

Introduction

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Photos (clockwise): 1. Jackson Lake, Angeles National Forest. NPS Photo. 2. Devil's Punchbowl. NPS Photo. 3. Fishing in the San Gabriel River, NPS Photo. 4. Quail, Angeles National Forest. Photo by Eric Lowenbach.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose and Need

The San Gabriel River Watershed Study Act (PL 108-042, July 2003) directed the National Park Service (NPS) to conduct a Special Resource Study of (1) the San Gabriel River and its tributaries north of and including the city of Santa Fe Springs, and (2) the San Gabriel Mountains within the territory of the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC).

The Act also directed the NPS to consult with the RMC and other appropriate federal, state and local government entities, and to consider regional flood control and drainage needs and publicly-owned infrastructure such as wastewater treatment facilities.

This legislation was sponsored by former Congresswoman Hilda L. Solis and co-sponsored by twenty other congressional representatives in order to explore environmental and recreational opportunities in the region. NPS representatives met with Congresswoman Solis prior to initiating the study. The Congresswoman expressed her hopes that the study would lead to more open space and recreational opportunities to urban communities in the San Gabriel Valley that currently have inadequate recreational access and fewer opportunities to enjoy open space. Another desired outcome was to explore ways to provide a better quality of life for urban communities by addressing clean air and water, as well as health-related issues such as obesity and diabetes. The Congresswoman also expressed a desire to see a National Park Service experience, including rangers along the San Gabriel River, who would be made available to these urban communities.

The purpose of this special resource study is to determine whether any portion of the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains study area is eligible to be designated as a unit of the national park system. Through the study process, the NPS identified alternative strategies to manage, protect, or restore the study area's resources, and to provide or enhance recreational opportunities. These alternatives explore partnerships and efforts to protect important resources in ways that do not necessarily require the commitment of funds and staff by the NPS. This study will provide information to aid the Congress, the United States Department of the Interior, and the NPS in determining whether designation of a unit of the national park system is desirable and appropriate.

The National Park System New Area Studies Act (PL 105-391, 16 U.S.C. Sec. 1a-5) requires that these studies be prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). At the beginning of the study process, the NPS initiated a notice of scoping in the Federal Register (Vol. 70, No. 12, pp. 3064-3065). Through this public scoping process, the NPS study team identified a range of issues to address through the study and impacts of concern to the public.

Following public comment on the preliminary study alternatives, the study team determined that an environmental assessment (EA) is a sufficient level of environmental analysis for this study. No significant impacts are anticipated from the findings and recommendations of this study. The majority of the public concerns centered around potential impacts to local land use control, property rights, water rights, and the authority of existing regulatory agencies. To address this concern, the NPS committed to providing study recommendations that respect property rights and the authorities that currently belong to existing local, state and federal agencies and jurisdictions.

In initiating the study, the NPS study team launched an extensive public scoping process to determine needs and issues that should be considered in carrying out the study. The comment period extended from January 2005 to May 2005. During this time, the NPS received comments from cities, agencies, organizations, elected officials, and community members regarding the scope of the study.

Following this extensive public process, the NPS study team further refined the study's emphasis and scope to address public interests and concerns. Acknowledging the characteristics of this study area which includes densely populated urban areas managed by many different landowners, agencies, and jurisdictions, the NPS study team emphasized opportunities for collaborative management and partnerships with local, state and federal governments and other entities, in order to:

1. Address current and future recreation and open space needs;
2. Protect or restore significant natural resources and important habitats;
3. Preserve historic and cultural resources; and
4. Maintain or improve water quality, water conservation and flood protection.

Furthermore, the National Park Service considered only those management alternatives which respect property rights and the authorities that currently belong to existing local, state and federal agencies.

Issues Addressed in Study

Through the scoping process, numerous stakeholders including public agencies, citizens, organizations, and elected officials, identified specific issues and concerns that should be considered in the study process. The following issues were developed by the study team based on public and stakeholder input. These issues are described more fully in Chapter 6, *Alternatives*.

