

# ALTERNATIVES



## CHAPTER 2: ALTERNATIVES

This chapter describes the various actions that could be implemented for managing motorized vehicle access at Curecanti National Recreation Area. NEPA requires federal agencies to explore a range of reasonable alternatives that address the purpose of and need for the action. The alternatives under consideration must include a “no action” alternative as prescribed by 40 CFR 1502.14. Action alternatives may originate from the proponent agency, local government officials, or members of the public at public meetings or during the early stages of project development. Alternatives may also be developed in response to comments from coordinating or cooperating agencies.

The NPS explored and objectively evaluated three alternatives in this plan/EA, including alternative A (no action), alternative B (Designate Motorized Vehicle Access Consistent with the 1997 General Management Plan), and alternative C—the NPS preferred alternative (Designate Motorized Vehicle Access and Amend the 1997 General Management Plan). These alternatives are the result of internal scoping and public scoping, and in accordance with NEPA, they meet the management objectives of the recreation area, as well as the overall purpose of and need for the proposed action.

The alternatives identify two types of off-road designations, routes, and areas, where motorized vehicles are allowed. The alternatives address motorized vehicle access on routes within the park which occur above the high water mark of Blue Mesa Reservoir. These routes include existing routes as well as the 4.9 miles of routes designated for future NPS administration in the RPS. These routes are generally used to access the reservoir and adjacent properties. The alternatives also address areas below the high water line where motorized vehicles may travel. Areas below the high water line are used to access the water itself for appropriate recreational activities such as boating, fishing and swimming.

For detailed information on the alternatives, refer to the narrative descriptions, maps, and the comparison of the alternatives versus objectives. The environmentally preferred alternative, NPS preferred alternative, alternative elements that were considered but dismissed, and summaries of alternative elements, the comparison of the alternatives versus objectives, environmental consequences are discussed later in this chapter.

### ELEMENTS COMMON TO ALL ALTERNATIVES

**Hours of Vehicle Operation:** Motorized vehicle access would be permitted 24-hours a day.

**Monitoring/Enforcement:** Per the interim management plan, all areas within Curecanti National Recreation Area would continue to be routinely monitored by law enforcement rangers as part of existing resource protection and education programs. Motorized vehicle access would be closely monitored and violations would be addressed with verbal warnings, citations, or arrest, especially during periods of seasonal closures pursuant to 36 CFR 1.5. Vehicle tracks in unauthorized areas would be promptly mitigated to avoid repetitive use by others. Traffic counters would be used to gauge vehicle use and visitation. Condition assessments would be conducted to determine what routes, if any, need maintenance because they have become impassable. Condition assessments would be conducted for cultural sites every 5 to 15 years and would provide information for resource management decisions related to motorized vehicle access.

**Closures:** Designated routes, areas, and snowmobile access points would be subject to year-round, seasonal, or site-specific closures listed in the Superintendent’s Compendium or implemented under the authority of 36 CFR 1.5(a).

**Snowmobile Requirements:** Operators and machines must conform to the laws and regulations governing the use of snowmobiles found in 36 CFR 7.51 and 36 CFR 2.18, as well as those promulgated by the state of Colorado where they prove to be more stringent or restrictive. Snowmobile gross weight would be limited to a maximum of 1,200 pounds (machine and cargo) unless prior permission is granted by the superintendent (36 CFR 7.51). Snowmobiles may not be operated in excess of 45 miles per hour (36 CFR 2.18d.4).

**Education/Outreach:** During the main visitor use season, interpretive staff would provide visitors with motorized vehicle access information and restrictions during roving contacts, visitor center contacts, interpretive programs, press releases, and on the recreation area website

**Mileage of Motorized Access Routes:** All alternatives include approximately 4.9 miles of routes on BLM/USFS lands to be transferred to NPS upon Congressional approval of the 2008 Resource Protection Study. These existing routes would be open to motorized use under BLM/USFS travel management plans and connect to existing NPS routes; however, NPS management of these routes is speculative due to the requirement for Congressional action.

