



February 17, 2019

Congressman Joe Neguse
Att: Bo Morris
1419 Longworth HOB
Washington DC 20515

Re: CORE Wilderness Proposal – Curecanti NRA

Dear Congressman Neguse;

Please accept this correspondence as the comments of the above referenced Organizations vigorously opposing the Curecanti NRA portions of the CORE Wilderness Proposal hereinafter referred to as "the Proposal". After a detailed review of the Proposal, the Organizations have concluded that every area expanded or created in the Proposal would result in significant lost recreational opportunities for the overwhelming portion of visitors to the Proposal area, both currently and in the future. While there are significant lost opportunities, there is also no additional protections for multiple use routes that might remain outside the Wilderness areas and no new areas are designated or released for multiple use recreational opportunities.

Even areas, such as the Curecanti NRA, where diverse recreational opportunities are alleged to be protected, fail to recognize the wide range of recreation provided in the area which have been previously recognized by Congress. This failure would be evidenced by the fact the NRA characteristics fail to mention camping and any form of trail-based recreation. The Organizations vigorously assert that the designation of the Curecanti NRA would result in significant additional costs as the Curecanti area is managed under one of the newest RMP in the state and that planning process would need to start from scratch and the area has been managed as an NRA for an extended period of time.

While these comments will center on the Curecanti NRA portions of the Proposal, we have enclosed copies of our comments on Continental Divide and San Juan portions of the Proposal that were previously submitted. Each of these comments provides site specific maps comparing current management and opportunity to closures in the Proposal and a detailed explanation of our basis for opposition.

1a. Characteristics of Curecanti NRA conflict with previous Congressional conclusions that Curecanti possessed high quality multiple use opportunities.

The Organizations are deeply troubled by the wide range of high-quality low impact recreational opportunities in the Curecanti NRA area that receive no additional protection in the Proposal and could actually be put at risk of loss as many of the large existing recreational uses are not identified as a characteristic of the Curecanti NRA in the CORE Wilderness Act. Even more troubling is the fact that the Curecanti NRA designation is frequently identified as a large win for multiple use recreation in the CORE Wilderness act. After reviewing the provisions, the Organizations can find utterly no basis for such an assertion. It is frustrating that no basis or reason for this change is even mentioned in the CORE Wilderness proposal, making substantive comments on the issue challenging at best.

Prior to addressing these usages specifically, we would like to address our experiences around designating SMA, NRA, Monuments and similar designations and the critical need to clearly identify **all** usages to be protected as a characteristic of the area in the Legislative actions creating the area. Our Organizations were heavily involved in the development of the Hermosa Watershed legislation that was passed into law addressing management of more than 100,000 acres of public lands between Durango and Silverton in 2014.¹ As part of this legislation, an SMA was created to protect **all** forms of recreation, and specifically identified both motorized and non, summer and winter in the SMA. Even with these specific Congressional protections in the Hermosa Legislation, alternatives in planning were provided that closed extensive portions of the area to protected usages and some members of the public still sought to close opportunities despite their support of the legislation. We have also become aware of numerous permitted activities being put at risk after the designation of National Monuments, despite the fact the permitted event had occurred with diverse support for decades and was using resources specifically protected in the designation of the Monument. Despite recognition of the usage and resource in the Monument proclamation, permits that had been issued for decades were subjected to much higher scrutiny and public comment than ever before. Our experience has been that the characteristics of any area designated by Congress are critically important to the future management of the area.

It is our experience that clearly stating all actions to be protected in the designation is a critical step and this simply has not been done in the Curecanti NRA portions of the Proposal. There is a long history of diverse high-quality recreational opportunities being provided without

¹ Final version of this legislation is available as §3062 of S1847 also know as the National Defense Authorization Act of 2014.

controversy in the proposed Curecanti NRA. These high-quality multiple use opportunities have been specifically recognized when Congress passed legislation exploring a possible Congressional designation for the area in 1999. These are recreational opportunities that the Organizations and its members have enjoyed in the area including use of the 10 campgrounds located throughout the proposed NRA some of which are approaching 100 sites in size. When Congress mandated review of the Curecanti area for possible designation as an NRA, Congress specifically recognized that:

“Congress finds that...
 (8) land in and adjacent to the Black Canyon of the Gunnison Gorge is—
 (A) recognized for offering exceptional multiple use opportunities;”²

As a result of Public Law 107-76, the NPS undertook an extensive review and analysis of the recreational usage on the Curecanti NRA. This research specifically identified the wide range of important recreational opportunities on the Curecanti as the NPS identified the following breakdown of visitation to the area:³

Activities on this visit

Question 10a

On this visit, in which activities did you and your personal group participate within Curecanti NRA?