- Additional *funding* is needed to meet their resource protection and recreation objectives.
- There are sufficient *barriers to outdoor recreation* for some communities including lack of close to home recreational opportunities, poor access to recreational areas, and personal safety concerns.
- The Los Angeles area continues to experience tremendous population growth *causing increasing demands on existing recreation areas*.
- Greater protection is needed for the region's threatened *ecological communities*.
- The study area's *cultural resources* would benefit from further documentation, protection, and/or interpretation.
- The *study area lacks a clear sense of identity* that could help connect communities to the natural and cultural resources of the San Gabriel Mountains and the Puente-Chino Hills.
- The region's natural, cultural, and recreation resources *lack a comprehensive management plan* and could benefit from a regional planning structure.
- There is an ongoing need to protect and restore riparian ecosystems and provide appropriate recreational use of waterways while *improving water quality, enhancing efficiency of water storage and use, and providing flood protection*.

Study Area

The study legislation directed the NPS to conduct a Special Resource Study of the following areas: (1) the San Gabriel River and its tributaries north of, and including, the city of Santa Fe Springs; and (2) the San Gabriel Mountains within the territory of the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy. The NPS defined the area for study, through examining the study act's legislative history and intent, and through the public scoping process.

The study area covers more than 1,000 square miles (over 700,000 acres) in the greater Los Angeles metropolitan region. It is one of the most densely populated and diverse areas of the United States. Most of the study area is located in Los Angeles County (approximately 85%), the remainder lies in Orange and San Bernardino counties. In addition to the portions of San Gabriel River Watershed, the study area also includes portions of the Los Angeles River, the Santa Clara River, and the Antelope Valley watersheds, as well as very small portions of the Santa Ana River and Mojave watersheds. A map of the study area watersheds is provided in Chapter 2, *Resource Description*.

The U.S. Forest Service manages approximately two thirds of the study area (450,000 acres in the San Gabriel Mountains) as part of the Angeles National Forest (ANF). With the exception of private inholdings and access facilities for flood protection structures and other utilities, the forest remains primarily undeveloped. In close proximity to highly urban areas, the forest provides a refuge for wildlife and recreational opportunities for the greater Los Angeles metropolitan region.

Over fifty communities are located in the study area with approximately 1.5 million residents as of 2000 census (see Map: Local Communities). The Los Angeles metropolitan region is home to over 16 million residents. The largest communities in the study area south of the San Gabriel Mountains include Pomona and Santa Clarita with populations near 150,000. The City of Palmdale is the largest community at the northern end of the study area with approximately 115,000 residents.

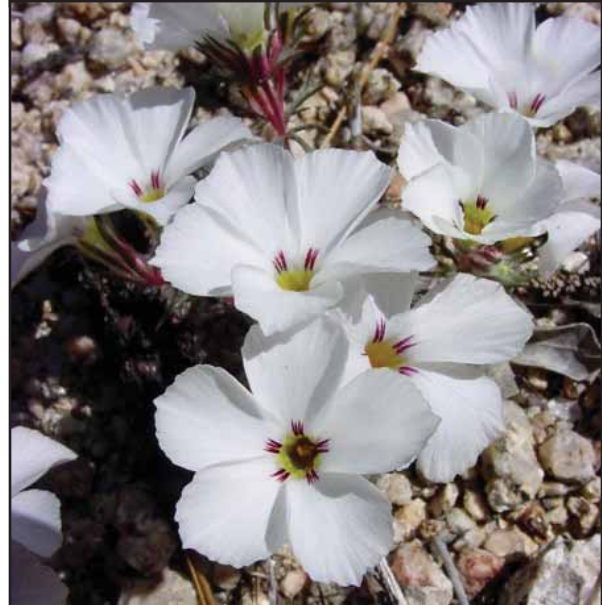
The study area is part of a complex landscape where the geomorphic provinces of the Transverse Ranges and Peninsular Ranges come together. The mountains, hills, and valleys of these provinces characterize the regional landscape. Major topographic features include the San Gabriel Mountains, the San Jose Hills, and the Puente-Chino Hills. The mountains and hills define valleys,

including the Santa Clarita, Antelope and San Gabriel valleys, and other portions of the Los Angeles basin and coastal plain. The northern limit of the study area includes the southwestern extent of the Mojave Desert in the Antelope Valley (See Figure 1: Location and Context).

