



*View of downtown Los Angeles and basin from Griffith Park. Photo: NPS.*

# INTRODUCTION 1





# Chapter 1: Introduction

An introduction to the purpose, scope, and issues of the study

## Purpose

The Consolidated Natural Resources Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-229, May 2008) directed the National Park Service (NPS) to conduct a special resource study of the area known as the Rim of the Valley Corridor, which is described in this legislation as the area generally including the mountains encircling the San Fernando, La Crescenta, Santa Clarita, Simi, and Conejo Valleys in southern California (*Figure 1-1: Regional Context*). The legislation directed that the study determine (1) the suitability and feasibility of designating all or a portion of the corridor as a unit of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area; and (2) the methods and means for the protection and interpretation of this corridor by the National Park Service, other federal, state, or local government entities or private or non-profit organizations. The legislation is contained in *Appendix A: Study Legislation*.

To achieve the first objective, this study analyzes whether any portion of the Rim of the Valley Corridor study area is eligible to be designated as a unit of the national park system or added to the existing park unit of Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA). To achieve the second objective the study analyzes the methods and means for protecting and interpreting the natural and cultural resources of the study area by the National Park Service, other federal, state, and local government entities and/or private and non-profit organizations.

The study was prepared following the process established by the National Park System New Area Studies Act (P.L. 105-391, 16 U.S.C. Sec.1a-5), contained in *Appendix B: New Areas Studies Act*. This law requires that special resource (new area) studies be prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (42 U.S.C. § 4321-4347). The determination of whether any part of the study area qualifies as an addition (or boundary adjustment) to an existing unit of the national park system is based on criteria

for boundary adjustments as described in *NPS Management Policies 2006* (Section 3.5), contained in *Appendix C: NPS Management Policies 2006*.

Establishing a new unit of the national park system or expanding the boundary of SMMNRA would require Congressional action.

The study legislation also requires the Secretary of the Interior to document the process used to develop the *SMMNRA Fire Management Plan* and all activity conducted pursuant to the plan designed to protect lives and property from wildfire. This documentation can be found in *Appendix G: Process Used to Develop the 2005 Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area Fire Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement*.

## Need

In this multi-pronged study, the study team sought to understand the location, character and condition of resources in the corridor, their relationship to SMMNRA, and the range of issues associated with their protection and interpretation. While much of this information and analysis is related to both study objectives, the definition of issues facing the Rim of the Valley Corridor was necessary in order to identify potential roles for the NPS and other federal, state, and local government entities or private and non-profit organizations, as called for in objective two of the study legislation. Four main issues were identified through comments received during public scoping, legislative testimony for the authorizing legislation (Shaddox 2007), and resource inventories.

The four main issues are:

1. ensuring long-term conservation of nationally significant resources;
2. protecting or enhancing the remaining wildlife and plant habitat connections within the Rim of the Valley Corridor;

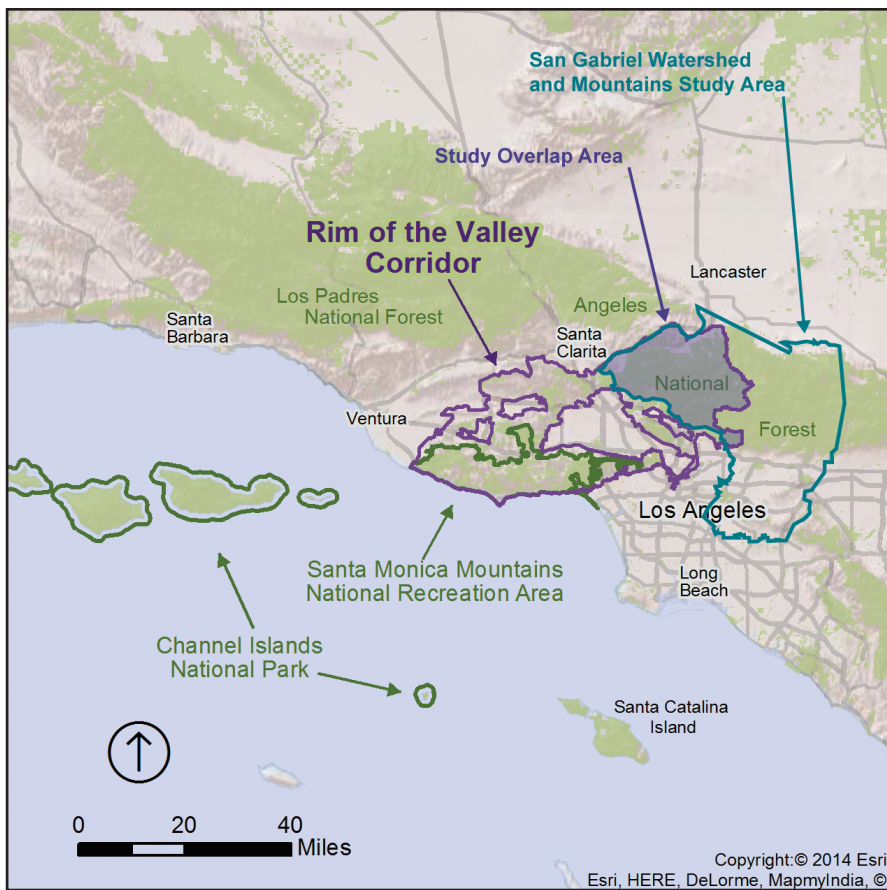


Figure 1-1: Regional Context

3. preserving and enhancing access to recreational opportunities and open space in the study area for visitors and residents in the second largest metropolitan area in the country; and
4. providing regional coordination to complete the Rim of the Valley Trail system and achieve other resource conservation goals.

Further explanation of the nature of these issues is provided following the description of the study area.

### Study Area

The study legislation directed the NPS to conduct a special resource study of the area known as the Rim of the Valley Corridor, generally including the mountains encircling the San Fernando, La Crescenta, Santa Clarita, Simi, and Conejo Valleys in southern California. The National Park Service defined the area for study by examining the study act's legislative history and intent, through public documents that use the term "Rim of the Val-

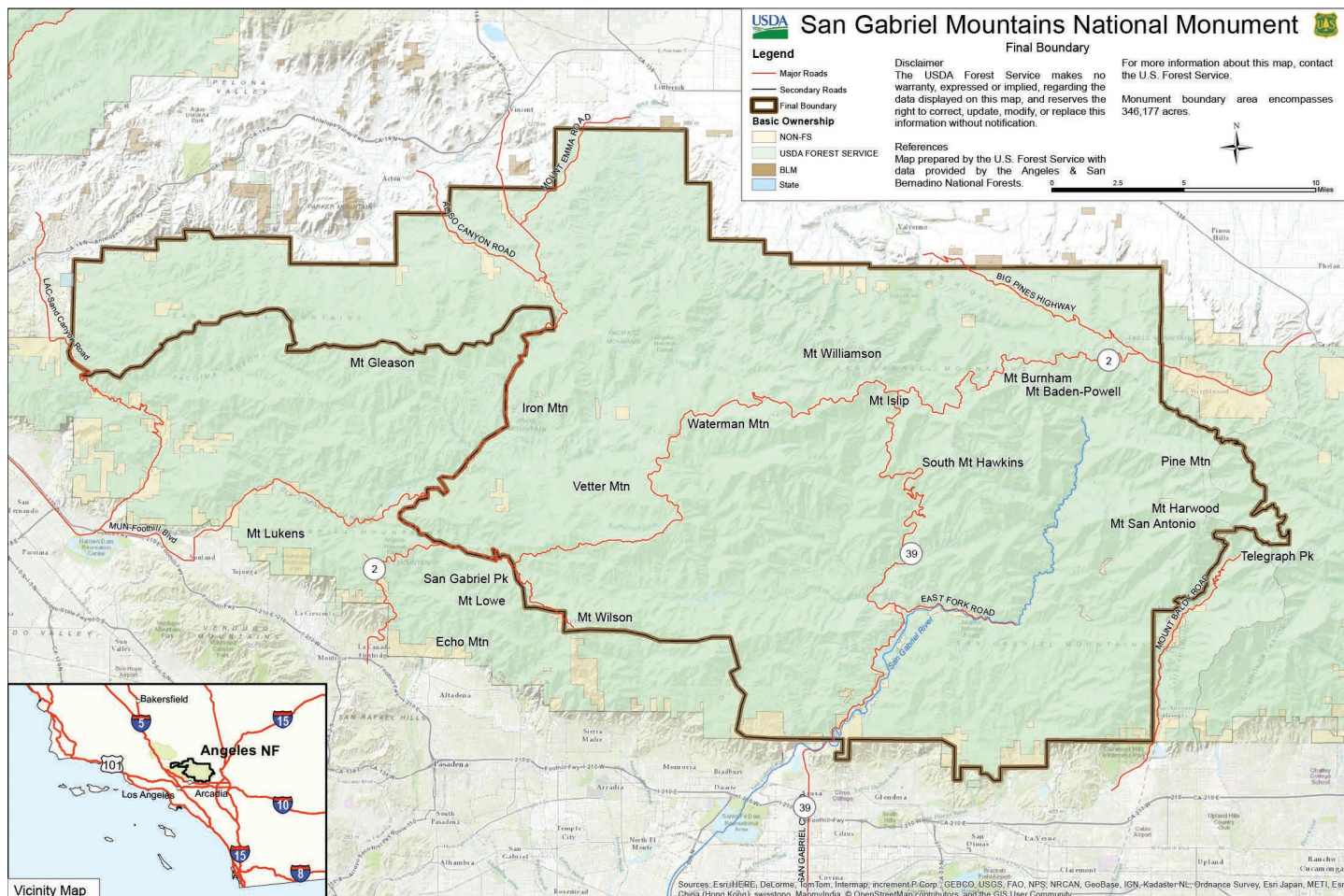
ley Corridor," and through the public scoping process. The team determined that the area "known as the Rim of the Valley Corridor" refers to the State of California's *Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy Zone - Rim of the Valley Corridor* map first approved by the State of California in 1984. This map was adopted as the study area for this special resource study (Figure 1-2: Study Area).