Results

- As shown in Figure 36, the most common activities in which visitor groups participated were:

- 47% General sightseeing
- 46% Fishing
- 38% Motor boating

- “Other” activities (7%) were:

- ATVing
- Biking
- Canoe camping
- Dump station
- Eat
- Exploring
- Jeep tour
- Junior Ranger program
- Learning about Curecanti NRA
- Motorcycling
- Mountain biking
- National Park Passport stamp
- Obtain boat permit
- Pine Creek Boat Ride
- Railroad exhibits
- Railroad history
- Sailing
- Shore camping on our boat
- Water sports (skiing, tubing)

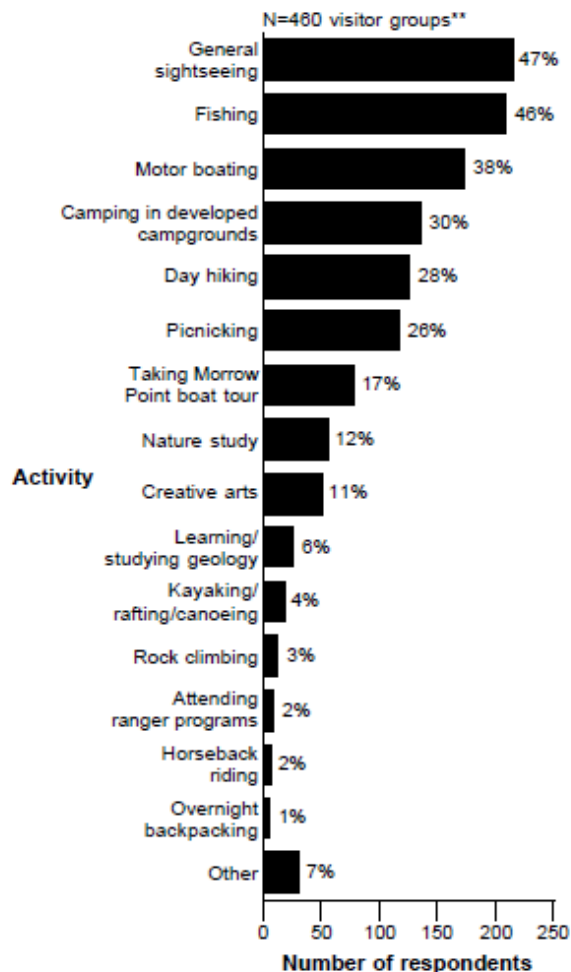


Figure 36. Activities on this visit

While there is a long history of high-quality multiple use recreation occurring in the Curecanti NRA with Congressional recognition and approval, the CORE Wilderness act seeks to greatly reduce the scope of these opportunities without discussion. Currently, the CORE Wilderness Act requires that the Curecanti NRA is to be managed for:

“(A) AUTHORIZATION. —Except as provided in subparagraph (B), the Secretary shall allow boating, boating-related activities, hunting, and fishing in the National Recreation Area in accordance with applicable Federal and State laws.”⁴

The wide range of recreational opportunities and diversity simply is not supported or protected when the characteristics of the Curecanti NRA are hunting, fishing and boating. In a troubling turn of events, hunting, which is identified as the reason less than 5% of visitors are using the Curecanti NRA is identified as a characteristic of the NRA, while other uses such as camping and trails-based usages, which are some of the highest visitations of the area are omitted. This simply lacks any basis in logic or fact and simply must be resolved to ensure that the current usages of the area are reflected as the Curecanti area is an area where all recreational usage exists with minimal conflicts and identified as one of the big wins for multiple use. Our position on that assertion is exactly the opposite.

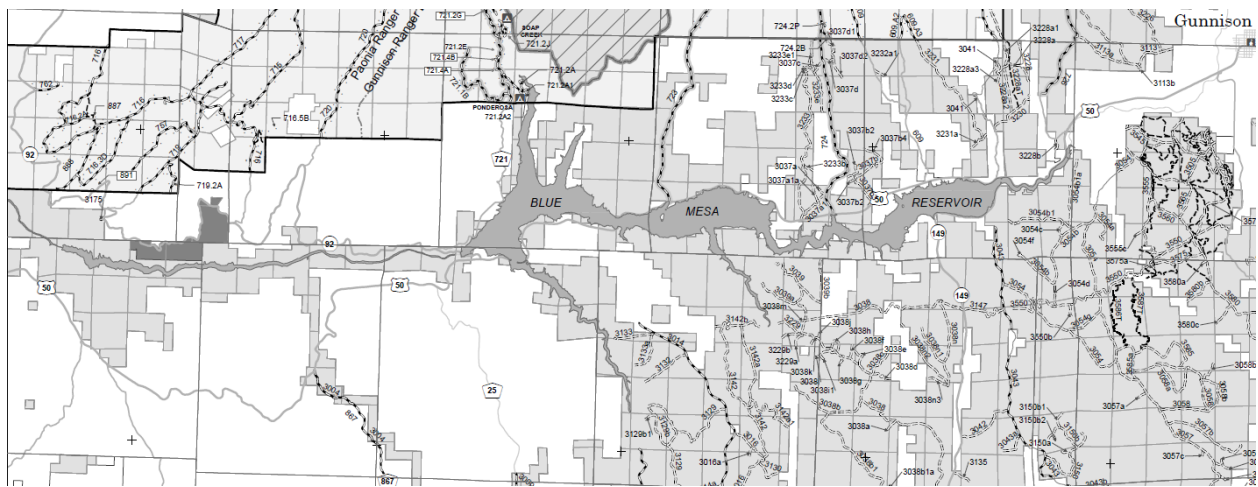
1b. Despite trails being one of the major uses of the Curecanti, this resource is not even mentioned as a characteristic of the NRA.