The San Gabriel Valley and the Los Angeles basin are highly urbanized areas. Much of the San Gabriel River and its tributaries downstream of the mountains and the foothills have been altered for flood control purposes and water conservation. Despite their altered state, these urbanized channels still serve as habitat for birds and mammals. The urbanized channels also provide opportunities for public enjoyment. Small tracts of open space, recreational areas, and a 39-mile bike trail along the San Gabriel River corridor provide existing outdoor recreational opportunities.

The San Jose and Puente-Chino Hills contain lower density urban development and still retain areas with significant open space. Areas in the southern San Gabriel foothills are also developed at a lower density than the highly urbanized areas in the valleys and coastal plains. These foothills function as the urban/wildland interface, and provide wildlife connections to river and stream corridors. The northern slopes of the San Gabriel Mountains are comprised of low density, rural communities with farms and ranches, although urban development has begun to spread to the Soledad basin and the Antelope Valley in recent years.

The San Gabriel River and mountains played an important role in the history and heritage of California. The first recorded inhabitants of the study area were the Gabrieleno/Tongva, Fernandeño, and Chumash Native Americans. There are a number of culturally significant properties within the study area, including hundreds of archeological sites within the Angeles National Forest. Many sites are eligible for, or listed on, the National Register of Historic Places. Mission Vieja, the original site of the San Gabriel Mission, is located on the Rio Hondo River. Engineered sections of the San Gabriel River were constructed as early as the 1930's, and may be historically significant. Three national trails cross the study area: the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail, the Old Spanish National Historic Trail, and the Pacific Crest Trail.



Photos (top to bottom): 1. View to Brown Mountain, Angeles Crest. 2007. NPS photo. 2. Rio Hondo, Puente Hills with the San Gabriel Mountains in the distance. Photo by Bruce Perry, Department of Geological Sciences, CSU Long Beach. 3. Lianthus. Photo courtesy of Michael Charters.

