



Rim of the Valley Corridor

Draft Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment

April 2015

We are pleased to provide you with this copy of the draft *Rim of the Valley Corridor Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment*.

The public comment period for this draft report will extend through June 30, 2015. We welcome your comments on the report, as well as your thoughts on how best to conserve the significance resources associated with the Rim of the Valley Corridor. Please sent your comments to:

National Park Service
Rim of the Valley Corridor Special Resource Study
570 W. Avenue 26 #175
Los Angeles, CA 90065
Email: pwr_rimofthevalley@nps.gov
Website: www.nps.gov/pwro/rimofthevalley

We also will be hosting a series of public meetings in various locations during during the comment period. At each of these meetings, we will present the key findings of the draft study report and environmental assessment, answer your questions, and provide opportunities for you to submit your comments. Check the study website: www.nps.gov/pwro/rimofthevalley for specific meeting dates, times, and locations.

A limited number of additional copies of this report are available from the address above. In addition, the Executive Summary and the full report are both posted on the website (see above for web address).

We appreciate your contributions to the study process so far, and we look forward to your comments on this draft report.

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RIM OF THE VALLEY CORRIDOR
Draft Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment
APRIL 2015

Produced by the Pacific West Regional Office
Park Planning and Environmental Compliance
San Francisco, CA
National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C.

Abstract

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Draft Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment

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Purpose and Need

The Consolidated Natural Resources Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-229, May 2008) directed the NPS to evaluate: (1) the suitability and feasibility of designating all or a portion of the area known as the Rim of the Valley Corridor as a unit of Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA); 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-governmental organizations. The Rim of the Valley Corridor is described in legislation as the area generally including the mountains encircling the San Fernando, La Crescenta, Santa Clarita, Simi, and Conejo Valleys in southern California.

Study Area

The study area covers approximately 650,000 acres in the southern California region. It includes SMMNRA (approximately 153,000 acres) and approximately 180,000 acres of lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service (the Angeles National Forest and the recently established San Gabriel Mountains National Monument). Numerous agencies and conservation organizations manage lands within the study area. Over 5 million people live in the study area, another 13 million live in surrounding communities within the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area. Land use is diverse and includes large natural areas, suburban communities, farms and ranches, highly urbanized areas, freeways, and an array of public infrastructure. However, the vast majority of lands (84%) are undeveloped.

Study Findings

The Rim of the Valley Corridor study area contains nationally significant resources. The topographically and geographically complex study area encompasses a mosaic of natural communities that span coastal and montane ecosystems and support high levels of biodiversity. More than 10,000 years of human habitation are represented in the cultural resources found within the study area. The area also contains significant resources, not currently represented in the national park system, which offer new opportunities for scientific research, interpretation, and education and are therefore suitable for inclusion in the national park system.

The creation of a new national park unit is not feasible, when compared to the resource management and operational efficiencies afforded by including additional areas in SMMNRA. Many of the significant resources within the study area augment the national significance of SMMNRA and provide habitat connectivity essential for long-term preservation of the significant resources within the Santa Monica Mountains, thus warranting physical connection to SMMNRA and/or a seamless, collaborative management approach.

An adjustment to the boundary of SMMNRA is feasible using the collaborative partnership-based management model exemplified by SMMNRA, which respects the complex mix of existing land use, ownership, and regulatory authorities. Inclusion of lands of the Rim of the Valley Corridor in SMMNRA would contribute to protection of significant resources related to the purpose of the national recreation area and expand opportunities for public enjoyment at SMMNRA.