## **NO-ACTION ALTERNATIVE**

### **ALTERNATIVE A: NO ACTION (CONTINUATION OF CURRENT MANAGEMENT)**

The no-action alternative is a continuation of current conditions and “sets a baseline of existing impacts continued into the future against which to compare impacts of action alternatives” (NPS Director’s Order 12 (NPS 2001, sec. 2.7)). This alternative would formalize motorized vehicle access management identified in the 2007 Off-Highway Vehicle Evaluation and Interim Management Plan (interim management plan) and regulations included in the Superintendent’s Compendium. As a result, all motorized vehicle routes and areas not currently designated as closed to such use would remain open (see maps 4a and 4b). This would include a total of 61 miles of routes in areas throughout the park unit. The no-action alternative, as it is occurring right now, could not be adopted because the park does not have a regulation allowing motorized vehicles off road as required by 36 CFR 4.10. To make the no-action alternative legal, the park would have to undertake a rulemaking process as with any of the action alternatives.

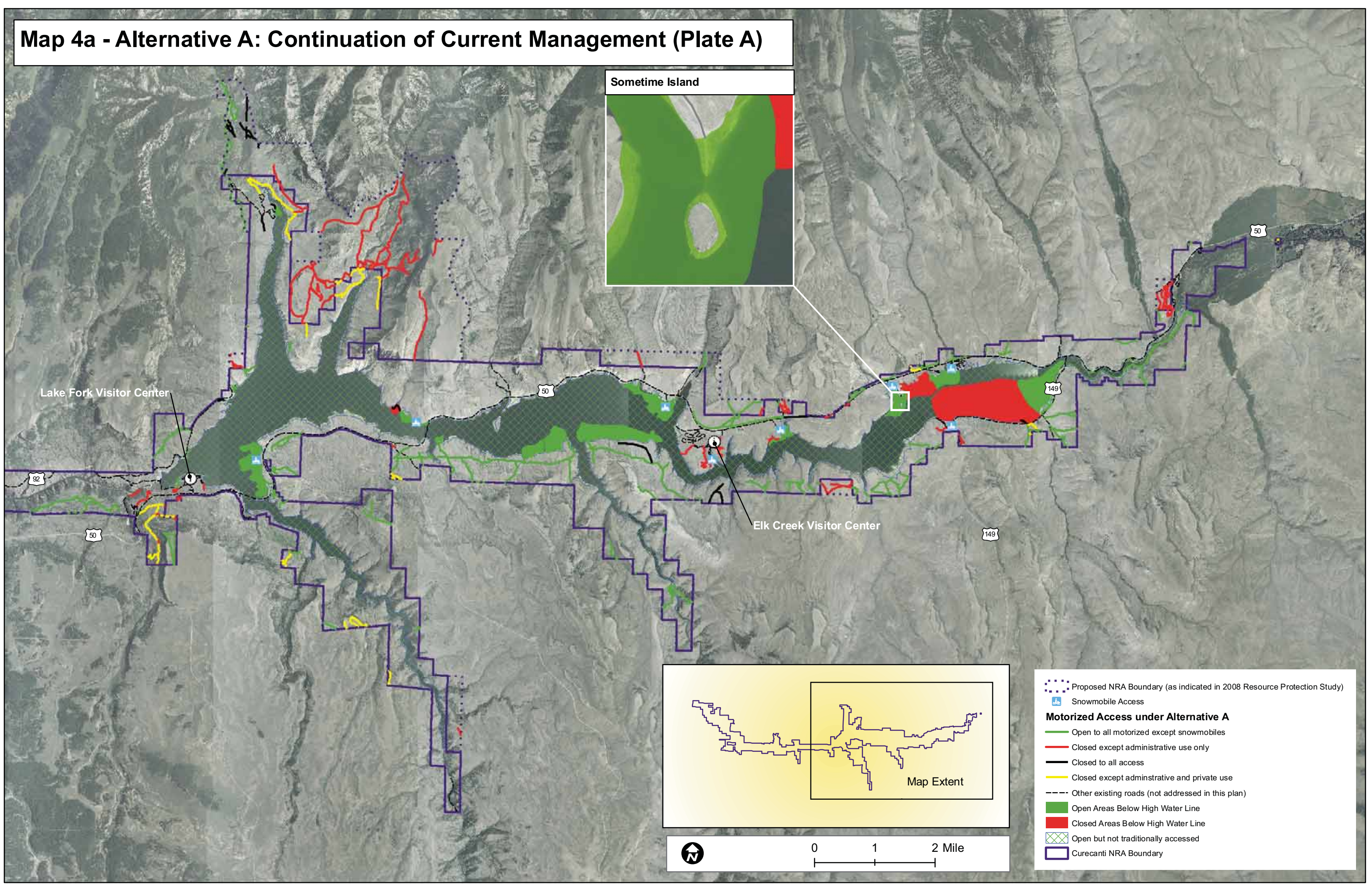
In addition, all areas below the high water line of Blue Mesa Reservoir would remain open to public motorized vehicle access, unless closed for resource concerns. This area totals approximately 8,239 acres, 7,280 of which are considered open but not traditionally used because of access limitations caused by terrain and reservoir level (see maps 4a and 4b). All routes and areas currently open for administrative access would remain open and legal private access would be maintained.