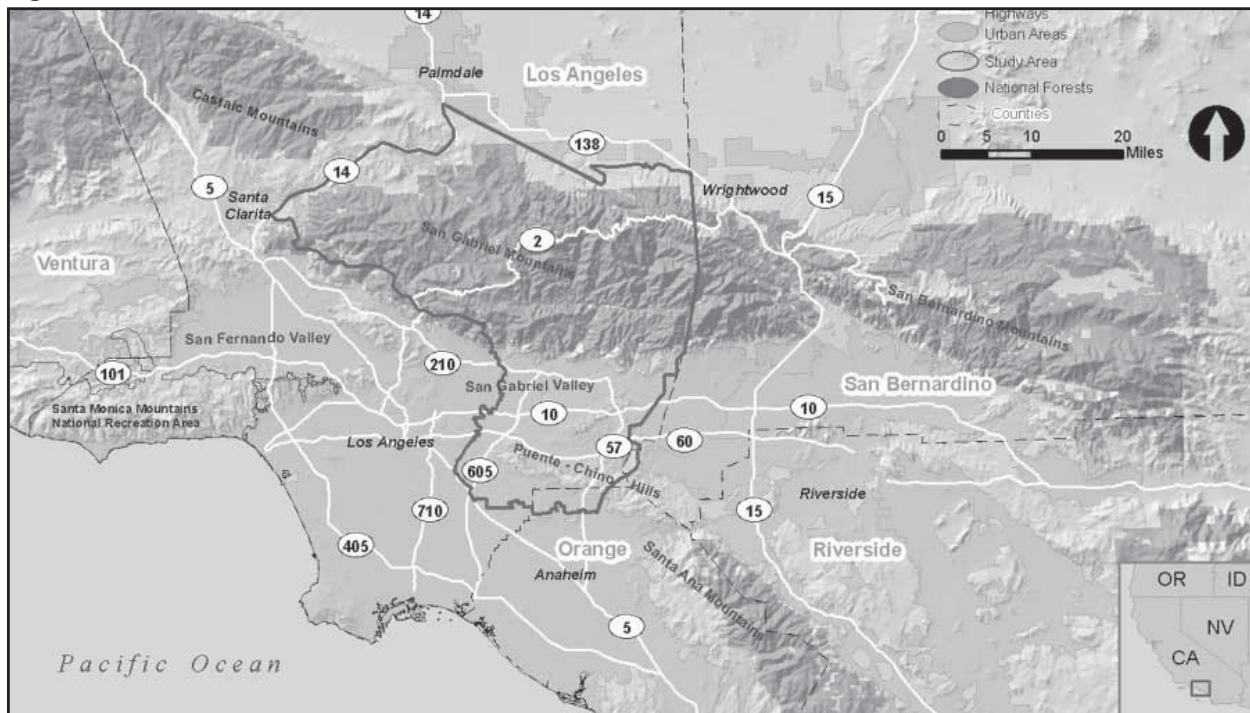
Access

Interstate 5 is the main access route from the north as it winds through the Tejon Pass in the Tehachapi Mountains to enter the Los Angeles basin from the north. Interstate 5 runs southeasterly through the Los Angeles basin and continues south along the coast to San Diego. Highway 101 is the main coastal access route from the northwest. Access to the Los Angeles basin via Highway 101 is through the Santa Monica Mountains.

Other access routes to the study area include Highway 14, which follows the Soledad basin along the northwestern base of San Gabriel Mountains from Santa Clarita to the Antelope Valley. The Angeles Crest Highway (Highway 2) is the only major route that winds north through the heart of the rugged San Gabriel Mountains connecting Pasadena to the town of Wrightwood and ultimately to Highway 138. However, portions of Highway 2 in the Angeles National Forest are often closed for repair.

Interstate 10 is the major east-west access route through the study area. Additional east-west highways through the Los Angeles basin include Interstate 205, State Route 60, and Interstate 405. Highway 138 is the major east-west corridor north of the San Gabriel Mountains. Regional north-south freeways include Interstate 710, Interstate 605, which follows the San Gabriel River, and State Route 57, which runs along the eastern end of Los Angeles County.

Figure 1: Location and Context



Study Process

LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY DIRECTION

Several laws and policies outline criteria for units of the national park system. The National Park System New Area Studies Act (PL 105-391, 16 U.S.C. Sec. 1a-5) establishes the basic process for NPS studies of potential new national park areas. NPS management policies provide further guidance. According to NPS management policies, a proposed addition to the national park system will receive a favorable recommendation from the NPS only if it meets all of the following four criteria for inclusion:

1. it possesses nationally significant natural or cultural resources;
2. it is a suitable addition to the system;
3. it is a feasible addition to the system; and
4. it requires direct NPS management, instead of alternative protection by other public agencies or the private sector.

These four criteria are designed to ensure that the national park system includes only the most outstanding examples of the nation's natural and cultural resources. They also recognize that there are other management alternatives for preserving the nation's outstanding resources.

Alternatives for National Park Service management are developed for study areas that meet all four of the criteria for inclusion, as shown above. Further definition of each of these criteria is provided in the related sections of this report.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The NPS San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study process was initiated in January 2005 with a series of meetings with public agencies. Public scoping meetings were held in March 2005 in Claremont, Diamond Bar, Downey, Rosemead, and Acton. A newsletter was published to announce the start of scoping, describe the study process, and to provide information on how the public and stakeholders could participate in the study process.