It is also significant to note that all forms of trail-based interests (hike, bike, ATV, motorcycle, horseback riding) are a major driver of recreational visitation to the area and this usage and resources needed to provide these opportunities is again omitted from identification as a characteristic of the proposed Curecanti NRA. The strength of this usage is the result of the extensive legal trail network in the proposed Curecanti NRA, which is reflected on the USFS MVUM map for the Gunnison South portion of the GMUG, which is below.⁵

⁴ See, §402(c)(4) of the CORE act proposal.

⁵ A complete version of this map is available here:

https://s3.amazonaws.com/ClubExpressClubFiles/266593/documents/Gunnison_South_GEO_PDF_426849723.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIB6I23VLJX7E4J7Q&Expires=1550245772&response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DGunnison_South_GEO_PDF.pdf&Signature=fgPJSLCVegBogm0grw7pz5YUUs%3D



This legal trail network has provided highly value recreational opportunities for all visitors to the Curecanti NRA area for decades without opposition and the Organizations submit this factor alone warrants inclusion of all forms of trail recreation as a criterion of any proposed Congressional designation. This is entirely unacceptable to the Organizations.

The value of the trail network on the Curecanti NRA is not limited to just the Curecanti geographic boundary area as the trails on the Curecanti NRA also serve as the sole access point for trails that access significant portions of BLM and USFS lands outside the NRA for a variety of other recreational activities. Some routes can be accessed with only lengthy road travels to other trailheads outside the Curecanti and access to some areas would be lost entirely if access through the Curecanti was lost. This trail network was just the basis of an EIS from the National Park Service in 2013, and as a result the Organizations believe that any resource issues should be minimal with the network. Loss of the Curecanti trail network would effectively close large tracts of land outside the NRA to public access for all usage. This is unacceptable.

2. Designation of the Curecanti NRA is an example of how not to cost effectively manage areas.

The Organizations would be remiss if the complete lack of factual basis in other asserted benefits of the Congressional designation of the Curecanti NRA was not raised, such as the economic benefits for designation. This benefit at best needs significant more information to be factual supported as the NPS specifically recognizes that:

“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.”⁶

Given that Congress is already funding the Curecanti NRA directly we are unable to understand how this benefit is achieved. While the Organizations share the frustrations of multiple agencies attempting to manage small areas with conflicting management standards and goals and objectives, the Organizations assert this issue is not resolved with the NRA as each agency involved in management of the area is still involved after the NRA is designated.

The lack of factual basis for the position that the Curecanti NRA provisions of the CORE act will save money is completely conflicted by the fact the Curecanti and Black Canyon areas are the basis of some of the most recent planning efforts in the region. The RMP for the area was completed in 1999 and planning related to the RMP on specific issues was only completed in 2012. The Organizations have no theory how reentering planning efforts, that were so recently completed, could be seen as efficient. The Organizations submit this situation is an example of an impact of the CORE Wilderness act that should be avoided at all costs as this is a perfect example of administrative inefficiency rather than a cost savings.

3. Conclusion.

After a detailed review of the Proposal, the Organizations have concluded that every area expanded or created in the Proposal would result in significant lost recreational opportunities for the overwhelming portion of visitors to the Proposal area, both currently and in the future. Rather than streamlining the management of these areas, the Proposal would create a major management barrier and greatly increase the costs of any management activities that might be undertaken in these areas. This will negatively impact recreational access both in the Proposal area and in areas that are outside the new management standards in the Proposal. While there are significant lost opportunities, there is also no additional protections for multiple use recreational opportunities such as camping and trail networks in the Curecanti NRA area. The Organizations still fail to understand the management concerns or perceived threats that are driving the discussion around the need for additional protection of these areas and after a review of previous Congressional action and NPS research addressing the Curecanti area the Organizations can find no basis for the Legislation as the Proposal would provide a major barrier to the utilization of recreational facilities in the planning areas.

⁶ See, National Park Service; *Curecanti National Recreation area; Background Slide Show*; August 2008 at slide 3. A complete version of the presentation is available here. <https://www.nps.gov/cure/learn/management/rps.htm>

Please feel free to contact Scott Jones, Esq. if you should wish to discuss any of the issues that have been raised in these comments further. His contact information is Scott Jones, Esq., 508 Ashford Drive, Longmont Colorado 80504; phone 518-281-5810; email Scott.jones46@yahoo.com

Respectfully Submitted,

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CSA President



D.E. Riggle
Director of Operations
Trails Preservation Alliance

CC: Senator Bennet (w/o enclosures)