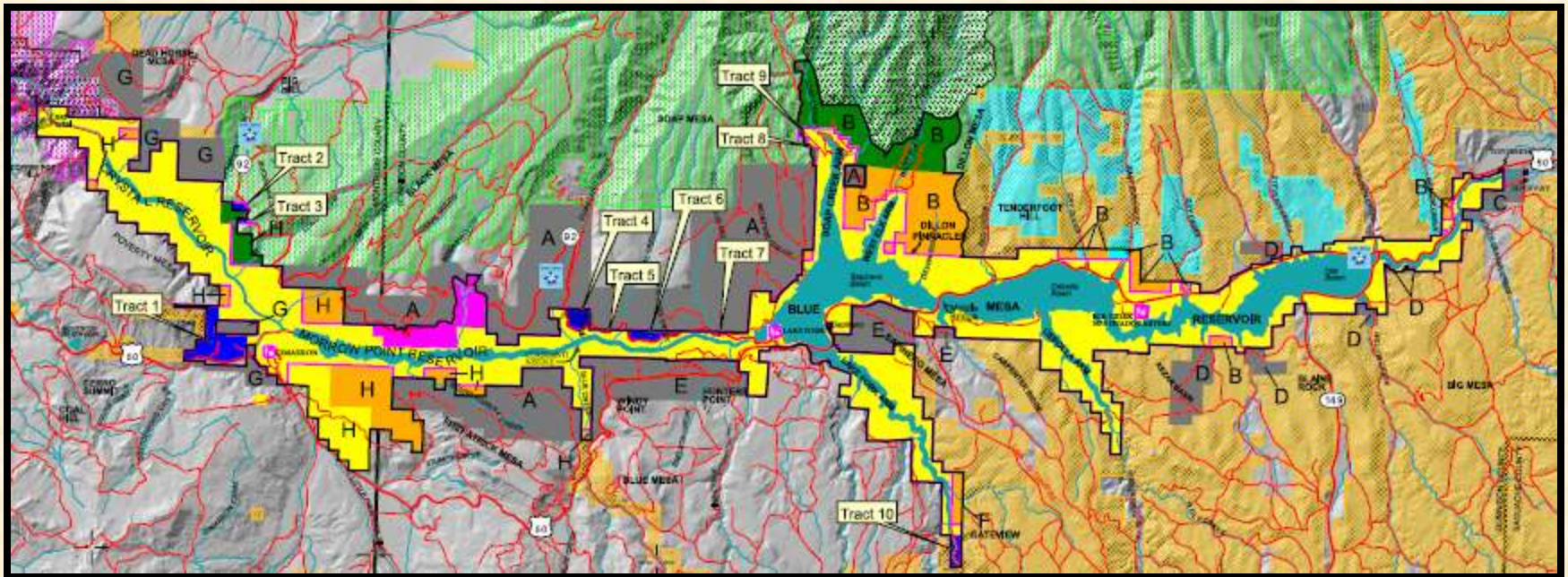
- Alternative 1 (No Action)
- Alternative 2 (Proposed Action)



Alternative 2 – The Proposed Action



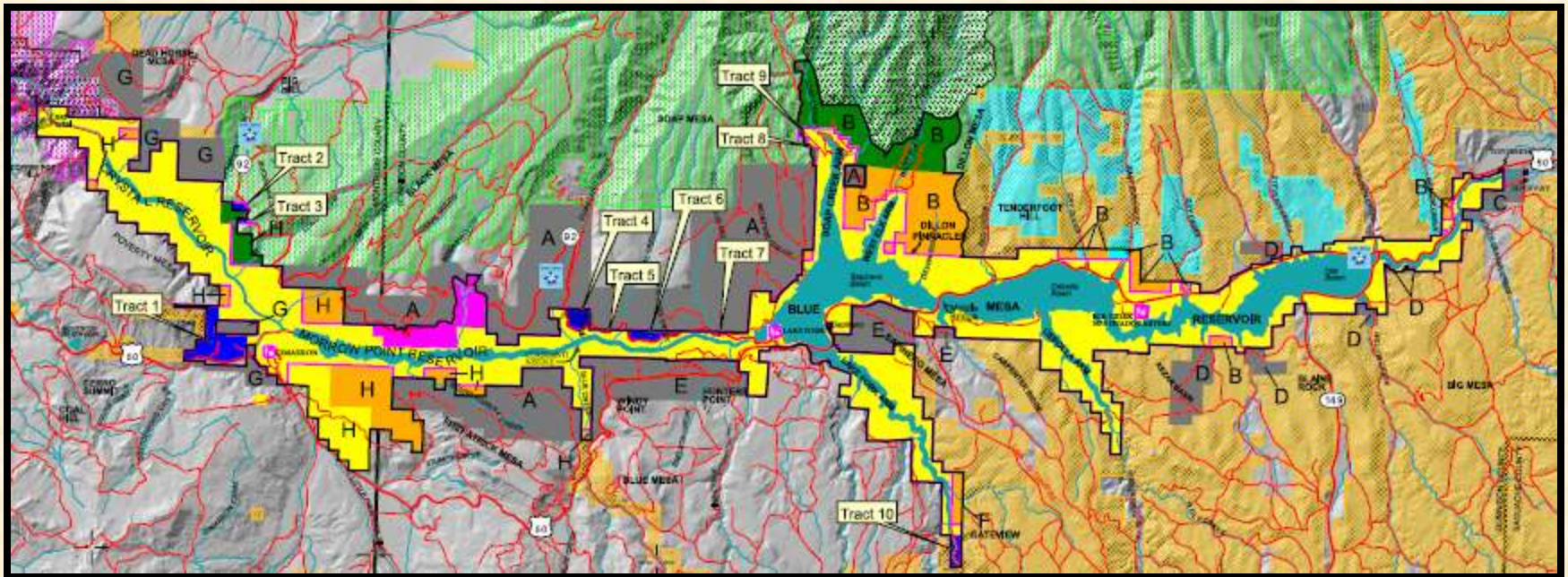
For purposes of analysis, the letters “A” – “H” below represent land units surrounding the NRA that contain resources considered important to conserve for NRA purposes. Under Alternative 2, Congress would officially establish the NRA, which would have a legislated boundary, and would include mutually agreed upon public land from neighboring agencies (Land Units B, F, and H). NPS, Reclamation, and Western would continue to manage their respective resources, facilities, interests, and/or projects, and would continue to have unrestricted access thereto.