The study area covers more than 1,000 square miles (650,000 acres) in two counties in the greater Los Angeles metropolitan region. It includes some of the most densely populated and diverse areas of the United States. Seventy-four percent of the study area is located in Los Angeles County and 26% is located in Ventura County. Spanning both Los Angeles and Ventura counties, the study area includes portions of the Santa Monica Mountains, Simi Hills, Santa Susana Mountains, Verdugo Mountains, San Rafael Hills, and San Gabriel Mountains.

Portions of at least 27 communities are located in the study area, with approximately 5.1 million residents. The greater Los Angeles metropolitan region is home to more than 18 million residents. The largest communities in the study area with populations over 100,000 residents include the cities of Los Angeles (3.8 million), Glendale (192,000), Santa Clarita (176,000), Pasadena (137,000), and Burbank (103,000) in Los Angeles County and the cities of Thousand Oaks (127,000) and Simi Valley (124,000) in Ventura County (Figure 1-3: Cities and Communities).

The majority of the lands in the study area (approximately 84%) are undeveloped open space or areas protected for conservation and recreation purposes. Federally protected areas within the study area include Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA), a unit of the national park system, the Angeles National Forest, and the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument (U.S. Forest Service) comprise a little over one-half of the study area lands. The study area also contains highly developed urban areas primarily located along the Los Angeles River and Arroyo Seco corridors and along some hillsides that are adjacent to the urbanized valleys/population centers.





## Relationship to the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study

In 2003, Congress directed the NPS to study resources within the San Gabriel Mountains and Watershed to determine whether all or part of the area is eligible for designation as a unit of the national park system. The study area covered approximately 700,000 acres of land in the greater Los Angeles Metropolitan Area. A portion of the area evaluated in the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study, the western San Gabriel Mountains and portions of the Upper Santa Clara River, is also included in the Rim of the Valley Corridor study area (*Figure 1-1: Regional Context*).

The NPS completed the *San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study* in April 2013. The study recommends: 1) designation of a San Gabriel Unit of SMMNRA (50,000 acres) that would include areas of the San Gabriel and Rio Hondo river corridors and the Puente-Chino Hills; 2) additional federal recognition, tools, and support for the Angeles National Forest; 3) collaboration between the USFS and the NPS to protect the significant resources of the San Gabriel mountains and watershed; and 4) NPS technical assistance to interested communities, agencies, and organizations to protect the region's wildlife corridors and provide close-to-home recreational opportunities (*Appendix H: San*

## *Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study & Environmental Assessment Findings and Recommendations for final recommendations and map).*

In the interest of efficiency and consistency, this study has adopted the analysis and final recommendations of the *San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study* for these areas. Those findings are restated throughout the document where appropriate.

## San Gabriel Mountains National Monument

On October 10, 2014, President Obama established the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument which became the eighth U.S. Forest Service national monument. The Antiquities Act of 1906 grants the President or Congress the authority to designate national monuments in order to protect "objects of historic or scientific interest." Located primarily in the Angeles National Forest, the monument is 346,177 acres (USFS 2014). The national monument recognizes the area's important geological, ecological, historic, scientific and recreational resources and is expected to bring additional resources to the area to improve visitor opportunities.