Some of the routes that would remain open, including some above Blue Mesa Reservoir, would be located in Semi-Primitive/Non-Motorized zones as designated in the 1997 general management plan (see map 7a). Although inconsistent with the management prescriptions for this zone, these routes would remain open under this alternative.

Appropriate snowmobile use and access would continue to be provided in accordance with the recreation area’s existing rule (36 CFR 7.51c), but there would be no specific routes for reaching the frozen surface of Blue Mesa Reservoir from existing designated access points (see maps 4a and 4b). The total annual cost to implement alternative A would be approximately \$62,623 (see table 11 in the “Environmental Consequences” chapter for a summary of costs).



Map 4a - Alternative A: Continuation of Current Management (Plate A)

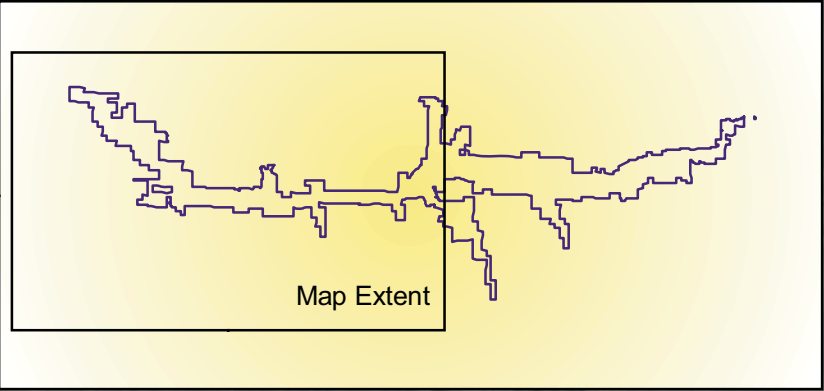








Map 4b - Alternative A: Continuation of Current Management (Plate B)



Proposed NRA Boundary (as indicated in 2008 Resource Protection Study)