Alternative 2 – The Proposed Action



Congress would establish a Conservation Opportunity Area (COA), which would include identified private lands outside of the proposed boundary, consisting of Land Units A, C, D, E and G (dark-gray shading). The COA will offer opportunities to work in partnership with landowners to conserve resources and enhance recreational opportunities.



Alternative 2 – The Proposed Action



How would the Conservation Opportunity Area work?

- The COA concept would first and foremost depend on the willingness of a landowner to participate. It is based on mutual partnerships.
- A conservation “toolbox” would provide NPS and landowners within the COA opportunities to conserve resources and values identified as important to the NRA.
- A variety of tools would be available, ranging from technical assistance to applying for conservation project funding grants, and from establishing conservation easements to acquiring land or interests in land.
- NPS would need to seek appropriations and/or partner with other entities to fund many program incentives. However, some of the Proposed Action could still be implemented, with congressional approval, prior to appropriations.

Differences Between the Alternatives



Alternative 1 No Action (Continue Existing Conditions)	Alternative 2 Proposed Action
Pertaining to Recreational Opportunities	
<p>Land within Curecanti National Recreation Area (NRA) would continue to be the minimum acquired by the Bureau of Reclamation for the Curecanti Project, 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.</p>	<p>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.</p>

Differences Between the Alternatives



Alternative 1 No Action (Continue Existing Conditions)	Alternative 2 Proposed Action
Pertaining to Conservation of Natural, Cultural, and Scenic Resources	
<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>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).</p> <p>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.</p>

Differences Between the Alternatives



Alternative 1 No Action (Continue Existing Conditions)	Alternative 2 Proposed Action
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.

Differences Between the Alternatives



Alternative 1 No Action (Continue Existing Conditions)	Alternative 2 Proposed Action
Pertaining to Management Efficiencies and Economic Benefits	
<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>

Differences Between the Alternatives



Alternative 1 No Action (Continue Existing Conditions)	Alternative 2 Proposed Action
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.

Differences Between the Alternatives



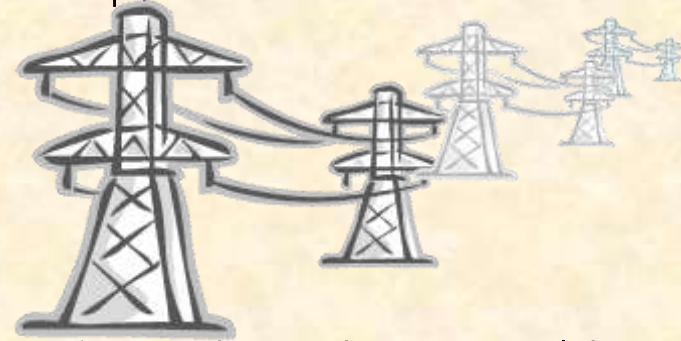
Alternative 1 No Action (Continue Existing Conditions)	Alternative 2 Proposed Action
Pertaining to Implementation Costs	
<p>With a determination that the administrative boundary is unlikely to change, one-time costs include completion of surveys, boundary posting and fencing. That cost is expected to be \$500,000. There would be no additional recurring annual costs.</p>	<p>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.</p>

Reclamation and Western Operations



For both alternatives in the RPS, Reclamation and Western would continue their administrative jurisdiction and responsibilities within and adjacent to the NRA, including construction, operation, maintenance, replacements, and additions; and they 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 the Aspinall Unit or the Uncompahgre Project. 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.



What's Next?



Following a 30-day public viewing period for the Final RPS/EIS, a Record of Decision will be issued.

A Report to Congress, co-authored by NPS and Reclamation, will then be forwarded through the Department of the Interior for submittal to the appropriate congressional committee(s).

Congress will then decide what action to take, if any. Implementation of the Proposed Action would require enactment of legislation, as well as appropriation of funding.



For More Information Contact



Formerly private property along Highway 92, near Myers Gulch above Morrow Point Reservoir, adjacent to Curecanti NRA, and acquired in 2001 from a willing seller, as authorized by Public Law 106-76, and in keeping with the goals and objectives of Alternative 2 – the Proposed Action – of the Resource Protection Study

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Curecanti National Recreation Area

Connie Rudd
Park Superintendent
(970) 641-2337 ext. 220

Intermountain Regional Office
James Doyle
Acting Chief, Communications & Legislation
(303) 969-2321

August 7, 2008