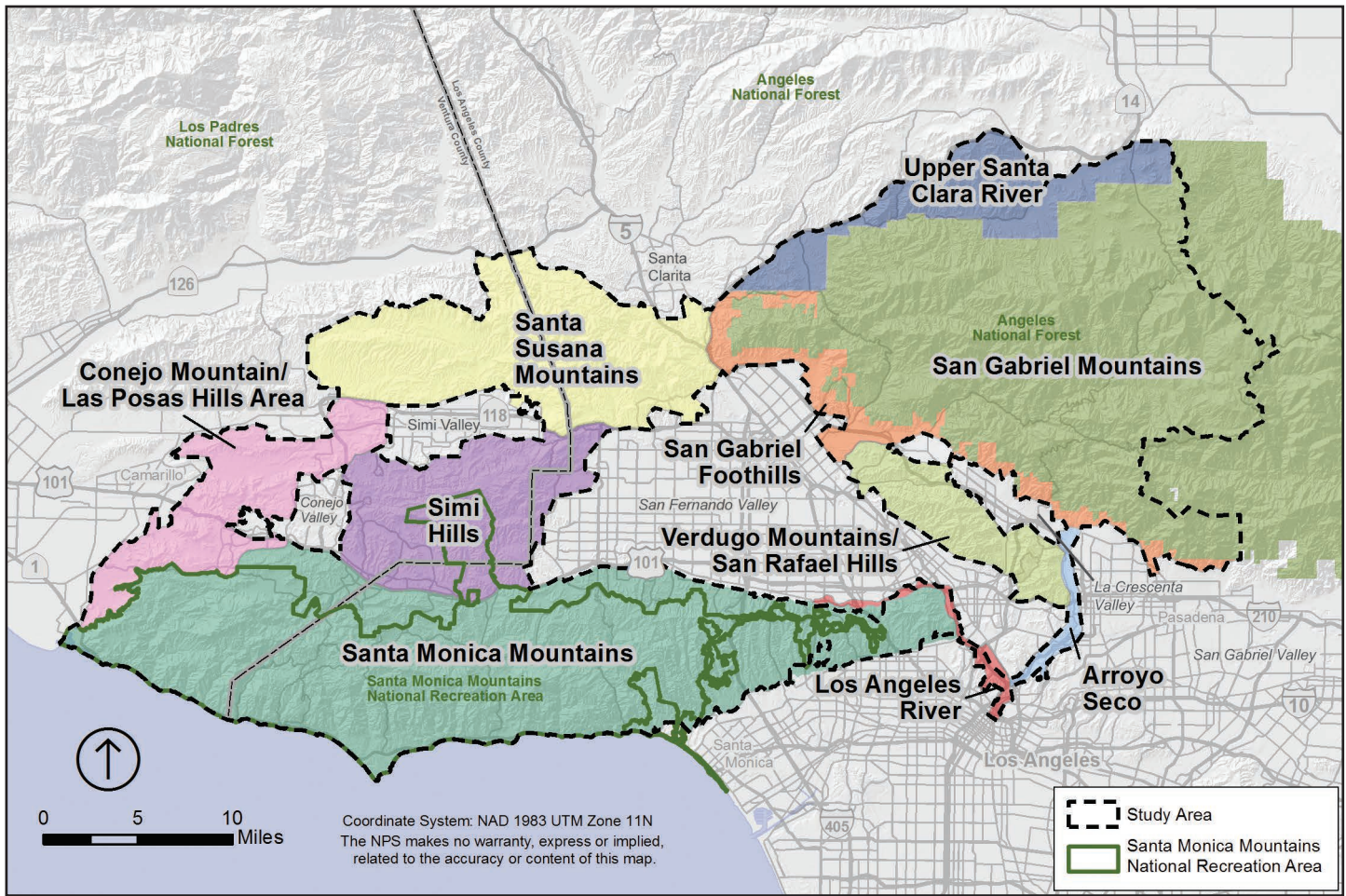


Figure 1-2: Study Area

As a whole, the study area is approximately 50% privately owned and 50% publicly owned. Of the 650,000 acre-study area, approximately one-quarter (approximately 153,000 acres) is within SMMNRA. Within the SMMNRA boundary, approximately 45% (70,000 acres) of the land is privately owned with the remaining 55% (84,000 acres) in public ownership. NPS owns approximately 15% (23,000 acres) of the land within SMMNRA. The remaining publicly owned land is held by the State of California and local government agencies. Several communities and entire cities, such as the City of Malibu, lie within the SMMNRA boundary. As described on pages 20 and 21, SMMNRA is managed through a unique partnership with other land management agencies. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) manages approximately one-quarter of the study area (180,000 acres in the San Gabriel Mountains) as part of the Angeles National Forest and San Gabriel Mountains National Monument.

Although federally-protected areas exist within the study area, the intent of Congress in authorizing the study was not to reconsider those designations, but rather to look at the area holistically to determine whether any areas are appropriate to add to SMMNRA, and to explore a variety of means for the protection and interpretation of this corridor by the full range of agencies and organizations working in the area (*Appendix A: Study Legislation*).

### ***Rim of the Valley Corridor Subareas***

Together, the mountains within SMMNRA, the Angeles National Forest, and San Gabriel Mountains National Monument serve as large natural areas that provide the majority of the study area's core habitat for native plant and wildlife species. The network of mountains, rivers and streams that connect these two large areas provide additional habitat and corridors that connect the region's core habitat areas. The study area is also near, but does not connect to, the Los Padres National Forest and the northern portion of the Angeles



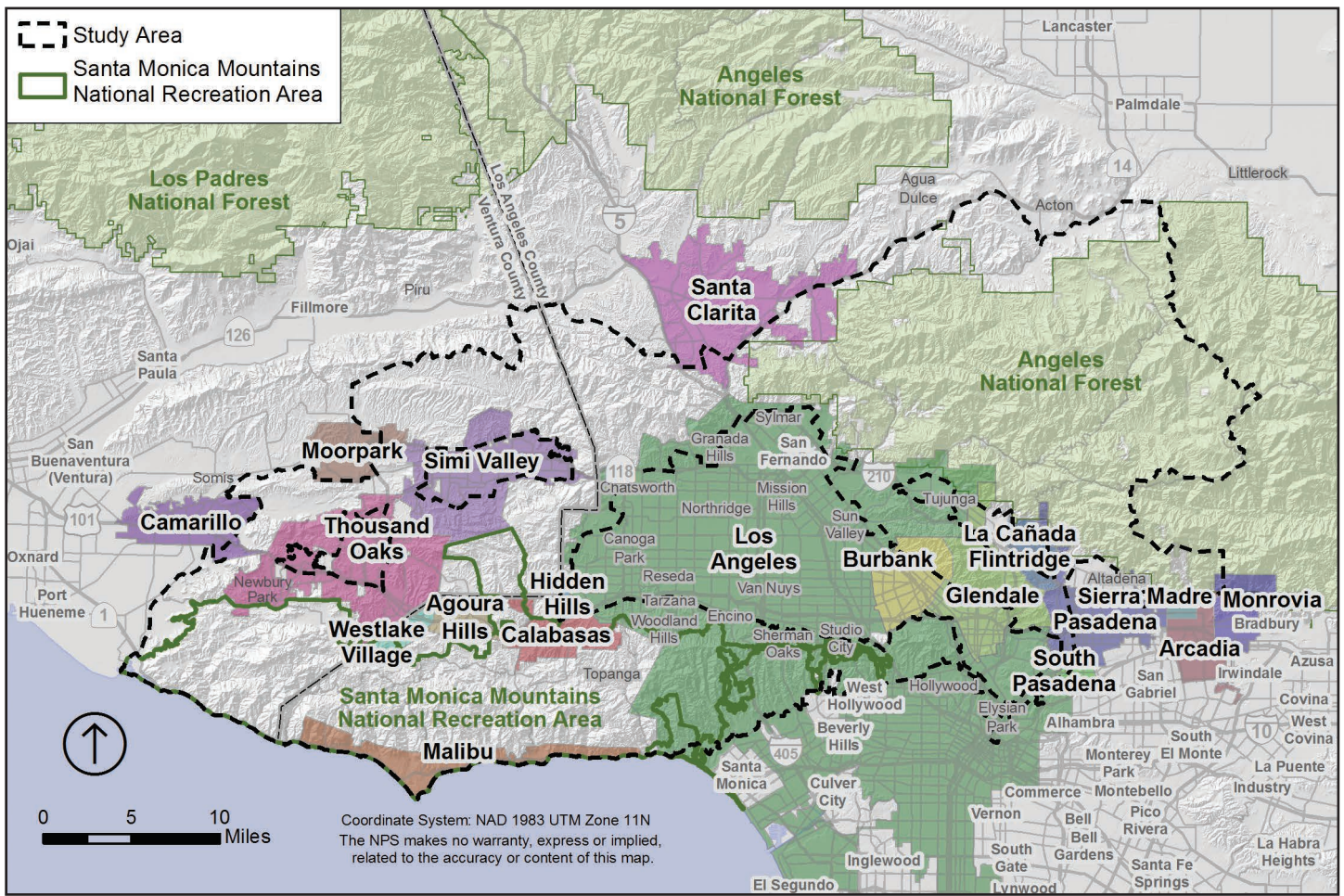


Figure 1-3: Cities and Communities

National Forest that includes portions of the Sierra Pelona. The mountain ranges and physiographic subareas are described on the following pages. The subareas are referenced frequently in the draft study report.

## Issues

Through comments received in public scoping, legislative testimony for the authorizing legislation (Shaddox 2007), and resource inventories, the study team identified four main issues associated with the protection and public enjoyment of resources in the study area.

### ***Protection of Nationally Significant Natural and Cultural Resources***

Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA) protects one of the best remaining examples of the Mediterranean ecosystem in North America. Mediterranean ecosystems are among the world's rarest and most endangered land types, occurring in only five locations in the world that support high

levels of biodiversity. Key resources related to this important ecosystem but outside the park are generally unprotected. The relatively intact plant and wildlife populations of the area are especially impressive considering their location within the second largest metropolitan area in the United States.

Beyond wildlife and habitat, many other significant resources in the Rim of the Valley Corridor are related to resources in SMMNRA. The condition of park resources could be enhanced if related resources within the Rim of the Valley Corridor are protected. These include historic sites, archeological resources, paleontological resources, and geologic resources associated with the Transverse Ranges Province.

### ***Loss of Habitat Connectivity***

Perhaps the greatest threat to natural resource preservation in SMMNRA is the loss of habitat connectivity from increased development and urban encroachment. Over time, large



## Rim of the Valley Corridor Subareas

### Santa Monica Mountains

This subarea is bound by the Oxnard Plain on the west, and the Los Angeles River on the east. The northern edge of the Santa Monica Mountains is approximately defined by U.S. Route 101, the Simi Hills, and the San Fernando Valley, with the southern edge defined by the Pacific Ocean and Los Angeles basin. Approximately 50% of the Santa Monica Mountains is conserved as protected open space with another 40% that is open space in private ownership. The remaining areas are developed with a combination of urban, suburban, commercial or industrial uses (Stoms et al. 2012).



Landscape view of Circle X Ranch in Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. Photo: NPS.