The scoping comment period extended until May 20, 2005. The NPS continued discussions with affected agencies and jurisdictions through the fall of 2005 to address specific concerns. To share the results of scoping with the public, the study team distributed a second newsletter with a summary of the comments received by the NPS during the public scoping period.

In early 2006, the National Park Service revised the study scope to address comments and concerns received during the scoping process. The revised scope refined the study area to include portions of the Rio Hondo River and removed from the study area the cities within the Gateway Cities Council of Governments jurisdiction as was intended in the legislation. The revised study scope also addressed concerns about potential impacts on local land use control and agency authorities. The NPS committed to producing a study that would respect property rights and the authorities that currently belong to existing local, state and federal agencies. The NPS study team produced a third newsletter to notify the public and stakeholders of the revised study scope.

Between 2006 and 2008, the NPS conducted resource analysis and developed preliminary alternatives. The NPS worked with local agencies and resource experts in analyzing the significance of the study area resources. In 2007-2008, the NPS worked on development of the preliminary alternatives, consulting with other recreation and land conservation agencies within the study area. More information about outreach efforts during this time period is included in Chapter 8 of the study report, Consultation and Coordination.

In fall of 2009, the NPS study team released draft alternatives for public review and comment. The study team produced and distributed over 3,000 newsletters to organizations and individuals on its mailing list, partner agencies, and at public and stakeholder meetings. A limited number of newsletters translated into Spanish were also distributed. The newsletter was also available for

comment on the study website. Between August and October 2009, the study team held six public meetings at locations throughout the study area including Diamond Bar, El Monte, Santa Clarita, Glendora, Palmdale, and Tujunga.

All of the meetings were well attended by diverse groups of community members (approximately 450 total) despite the fact that the Station Fire, which significantly affected the Angeles National Forest and surrounding communities, was burning during this time. In addition to the public meetings, the NPS study team held meetings with local, state and federal government agencies, organizations, communities, and Congressional offices. The NPS study team received approximately 4,800 comments. Most of these comments were submitted via written letters and through e-mail. The NPS revised the alternatives based on the public comments. Additional stakeholder meetings were held with various agencies in early 2010 to address specific concerns.

Throughout the study process, all information sent by mail was made available on the study website, www.nps.gov/pwro/sangabriel. Numerous articles and opinion pieces about the study appeared in area newspapers.

RESOURCE ANALYSIS

The study team used information gathered from the scoping process, public databases, environmental impact reports, land and resource management agencies, and other resource specialists to assess the significance and suitability of the area's resources and to develop alternatives for the study area. The NPS found resources within the San Gabriel Mountains and Puente-Chino Hills to be of national significance and suitable for inclusion in the national park system. A summary of the preliminary findings and alternatives were presented in Newsletter #4. Chapters 3 and 4 provided the full analysis of significance and suitability.

FEASIBILITY

The National Park Service determined that a collaborative partnership-based park unit which respects the complex mix of land use, ownership, and regulatory authority in the study area is feasible. While a large traditional national park unit, owned and operated solely by the NPS would likely be infeasible, opportunities for collaborative management with local, state and federal managers to protect natural and cultural resources, provide recreation, public access, interpretation and educational opportunities, and other compatible uses in an NPS partnership-based park unit have

been demonstrated to exist. Chapter 5, *Feasibility*, contains the full feasibility analysis.

DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVES

Four alternatives are presented in this study report, including the “no action” alternative which describes the continuation of current management and serves as a baseline for comparison for the other three action alternatives. Two of the three action alternatives include designation of a national park unit. All three alternatives respect private property rights and existing agency authority. The NPS alternatives propose collaborative management models that do not require extensive land management by the NPS. See Chapter 6, *Alternatives*, for a full description of the study alternatives.