Snowmobile Access

**Motorized Access under Alternative A**

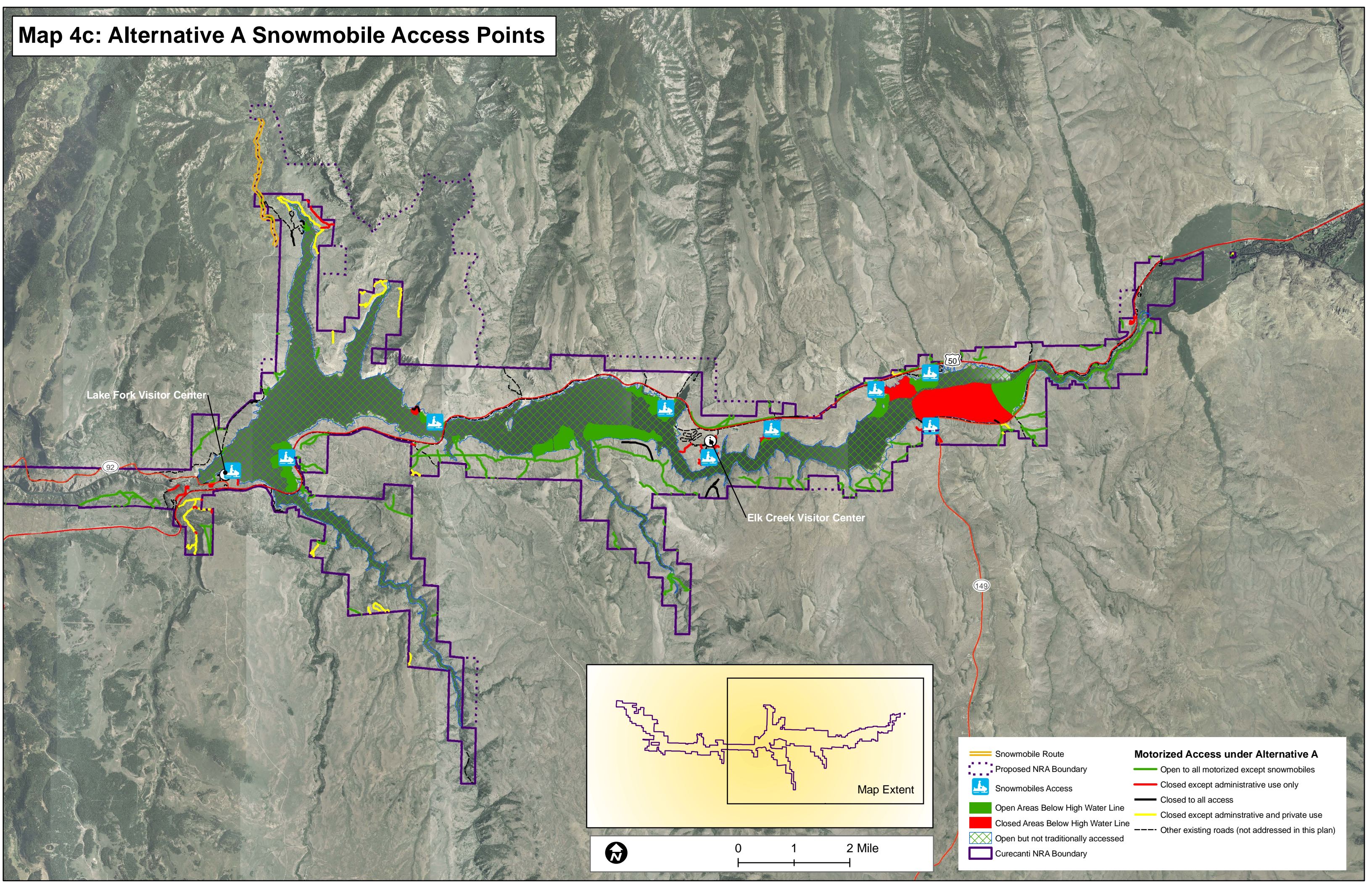
- Open to all motorized except snowmobiles
- Closed except administrative use only
- Closed to all access
- Closed except administrative and private use
- Other existing roads (not addressed in this plan)
- Open Areas Below High Water Line
- Open but not traditionally accessed
- Curecanti NRA Boundary







Map 4c: Alternative A Snowmobile Access Points









## **ACTION ALTERNATIVES**

### **ELEMENTS COMMON TO ALL ACTION ALTERNATIVES**

#### **Designation of Motorized Vehicle Routes and Areas**

- Motorized vehicle use within the recreation area would be allowed only in areas designated as open by regulation, including routes and areas above and below the high water line of Blue Mesa Reservoir.
- Routes not designated as open to motorized access would be closed and allowed to recover naturally, or would be rehabilitated if and when funds become available.

#### **Designation of Snowmobile Access**

- With regard to areas of permitted snowmobile use, this plan only addresses the designation of access points and routes to the frozen surface of Blue Mesa Reservoir, where snowmobile use is permitted under the existing rule (36 CFR 7.51c). Changes in the pattern of snowmobile use are not being considered.
- Although this alternative would not change the pattern of snowmobile use at Curecanti National Recreation Area, two new snowmobile access points to the frozen surface of Blue Mesa Reservoir would be formalized: one at the Lake Fork boat ramp (only when snow and ice conditions are sufficient for snowmobile use) and one on the southeast shore of Iola Basin near Willow Creek. In addition, the most direct path from these points to the frozen surface would also be formalized as snowmobile access routes. These access points would be included on the official maps referenced in the existing snowmobile rule (36 CFR 7.51(c)).
- A traditional access route on USFS lands identified for NPS administration in the RPS would be preserved to allow connection to existing adjacent routes.

#### **Motorized Vehicle Access to Areas below the High Water Line of Blue Mesa Reservoir (Land-based)**

- Access below the high water line of Blue Mesa Reservoir would only be permitted from routes and areas designated as open to motorized vehicle use.

#### **Motorized Vehicle Closures**

- All routes and areas not officially designated as open would be closed to motorized vehicle access. This includes, but is not limited to:
  - Dry Creek, from the boat ramp west along the shoreline at the approximate 7,500-foot elevation mark
  - Two-track on Sometime Island (Note: Sometime Island is defined as the vegetated portion above the high water line. Refer to inset on map 4a)
  - Travel from the North Willow restroom to the unnamed branch of North Willow Creek to the east
  - From South Willow west to Iola

#### **Vehicle Requirements**

- The current Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) road regulations would apply to motorized vehicles in the recreation area.