### Conejo Mountain-Las Posas Hills

This subarea, located to the north of the western Santa Monica Mountains, includes the area around Conejo Mountain (also referred to as the Conejo Hills) and Las Posas Hills surrounding the southern, western, and northern edges of Conejo Valley. This subarea is bound to the north by California State Route 118, to the south by the boundary of SMMNRA, to the east by Olsen Road, and to the west by Santa Rosa Valley and Calleguas Creek. This area includes a number of large protected areas and also has the largest percentage of agricultural lands of all the geographic subareas.



Wildwood Mesa is public open space located in the Conejo Mountain area. Photo: NPS.

### Simi Hills

The Simi Hills subarea includes the hills bordered by Simi Valley and the Santa Susana Mountains to the north, the San Fernando Valley to the east, the Santa Monica Mountains to the south, and the Conejo Valley to the west. Although bordered by urban development, the Simi Hills includes a large amount of open space. Portions of the Simi Hills are included in SMMNRA. Though surrounded by development, the Simi Hills comprise a large block of protected public land.



View of the Santa Monica Mountains from the Simi Hills. Photo: NPS.



## Rim of the Valley Corridor Subareas (continued)

### Santa Susana Mountains

This subarea extends from the western edge of the Oxnard Plain, eastward to Newhall Pass, which divides the Santa Susana and San Gabriel mountains. The Santa Clara River Valley defines the northern edge of this subarea, with Simi Valley, the Simi Hills, and the San Fernando Valley bordering the southern edges. The Santa Susana Mountains are primarily undeveloped open space.



The 4,800 acre Rocky Peak Park in the Santa Susana Mountains between Chatsworth and Simi Valley includes the 4,400-acre Runkle Ranch formerly owned by entertainer Bob Hope. Photo: NPS.

### Upper Santa Clara River

This portion of the study area is bound by the Angeles National Forest to the south, the study boundary, approximately defined by California State Route 14 to the north, and the Newhall Pass area to the west. Much of the area is privately owned with the exception of non-contiguous public lands managed / owned by the Bureau of Land Management, California State Parks and local jurisdictions, much of this area is privately owned.



Riparian vegetation is often found in and along the Upper Santa Clara River and its tributaries. Photo: NPS.

### San Gabriel Foothills and Mountains

This San Gabriel Foothills includes the lower elevations of the San Gabriel Mountains outside of the boundaries of the U.S. Forest Service managed areas, and to the south of California State Route 14. These foothills include a mosaic of land uses including protected open space, residential, institutional and commercial development. The San Gabriel Mountains subarea is defined by the boundaries of the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument to the north and west; the Angeles National Forest to the west and south; and by the study boundary to the east. The primary use in the U.S. Forest service managed areas is recreation, but these areas also contain utility easements, communications facilities, and infrastructure related to flood protection and water supply.



View of the San Gabriel Mountains and foothills as seen from the Verdugo Mountains. The mostly developed La Crescenta Valley lies between these mountains. Photo: NPS.



## Rim of the Valley Corridor Subareas (continued)

### Verdugo Mountains-San Rafael Hills

This subarea includes the mountains and hills that are bound by the San Fernando Valley to the west, the La Crescenta Valley to the east, and the Arroyo Seco to the south. The Verdugo Mountains forms a largely undeveloped island in the midst of a highly urbanized landscape. The San Rafael Hills are divided from the Verdugo Mountains via a canyon. Private homes are scattered throughout the San Rafael Hills, which are bordered to the east by the Arroyo Seco.



The Verdugo Mountains afford views of downtown Glendale with downtown Los Angeles in the background. Photo: NPS.

### Arroyo Seco

This subarea includes the Arroyo Seco canyon and corridor, from Hahamongna Watershed Park in Pasadena at the base of the San Gabriel Mountains, downstream to the confluence with the Los Angeles River. The Arroyo Seco stream is primarily bordered by public parkland surrounded by highly urbanized areas. The hillsides at the edges of the Arroyo Seco canyon include a mixture of residential development interspersed with canyon and hillside open spaces and parks.



The Arroyo Seco corridor extends from the San Gabriel Mountains to the confluence with the Los Angeles River, passing through urban communities. Photo: NPS.

### Los Angeles River

This subarea includes the Los Angeles River corridor from Sepulveda Dam Basin in the San Fernando Valley to downtown Los Angeles, including El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument. The areas surrounding the Los Angeles River are mostly urbanized with scattered pocket parks along the river. Exceptions include the Sepulveda Dam Basin, managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with the City of Los Angeles; Griffith and Elysian parks, managed by the City of Los Angeles; Rio de Los Angeles State Park; and Los Angeles State Historic Park. Through Sepulveda Dam Basin and the 11-mile Glendale Narrows/Elysian Valley, the river is characterized by natural surface channel bottoms and vegetation. The study also considers a narrow stretch of the river corridor from Sepulveda Dam Basin west to the Simi Hills. Though not part of the authorized study area, this river reach is examined because of similarities to the river sections within the study area and the opportunities for recreational connections between local communities and the Rim of the Valley Corridor. Generally, public comments showed support for consideration of this area as portions of this corridor were included in one of the management options presented to the public in 2012.



In 2013, the Los Angeles River reach through the Glendale Narrows was officially opened for recreation including kayaking, fishing and nature viewing. Previously, public access was limited to the trail along the levee. Photo: NPS.



open space areas have become increasingly fragmented and isolated resulting in threats to the viability of native plant and animal populations including rare, threatened, and endangered species, and rare or unusual plant communities and habitat.

There has been a growing awareness of the need to protect broader landscapes to sustain wildlife and natural habitat. Movement through contiguous habitat is essential to wildlife survival, whether it be the day-to-day movements of individuals seeking food, shelter, or mates, dispersal of offspring to find new homes, or seasonal migration to find favorable conditions. Movement is also essential for gene flow, for recolonizing unoccupied habitat after a local population goes extinct, and for species to shift their geographic range in response to global climate change (Penrod et al. 2006).

The habitat value for large mammals at SMMNRA depends in part on its continued connectivity to larger blocks of natural land to the north, through the Simi Hills, the Santa Susana Mountains and beyond to the Los Padres National Forest in the Sierra Madre (Coast Range) Mountains and the Angeles National Forest in the San Gabriel Mountains (Stoms et al. 2012).

Protecting existing open space for resource protection is a challenge given the area's continuing population growth, high land values, and development pressures. With a combined population of over 10 million, Los Angeles and

Ventura counties include some of the fastest growing and most densely populated areas in the United States (*Figure 1-4: Population Density and Ethnicity*). Another 4 million residents are expected in southern California by 2035. Additional land will be needed to accommodate this growth (SCAG 2012).

### ***Recreational Opportunities and Open Space are Distributed Unevenly Across the Corridor***

With regional population growth, demand for recreational opportunities has increased. Existing park, open space and recreation areas are unevenly distributed, with the fewest park areas in low income communities of color and areas with high numbers of children. Lack of adequate transportation options further impacts access to existing open space and recreation areas. Much of metropolitan Los Angeles is considered to be park deficient because it has less than three acres of green space per 1,000 residents. Some of these park-poor neighborhoods lie along the Los Angeles River portions of the study area or in the San Fernando Valley. The communities of Camarillo, Oxnard and Port Hueneme west of the study area are also considered park-poor (The City Project 2011).

Numerous plans and studies have identified the need for additional parks and open space, as well as a more interconnected multi-use trail system and a coordinated regional trail plan, including for the Rim of the Valley Trail system. Increased access to open space could



View of the eastern Santa Susana Mountains from Elsmere Canyon in the San Gabriel foothills. The network of freeways and roads through Newhall Pass present challenges for habitat and wildlife connectivity between the Santa Susana and San Gabriel Mountains. NPS photo.