REPORT PUBLICATION, REVIEW AND TRANSMITTAL

Publication of the *Draft San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment* will be followed by a 90-day public comment period. The NPS study team will then revise the report if needed, and transmit it to the Secretary of the Interior. The Secretary will transmit the report to Congress, along with the Secretary’s recommendation for the area.

Related Plans and Studies

This section describes regional or coordinated planning efforts have recently been completed and which provided guidance and resource information for the study.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA NATIONAL FORESTS LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN, ANGELES NATIONAL FOREST STRATEGY (2005)

The Land Management Plan guides forest managers in site-specific planning and decision-making for the Angeles National Forest, including policies for the types of activities and special designations that can occur within each national forest. Project-level decisions that are subsequently designed and implemented must be consistent with the direction described in the plan.

SAN GABRIEL RIVER MASTER PLAN (2005)

The San Gabriel River Master Plan represents a shared vision for the San Gabriel River corridor. A steering committee representing cities, other public agencies, water groups, and community and environmental groups developed this shared vision of the river and a plan for how to achieve it.

The master plan integrates many objectives, including: habitat, recreation, open space, flood control, water supply and economic development, and identifies priorities, provides guidance, and coordinates multiple goals of the many jurisdictions and other stakeholders that share the river, reflecting the consensus of all these stakeholders.

GREATER LOS ANGELES COUNTY INTEGRATED REGIONAL WATER MANAGEMENT PLAN (2006)

The purpose of the Greater Los Angeles County Integrated Regional Water Management Plan (IRWMP) is to improve water supplies, enhance water supply reliability, improve surface water quality, preserve flood protection, conserve habitat, and expand recreational access in the Los Angeles Region. The IRWMP also defines a comprehensive vision for greater Los Angeles County which will generate local funding, position the region for future state bonds, and create opportunities for federal funding.

COMMON GROUND: FROM MOUNTAINS TO THE SEA (2001)

Common Ground is a joint plan undertaken by two California state land conservancies, the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles rivers and Mountains Conservancy and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. The Common Ground plan articulates a vision for the watersheds of the San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers and provides a framework for future watershed and open space planning. The overall vision is to “restore balance between natural and human systems in the watershed.” The key component of the plan is a set of guiding principles, which provide over-arching goals for future open space planning in the dual watersheds.

PUENTE HILLS LANDFILL NATIVE HABITAT PRESERVATION AUTHORITY RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN (2007)

The Resource Management Plan (RMP) was designed to guide the preservation and recreational uses of land managed and/or owned by the Habitat Authority. The main components of the RMP include habitat restoration, fuel modification management, a trails plan, an interpretive element and cultural resource management - all within the Puente Hills.

Emerald Necklace Park Vision and Accord - Amigos de los Rios (2005)