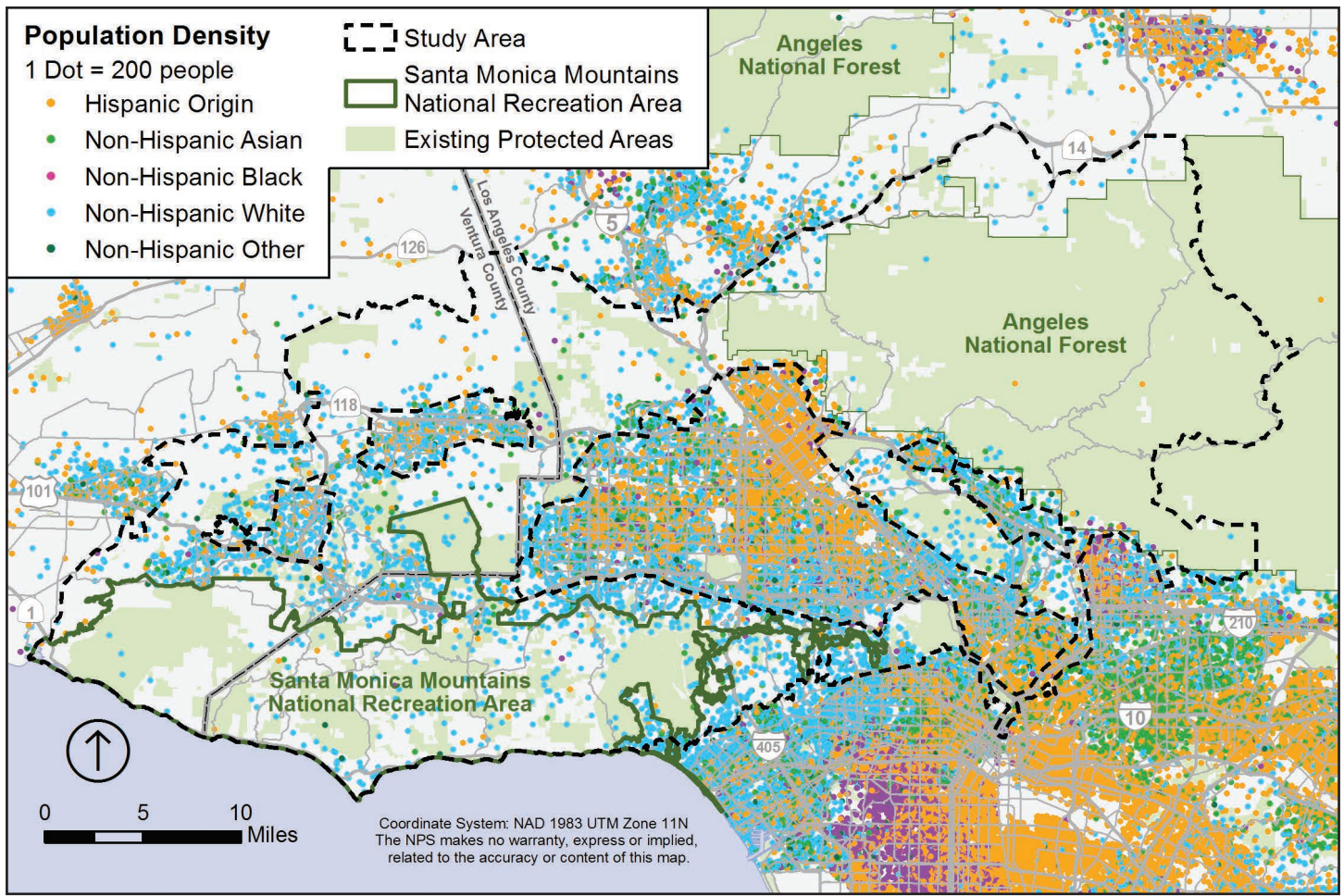


Figure 1-4: Population Density and Ethnicity

provide much needed places for respite and renewal for people within the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area.

### ***Providing a Framework for Regional Coordination***

The study area includes a diverse array of land managers and resource management agencies. Many different federal, state, and local governments and agencies manage parks, open space, and other public land uses within the study area which expands across two counties and approximately 27 local governments. As a result, a variety of projects and plans exist for different portions of the study area. These projects involve different landowners and differing management goals. Better coordination may be needed among these entities. For example, because the Rim of the Valley Trail crosses many of these jurisdictions, a high level of coordination among agencies and landowners is required. This trail system, if completed, could be available to the millions of people in the second largest metropolitan area in the United States, thereby providing more

close-to-home outdoor recreational experiences. Such coordination within SMMNRA has led to the near completion of the 65-mile Backbone Trail that follows the ridgeline of the Santa Monica Mountains.

### **Study Process**

The study process includes two separate, parallel analyses, one that focuses on the potential creation of a new unit of the national park system; and a second that focuses on potential adjustment of the existing boundary of Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA). It should be noted that there is a certain amount of overlap between the criteria for a new park unit and the criteria for a boundary adjustment. Both sets of criteria require proposals to be feasible and to demonstrate a need for direct NPS management instead of management by other entities.

### ***New Park Unit Evaluation***

This special resource study evaluates the Rim of the Valley Corridor Study Area as a potential new unit of the national park system based





The study team coordinated with natural and cultural resource experts to analyze the significance of resources in the study area. As part of a workshop, resource experts visited Laskey Mesa in the Simi Hills, shown above. NPS photo.

on established criteria. 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 (NPS *Management Policies* 2006):

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.

The complete analysis of the Rim of the Valley Corridor study area under these criteria can be found in *Chapter 3: New Park Unit Evaluation*.

### **SMMNRA Boundary Evaluation**

This study also evaluates the potential of including all or a portion of the study area as part of SMMNRA through an extension of the SMMNRA boundary. For the Secretary of the Interior to recommend any portion of the Rim of the Valley Corridor study area as an addition to SMMNRA, the area must meet one of the following criteria (NPS *Management Policies* 2006):

- Protect significant resources and values or enhance opportunities for public enjoyment related to park purposes; or

- Address operational and management issues, such as the need for access or the need for boundaries to correspond to logical boundary delineations such as topographic or other natural features or roads; or
- Otherwise protect park resources that are critical to fulfilling park purposes.

The addition needs to:

- Be a feasible addition to the national park system—the criteria is the same as the feasibility criteria for special resource studies listed above; and
- Require direct NPS management that cannot or will not be accomplished by another government entity or by the private sector.

The analysis of the Rim of the Valley Corridor study area using boundary expansion criteria can be found in *Chapter 4: Boundary Adjustment Evaluation*.

### **Public and Stakeholder Involvement**

Consistent with the study legislation and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), public comment opportunities were provided at key points, including during scoping, preliminary findings and alternative concepts. The NPS also met with interested parties as needed throughout the study process. A detailed description of public and stakeholder involvement in the study process is included in *Chapter 7: Consultation and Coordination*.

### **Project Initiation and Public Scoping**

At the beginning of the study process, the NPS initiated a notice of public scoping in the *Federal Register* (Vol. 75, No. Number 167 (Monday, August 30, 2010), pp. 52969-52971). Through the public scoping process, including nine public meetings with over 400 attendees, and receipt of over 2,000 comments, the NPS study team identified the range of issues to be addressed by the study and potential impacts of concern to the public. These issues are defined in the previous purpose and need section and in *Chapter 5: Alternatives*, and explained further through the environmental impact analysis in *Chapter 6: Environmental Consequences*.



### **Resource Analysis and Preliminary Alternatives Development**

Following the public scoping process, the NPS study team conducted interviews with resource experts and gathered existing literature to analyze the significance of the natural and cultural resources in the study area and their suitability for inclusion in the national park system as a new park unit. The NPS also conducted analysis to determine if any portion of the study area met the NPS criteria for a boundary adjustment to SMMNRA. The NPS conducted a workshop with an interdisciplinary team of resource professionals familiar with the study area to identify resources of national significance and to generate ideas for preliminary alternative concepts that explored a variety of management approaches for the area by NPS and other entities.

Although some of the natural and cultural resources in the study area met the significance and suitability criteria for new park areas, the NPS preliminarily determined that a boundary expansion to SMMNRA would be less costly and more efficient than establishment of a new stand-alone park area. In general, the public agreed with this finding. The NPS published preliminary findings and alternative concepts in *Newsletter #3*.

Following the public comment period on preliminary alternatives, the NPS determined that an environmental assessment (EA) is a sufficient level of environmental impact analysis for this study. No significant impacts are anticipated from the findings and recommendations of this study.

### **Alternatives Development**

Based on public comment on the preliminary findings for significance, suitability and feasibility, and the preliminary alternative concepts, the study team developed the range of alternatives presented in this draft study report. The study evaluates four alternatives: a “No Action” alternative (required by the National Environmental Policy Act), a cooperative conservation alternative with no additional NPS authority for land acquisition or direct land management, and two alternatives that include boundary additions to SMMNRA. These alternatives consider only management approaches that respect private property rights and the authorities that cur-

rently belong to existing local, state and federal agencies. The two boundary expansion alternatives extend the management model for SMMNRA, which is based on a public-private framework where the NPS is a minor landowner (15%) and much of the land within the boundary (50%) remains private property. A full description of the study alternatives can be found in *Chapter 5: Alternatives*.

### **Draft Report Publication, Review and Transmittal of Final Study Findings**

Publication of the *Rim of the Valley Corridor Draft Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment* will be followed by a minimum 60-day public comment period. If no significant environmental impacts are identified and no major changes are made to the alternatives then a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) would conclude the study process. The FONSI will include a final decision by the NPS (selected alternative). The Secretary of the Interior will then transmit the final study report consisting of the FONSI, and any technical corrections to the draft study report, to Congress, along with the Secretary’s recommendations for the study area. At that time, the final recommendations will be made available to the public.

### **Related Plans and Studies**

This section describes the range of plans, studies, and initiatives that provide guidance and resource information for this special resource study. Because the study area includes numerous federal, state, and local governments, not every plan or study is described in detail here. Rather, this section provides an overview of those plans most pertinent to this study.

### **NPS Plans and Special Studies**

#### **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, including a youth listening session at Rio de Los Angeles State Park, and a general public listening session at Occidental College, both in Los Angeles. The America’s Great Outdoors report, *A Promise to Future Generations*, is a result of that dialogue. The report





The Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail is one of two designated national historic trails that passes through the study area. A plaque marking and commemorating the Anza Trail is located in Griffith Park. NPS photo.

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.

#### **NPS Call to Action (revised, 2013)**

*A Call to Action: Preparing for a Second Century of Stewardship and Engagement* describes specific goals and measurable actions that chart a new direction for the National Park Service as it enters its second century in 2016. The vision and framework for the future of the NPS includes many initiatives that overlap with the goals of this study including: 1) emphasis on close-to-home parks and open space in urban areas, 2) adding sites to the system that present untold stories of the nation's diverse natural and cultural history and 3) increased emphasis on landscape conservation and connectivity efforts at a regional scale.

#### **Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area General Management Plan (2003)**

The *Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area General Management Plan* provides a 20-year framework for the collective management of SMMNRA by the National Park Service, California State Parks, and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. The plan describes the nationally significant natural and cultural resources of the Santa Monica Mountains and provides desired outcomes and conditions for those resources and for the visitor experience in the national recreation area.

#### **Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area Interagency Trail Management Plan Environmental Impact Statement/ Environmental Impact Report (underway)**

The *SMMNRA Interagency Trail Management Plan* will present a long-term vision for recreation trails in the Santa Monica Mountains, including trail circulation, alignment and use designations with the goal of facilitating a safe, enjoyable, and jurisdictionally seamless recreational experience for trail users that also protects natural and cultural resources. The plan will guide trail decisions for the primary land management agencies in SMMNRA, includ-

ing the National Park Service, California State Parks, Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and Mountains Recreation & Conservation Authority.

#### **San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment (2013)**

In 2003, Congress directed the NPS to study resources within the San Gabriel Mountains and Watershed to determine whether all or part of the area is significant, suitable, and/ or feasible for designation as a unit of the national park system. As described on page 2, a portion of the area evaluated in this special resource study, the western San Gabriel Mountains and portions of the Upper Santa Clara River, is also included in the Rim of the Valley Corridor study area. In the interest of efficiency and consistency, this study has adopted the analysis and final recommendations of the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study for these areas. *Appendix H: San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study & Environmental Assessment Findings and Recommendations* contains the study's final recommendations.

#### **Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail and Old Spanish National Historic Trail Comprehensive Trail Management Plans**

Two national historic trails traverse the study area, the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail (NHT) and the Old Spanish NHT. In addition to the historic trail route, the National Park Service administers both a recreational and auto route for the Juan Bautista de Anza NHT that crosses through the Simi Hills and the Santa Monica Mountains. The Old Spanish NHT also passes through and ends in the Rim of the Valley Corridor study area, terminating near downtown Los Angeles. This historic route from Santa Fe, New Mexico to Los Angeles is jointly managed by the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service. Both the Old Spanish and Juan Bautista de Anza NHTs are interpreted at El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument in downtown Los Angeles. Management of the NHTs is guided by their respective comprehensive trail management plans (CMP). The *Juan Bautista de Anza NHT Comprehensive Management and Use Plan* was completed in 1996. The NPS is working on completion

of a comprehensive trail management plan for the Old Spanish NHT.

**Butterfield Overland Trail Special Resource Study/Environmental Assessment (underway)**

In 2009, Congress directed the NPS to evaluate potential designation of the historic routes pioneered by John Butterfield and the Butterfield Overland Stage Company as they traveled over the “ox-box route” between the eastern termini of St. Louis, Missouri and Memphis, Tennessee and the western terminus of San Francisco, California (Sec. 7209 of P.L. 111-11). Stages traveled over this route between 1858 and 1861. The study is currently underway. The NPS completed public scoping for the special resource study in 2012 including a public meeting at the Wells Fargo History Museum in Los Angeles.

**Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program**

The Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program provides technical assistance and grants to historic features along Route 66 which ends in the City of Santa Monica. The program collaborates with private property owners; non-profit organizations; and local, state, federal, and tribal governments to identify, prioritize, and address Route 66 preservation needs. It provides cost-share grants for the preservation and restoration of the most significant and representative properties dating from the route’s period of outstanding historical significance, 1926 through 1970. The program serves as a clearinghouse of preservation information, and provides limited technical assistance.

***Other Federal Planning Efforts and Studies***

**U.S. Forest Service - Southern California National Forests Land Management Plan (2005)**

This *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 designation that can occur within each national forest. Subsequently designed and implemented project level decisions must be consistent with the direction described in the plan. In 2013, the Angeles, Los Padres, and two other national forests proposed to

amend their land management plans with new guidance for roadless area management and land management plan monitoring, including recommendations for wilderness designation by completing a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. A draft Record of Decision was released in January, 2014.

**National Aeronautics and Space**

**Administration (NASA) – Final Environmental Impact Statement for Proposed Demolition and Environmental Cleanup Activities at Santa Susana Field Laboratory (March, 2014)**

The proposed action described in this plan is to demolish existing structures and to remediate soil and groundwater contamination on the 451-acre NASA-administered property of the Santa Susana Field Laboratory (SSFL) in the Simi Hills. The purpose of the proposed action is to remediate the environment to a level that meets NASA’s environmental cleanup responsibilities and to undertake the demolition actions necessary to support both remediation and property disposition of the NASA-administered portion of SSFL. This property is within the Rim of the Valley Corridor study area. A signed Record of Decision (ROD) was issued in April 2014. The most immediate actions proposed are to dismantle the Coca Test Stands and associated features in the Coca historic district, and complete soil and groundwater clean-up feasibility studies as determined in the ROD and conduct archaeological testing as prescribed in the Programmatic Agreement that is attached to the ROD.

**Other Santa Susana Field Laboratory Clean-Up Plans (underway)**

There are two additional planning and environmental compliance efforts underway that cover portions of the Santa Susana Field Laboratory (SSFL). One environmental plan that is underway is the Department of Energy’s Environmental Impact Statement that will consider options for cleanup of Area IV and the Northern Buffer Zone at the Santa Susana Field Laboratory (SSFL). In addition, the State of California Department of Toxic Substances Control is preparing a Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for contaminated soil and groundwater remediation projects at SSFL.