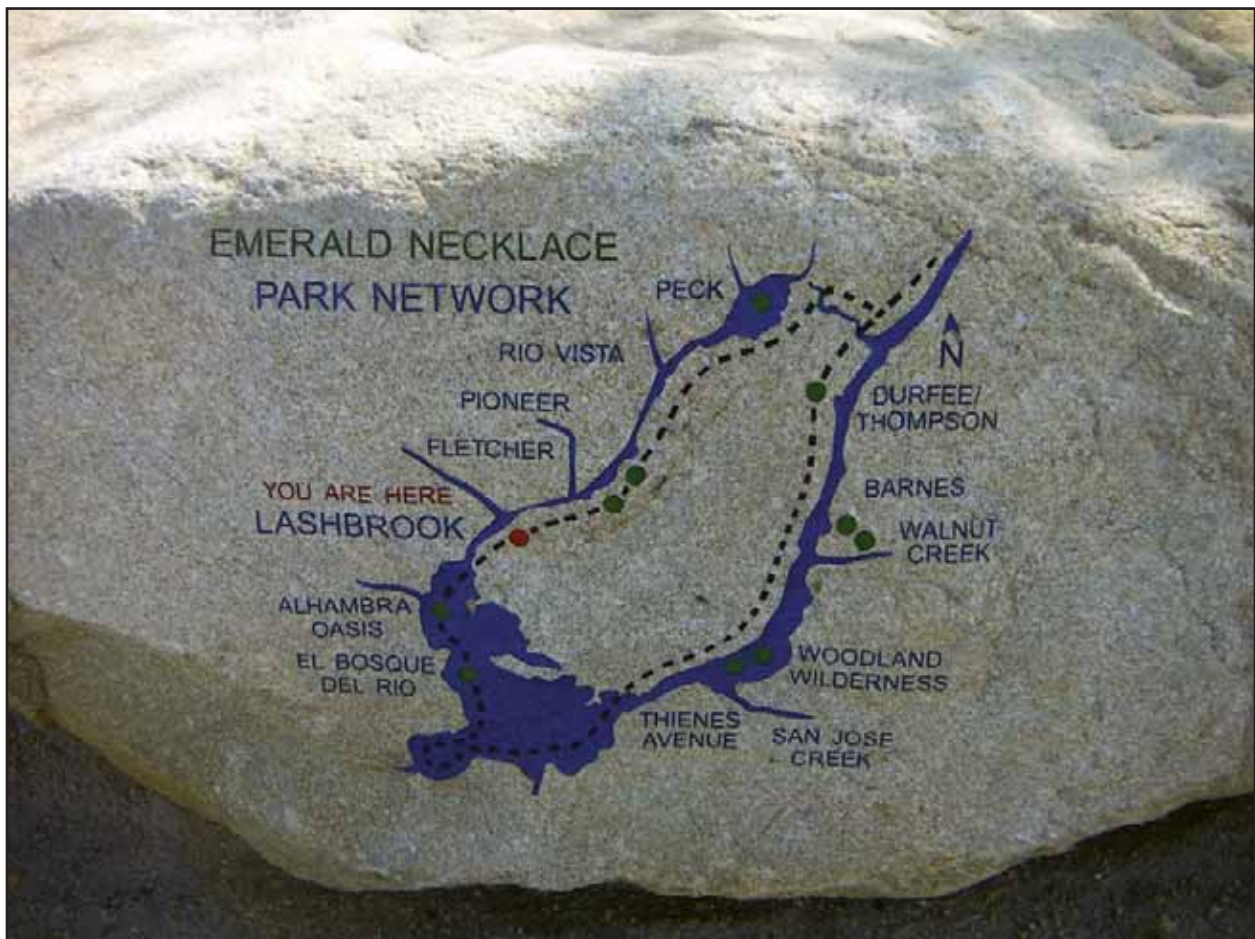
The Emerald Necklace is a vision for a 17-mile loop of parks and greenways connecting 10 cities and nearly 500,000 residents along the Río Hondo and San Gabriel rivers. The Emerald Necklace Accord is an agreement among agencies and cities of the region to preserve the rivers and tributaries for recreational, open space, and native habitat conservation and restoration purposes.

Los Angeles County Draft 2035 General Plan

The Los Angeles County 2035 General Plan provides the policy framework for how and where the unincorporated county will grow through the year 2035. Comprising approximately 2,650 square miles, unincorporated Los Angeles County is home to over one million people. The Los Angeles County 2035 General Plan accommodates new housing and jobs within the unincorporated area in anticipation of population growth in the county and the region.

America's Great Outdoors: A Promise to Future Generations (February 2011)

In April 2010, President Obama launched the America's Great Outdoors Initiative. Listening sessions were held in communities throughout America to initiate a dialogue about conservation. *The America's Great Outdoors report: A Promise to Future Generations* is a result of that dialogue. The outlines ways in which the federal government will help empower local communities to accomplish their conservation and recreation priorities. Many of the initiatives and recommendations overlap with the goals of this study including: 1) connecting Americans to the great outdoors; 2) conserving and restoring America's great outdoors; and 3) working together for America's great outdoors.



Emerald Necklace Park Network location map. NPS Photo.