**U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the City of Los Angeles – Los Angeles River Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Draft Study and Environmental Impact Statement/ Environmental Impact Report (underway)**

This study evaluates alternatives for the purpose of restoring 11 miles of the Los Angeles River from approximately Griffith Park to downtown Los Angeles, while maintaining existing levels of flood risk management. Restoration measures considered include creation and reestablishment of historic riparian strand and freshwater marsh habitat to support increased populations of wildlife and enhance habitat connectivity within the study area, as well as to provide opportunities for connectivity to ecological zones, such as the Santa Monica Mountains, Verdugo Hills, Elysian Hills, and San Gabriel Mountains. The study also evaluates opportunities for passive recreation compatible with the restored environment. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers released a draft feasibility study and environmental impact statement/environmental impact report in September 2013. The study area is entirely within the study area.

**U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and County of Los Angeles - Arroyo Seco Watershed Ecosystem Restoration Study (underway)**

The primary purpose of this study is to evaluate solutions to a variety of water and land-related issues in the watershed, including ecosystem degradation, flooding, and poor water quality along the lower Arroyo Seco. The study area, an 11-mile reach of the lower Arroyo Seco is entirely within the Rim of the Valley Corridor study area. The Arroyo Seco watershed study area extends from the Angeles National Forest border through the unincorporated community of Altadena, and cities of La Cañada Flintridge, Pasadena, South Pasadena, and Los Angeles, to approximately 0.5 miles from the confluence with the Los Angeles River.

**State Plans**

**California State Parks General Plans**

Within SMMNRA there are five state parks with approved general plans. These plans describe park resources and provide direction for resource protection and visitor use. These parks are Malibu Creek State Park,

Point Mugu State Park, Topanga State Park, Leo Carrillo State Park, and Will Rogers State Historic Park. Within the Rim of the Valley Corridor study area outside of SMMNRA there are four state parks with approved general plans. State parks include Santa Susana Pass State Historic Park, Los Encinos State Historic Park, Rio de Los Angeles State Park, and Los Angeles State Historic Park.

**State Land Conservancy Plans**

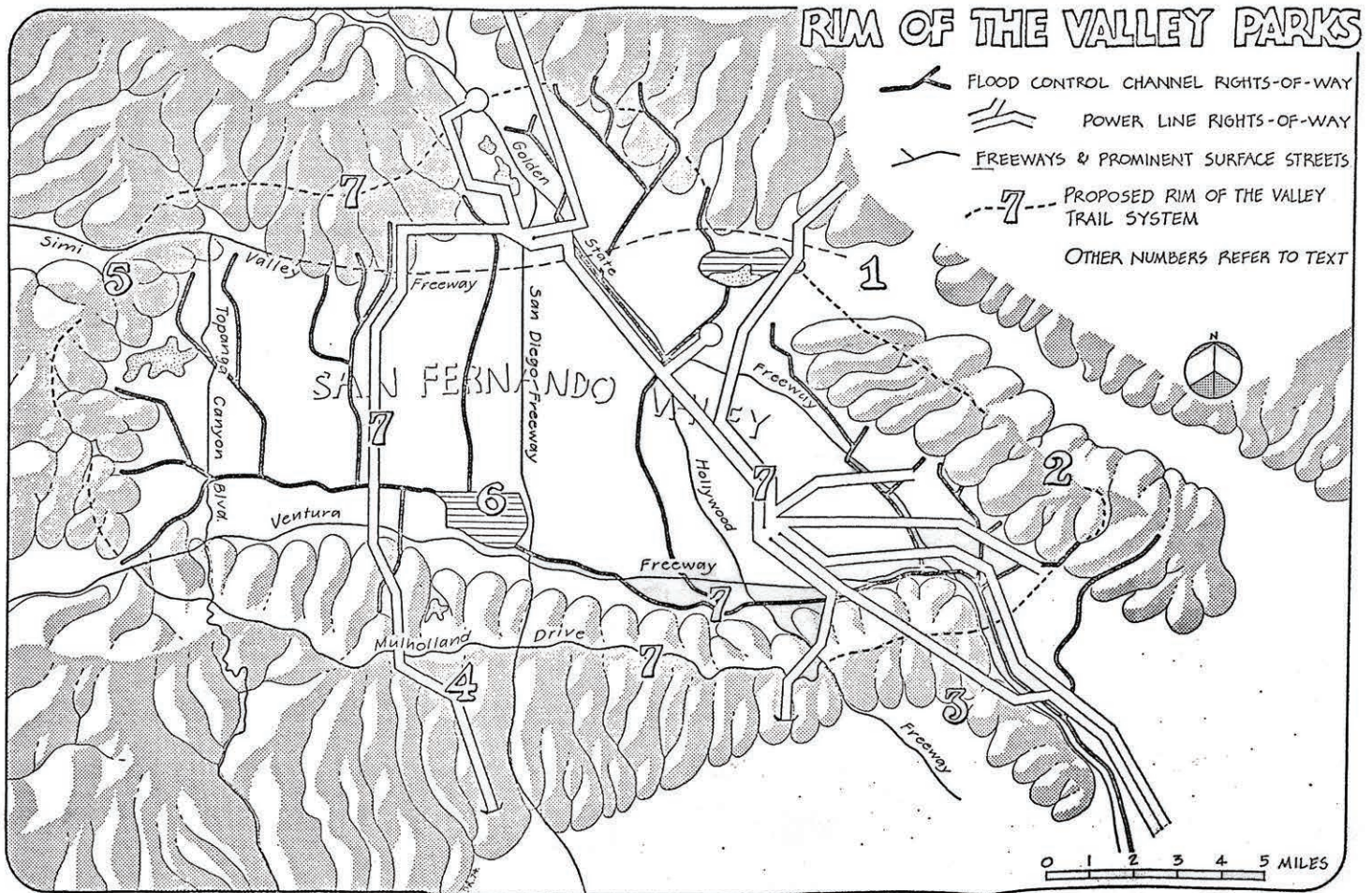
The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy has several planning documents that guide priorities for management and acquisition in the study area. These include the *Rim of the Valley Trail Corridor Master Plan* (1990) and the *Santa Monica Mountains Comprehensive Plan* (1979).

*Common Ground: From Mountains to the Sea* (2001) 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. A key component of the plan is a set of guiding principles, which provide overarching goals for future open space planning in both watersheds.

**Local Plans**

**Los Angeles County Draft 2035 General Plan (underway)**

The *Los Angeles County 2035 General Plan* update will provide the policy framework for how and where the unincorporated parts of the county will grow through 2035. The general plan update includes goals, policies, implementation programs, and ordinances, including draft recommendations for expanding “Significant Ecological Areas” (SEA) throughout the county. A SEA designation is given to land that contains irreplaceable biological resources. Individual SEAs include undisturbed or lightly disturbed habitat supporting valuable and threatened species, linkages and corridors to promote species movement, and are sized to support sustainable populations of their component species. The objective of the SEA Program is to preserve the genetic and



The original Rim of the Valley Trail vision, illustrated above, was articulated in the master's thesis prepared by Marge Feinberg entitled, "Rim of the Valley Park Proposals for a Green Belt Around the San Fernando Valley." The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy developed a master plan for the trail in 1990. Drawing by Marge Feinberg, 1976, California State University, Northridge.

physical diversity of the county by designing biological resource areas capable of sustaining themselves into the future. Although SEAs are not preserves, they are areas where the county deems it important to facilitate a balance between development and resource conservation.

#### **Ventura County General Plan (2005)**

The *Ventura County General Plan*, last updated in 2005, sets forth the goals, policies and programs that manage future growth and land use for the unincorporated areas of Ventura County.

#### **Integrated Regional Water Management Plans**

Each of the two counties in the study area has an integrated regional water management plan. The purpose of the *Greater Los Angeles County Integrated Regional Water Management Plan* (IRWMP) the *Integrated Water Resource*

*Plan for Ventura County* is to improve water supplies, enhance water supply reliability, improve surface water quality, preserve flood protection, conserve habitat, and expand recreational access in the each county. These plans also define a comprehensive vision for each county designed to generate local funding, to position the area for future state bonds, and to create opportunities for federal funding.

#### **County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation - Santa Susana Mountains Trail Master Plan (underway)**

The *Santa Susana Mountains Trail Master Plan* will promote and encourage safe and enjoyable recreation trail opportunities for hikers, mountain bikers and equestrians. The plan will identify connections to existing local, state, regional and national trail systems, as well as make connections to existing trailheads and points of interest. This plan includes the



Rim of the Valley Trail in the Los Angeles County portion of the Santa Susana Mountains and is a proposed amendment to the Los Angeles County General Plan.

#### **City of Los Angeles - Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan (2007)**

The City of Los Angeles' Department of Public Works created the *Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan* which presents a 20-year blueprint for development and management of the Los Angeles River. The objectives of the plan include: 1) the establishment of environmentally sensitive urban design guidelines, land use guidelines, and development guidelines for the river zone, 2) environmental improvements to water quality and ecological functioning of the river, 3) increased public access to the river, 4) increased recreation and open space, including new trails, and 6) enhanced flood control.

#### **Other Local Plans**

In addition to the planning initiatives described above, there are numerous approved local planning documents that provide policy guidance in the study area. These include the local coastal plans for Los Angeles County, Ventura County, and the City of Malibu; the *Santa Monica Mountains North Area Plan* (Los Angeles County); and land use planning documents for the incorporated cities that are within or near the study area. Unincorporated areas are governed by county comprehensive and zoning plans. Some plans such as the *Mulholland Scenic Parkway Specific Plan* (City of Los Angeles, 1992) also provide more detailed guidance. Additionally, local and regional park and recreation districts have adopted plans and studies. For example, the Pleasant Valley Recreation and Parks District recently completed a trail and greenway planning study.

## **Other Relevant Plans**

### **Santa Clara River Plans**

There are several conservation plans for the Santa Clara River including the *Santa Clara River Enhancement and Management Plan* (Ventura County Watershed Protection District and Los Angeles County Department of Public Works 2005), and the *Santa Clara River Upper Watershed Conservation Plan* (The Nature Conservancy 2006). These conservation plans provide strategies for collaborative, strategic conservation actions to conserve the unique natural heritage of the upper (east of Piru Creek) Santa Clara River watershed.

### **Wildlife Corridor Studies**

The California Department of Fish and Game and CalTrans commissioned a team to produce a statewide assessment of essential habitat connectivity using the best available science, data sets, spatial analyses and modeling techniques. The goal of the study, titled *California Essential Habitat Connectivity Project: A Strategy for Conserving a Connected California* (February 2010), was to identify large remaining blocks of intact habitat or natural landscape and model linkages between them that need to be maintained, particularly as corridors for wildlife.

The *South Coast Missing Linkages Project: A Linkage Design for the Santa Monica – Sierra Madre Connection* (2006) identifies habitat linkages between parkland and open space between Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area and the Los Padres National Forest. The report was coauthored by South Coast Wildlands and the National Park Service in cooperation with the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy, and California State Parks.

## About Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area

Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA), the nation's largest urban national park, extends from Point Mugu east to the Hollywood Hills and includes a portion of the Simi Hills to the north. The Simi Hills function as an important wildlife corridor between the Santa Monica and the Santa Susana mountains. The U.S. Congress granted the National Park Service the authority to promote a level of shared management of the national recreation area. Administratively, SMMNRA is a cooperative effort that joins federal, state, local park agencies with non-profit organizations and private landowners to protect resources and provide public enjoyment opportunities. Since the establishment of SMMNRA in 1978, public lands within the Santa Monica Mountains have increased from 22% to 52%. Today, roughly 80,000 acres of the land within the 153,250-acre SMMNRA are preserved for resource protection and/or public enjoyment. While the National Park Service (NPS) shares responsibility for management of the national recreation area, it currently has direct responsibility for 15% of the land (23,500 acres).

A cooperative management agreement with the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, and California State Parks provides a framework for the NPS to share resources and responsibilities for public land management. The participating parties in the cooperative management agreement have benefited from both efficiency and cost savings from implementation of cooperative operating procedures, practices, and law enforcement (both resource and visitor protection), as well as from standardizing signs and rules, where possible, which promotes less confusion and improved convenience for visitors.

### Santa Monica Mountains Zone

SMMNRA's 1978 authorizing legislation also established the Santa Monica Mountains Zone (SMMZ). The SMMZ incorporates watersheds and canyon slopes associated with, but not formally included in SMMNRA, as well as the easternmost portion of the Santa Monica Mountains encompassing Griffith Park. Local and state agencies are responsible for land use regulations within this zone (including within the park boundary), but the NPS retains, by law, reviewing authority on projects involving federal funds, permits, or licenses that may affect the recreation area. This authority was provided by Congress to reduce downstream impacts on recreation area resources when possible.

### Outreach and Assistance

SMMNRA management activities in areas beyond the current national recreation area include projects that further SMMNRA's defined purpose. Current efforts include urban outreach and resource management cooperation and assistance. For example, SMMNRA recently established an outreach office in downtown Los Angeles in the historic Old Plaza in El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument to provide opportunities to better connect the resources and recreational opportunities of SMMNRA to surrounding urban communities.

SMMNRA resource management professionals share data and expertise with other agencies and organizations and partner on regional conservation efforts such as the South Coast Missing Linkages Project and the SMMNRA carnivore study which has provided important information on how large predators like bobcats and mountain lions cope with urban development. Various agencies and organizations in the region have benefited from this work. Additionally, the Southern California Research Learning Center (SCRLC), one of 17 NPS research learning centers across the nation, is based at SMMNRA. The SCRLC programs focus on college-level students and university-based researchers integrating public participatory science into local college courses.





# Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area Foundation Statement

Every unit of the national park system will have a foundational document to provide basic guidance for planning and management decisions—a foundation for planning and management. The core components of a foundation document include a brief description of the park as well as the park's purpose, significance, fundamental resources and values, other important resources and values, and interpretive themes.

The NPS is currently in the process of completing a foundation document for SMMNRA. The following components of SMMNRA's foundation statement describe the national recreation area's purpose, based on its authorizing legislation, and what aspects of the park are nationally significant. Fundamental resources and values and other important resources and values as well as the interpretive themes that provide guidance on the primary stories or messages conveyed at SMMNRA are described in *Chapter 2: Resource Description*.

## **Park Purpose**

The purpose statement identifies the specific reason(s) for establishment of a particular park. The purpose statement for Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area was drafted through a careful analysis of its enabling legislation and the legislative history that influenced its development. The national recreation area was established when the enabling legislation adopted by Congress was signed into law on November 10, 1978.

*Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area is a collaborative partnership that protects a mosaic of natural resources, cultural heritage, and scenery within North America's Mediterranean biome, and provides public enjoyment opportunities, including connections to wild places in the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area.*

## **Park Significance**

Significance statements express why a park's resources and values are important enough to merit designation as a unit of the national park system. These statements are linked to the purpose of Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Statements of significance describe the distinctive nature of the park and why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and system-wide context. They focus on the most important resources and values that will assist in park planning and management.

The following significance statements have been identified for Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area:

- Influenced by the mild climate and complex geologic setting, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area contains high concentrations of rare, sensitive, and endemic species, and represents one of the best remaining examples of the Mediterranean biome in North America. Mediterranean ecosystems are among the world's rarest and most endangered land types, occurring in only five locations throughout the world.
- The coastal and mountainous terrain of Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area offers an abundance of recreational, health, and educational benefits and contributes clean air and water for the Los Angeles Region. Its proximity to one of the most densely populated regions of the United States provides a gateway to experience national park sites and other public parklands.
- The Santa Monica Mountains provide an opportunity for understanding how to protect high biodiversity in a vast urban area. Additionally, the rich concentration of resources, which include an extensive range of native vegetation communities, archeological sites, and geologic and paleontological features, are all in close proximity to numerous research institutions, providing exceptional opportunities for scientific study.
- Native American occupation in the Santa Monica Mountains spans more than 10,000 years, as reflected in a diversity of well-preserved archeological sites. American Indian groups, including the Chumash and Tongva, continue to have cultural ties to these resources and their associated landscapes.
- Extending from Point Mugu to downtown Los Angeles, the rugged landscape and geologic features of the Santa Monica Mountains serve as an urban refuge and offer a variety of exceptional vistas from expansive ocean and mountain views and urban skylines to secluded canyons and miles of seashore.
- Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area's varied coastal and mountain landscapes, in close proximity to Hollywood, played a significant role in the film industry's transition from studio production to on-location filming, as represented by Paramount Ranch, one of the best remaining examples of an early movie ranch. These landscapes continue to provide backdrops for film production today.