Alternatives Evaluated

The study evaluates a range of opportunities to cooperatively manage the significant resources of the study area:

- *Alternative A: Continuation of Current Management (No Action)*, serves as a baseline for evaluating the action alternatives;
- *Alternative B: Cooperative Conservation Partnership* would foster cooperative planning and funding tools for the NPS, partner agencies and landowners in the Rim of the Valley Corridor and key habitat linkages to the Los Padres and Angeles national forests (no new areas would be added to SMMNRA);
- *Alternative C: Rim of the Valley Boundary Adjustment (Preferred Alternative)*, a SMMNRA boundary adjustment (approximately 173,000-acre addition) that would provide more parks and protect habitat linkages, with an emphasis on creating more recreational opportunities near urban areas; and
- *Alternative D: Regional Rim of the Valley Boundary Adjustment and Cooperative Conservation Areas*, a SMMNRA boundary adjustment (approximately 313,000 acre addition) with an emphasis on protecting regional wildlife corridors, would add most areas within Rim of the Valley Corridor (excluding U.S. Forest Service managed areas) to SMMNRA. Cooperative conservation approaches would also be recommended for key habitat linkages between the Rim of the Valley Corridor study area and the Los Padres and Angeles national forests.

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Executive Summary

Background and Study Process

The Consolidated Natural Resources Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-229, May 2008) authorized the National Park Service (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 to determine:

(1) the suitability and feasibility of designating all or a portion of the corridor as a unit of Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA); and

(2) the methods and means for the protection and interpretation of this corridor by the NPS, other federal, state, or local government entities or private or non-profit organizations.”

To achieve objective (1), 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 objective (2), 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 or private and non-profit organizations.

The purpose of a special resource study is to provide information to aid Congress, the U.S. Department of the Interior and the NPS in determining whether there are feasible and appropriate roles for the NPS within the study area.

Relationship to the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study

The NPS completed the *San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study* in April 2013. 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.

The study recommended: 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 (See *Appendix H* for final recommendations).

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.

Legislative and Policy Direction

New National Park Unit

In evaluating whether the study area is eligible for designation as a new unit of the national park system, the study follows the process established by the National Park System New Area Studies Act (P.L. 105-391, 16 U.S.C. Sec. 1a-5) and addresses the criteria for new areas outlined in *NPS Management Policies 2006*.

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:

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

These criteria are designed to ensure that the national park system includes only the most outstanding examples of the nation’s natural and cultural resources, while recognizing that there are other management alternatives for preserving the nation’s outstanding resources. Alternatives for NPS management are developed for areas that meet all four of the criteria for inclusion.

Addition to Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (Boundary Adjustment)

The determination of whether any part of the study area qualifies as an addition (or boundary adjustment) to Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA) to carry out the purpose of the national recreation area is based on criteria for boundary adjustments as described in *NPS Management*

Policies 2006 (Section 3.5). Areas acceptable for addition to an existing park boundary (in this case SMMNRA) must:

- protect significant resources and values, or enhance opportunities for public enjoyment related to park purposes
- address operational and management issues, such as the need for access or the need for boundaries to correspond to logical delineations such as topographic or other natural features or roads; or
- otherwise protect park resources that are critical to fulfilling park purposes

All recommendations for boundary changes must also meet the following two criteria:

- the added lands will be feasible to administer considering their size, configuration, and ownership; costs; the views of and impacts on local communities and surrounding jurisdictions; and other factors such as the presence of hazardous substances or exotic species.
- other alternatives for management and resource protection are not adequate.

A new unit of the national park system or park boundary expansion requires Congressional action.

Fire Management Documentation

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 of the draft study report.

Environmental Compliance

The National Park System New Area Studies Act requires that special resource studies be prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The NPS determined that an environmental assessment (EA) is a sufficient level of environmental analysis for this study. This study complies with the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 and 110 requirements. Section 106 requires federal agencies to take into account the effects of their undertakings on historic properties. The Section 106 process is being coordinated with the National Environmental Policy Act process for this special resource study. No significant impacts or effects are anticipated from the findings and recommendations of this study.

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 of California. It is surrounded by some of the most densely populated and diverse areas of the United States.

Spanning both Los Angeles and Ventura counties, the study area includes portions of the Santa Monica Mountains, Conejo Mountain-Las Posas Hills, Simi Hills, Santa Susana Mountains, Upper Santa Clara River, the Verdugo Mountains-San Rafael Hills, the Los Angeles River and Arroyo Seco corridors, and the San Gabriel Mountains. As a whole, the study area is approximately 50% privately owned lands and 50% public lands. Portions of at least 30 communities are located in the study area, with approximately 5.1 million residents.

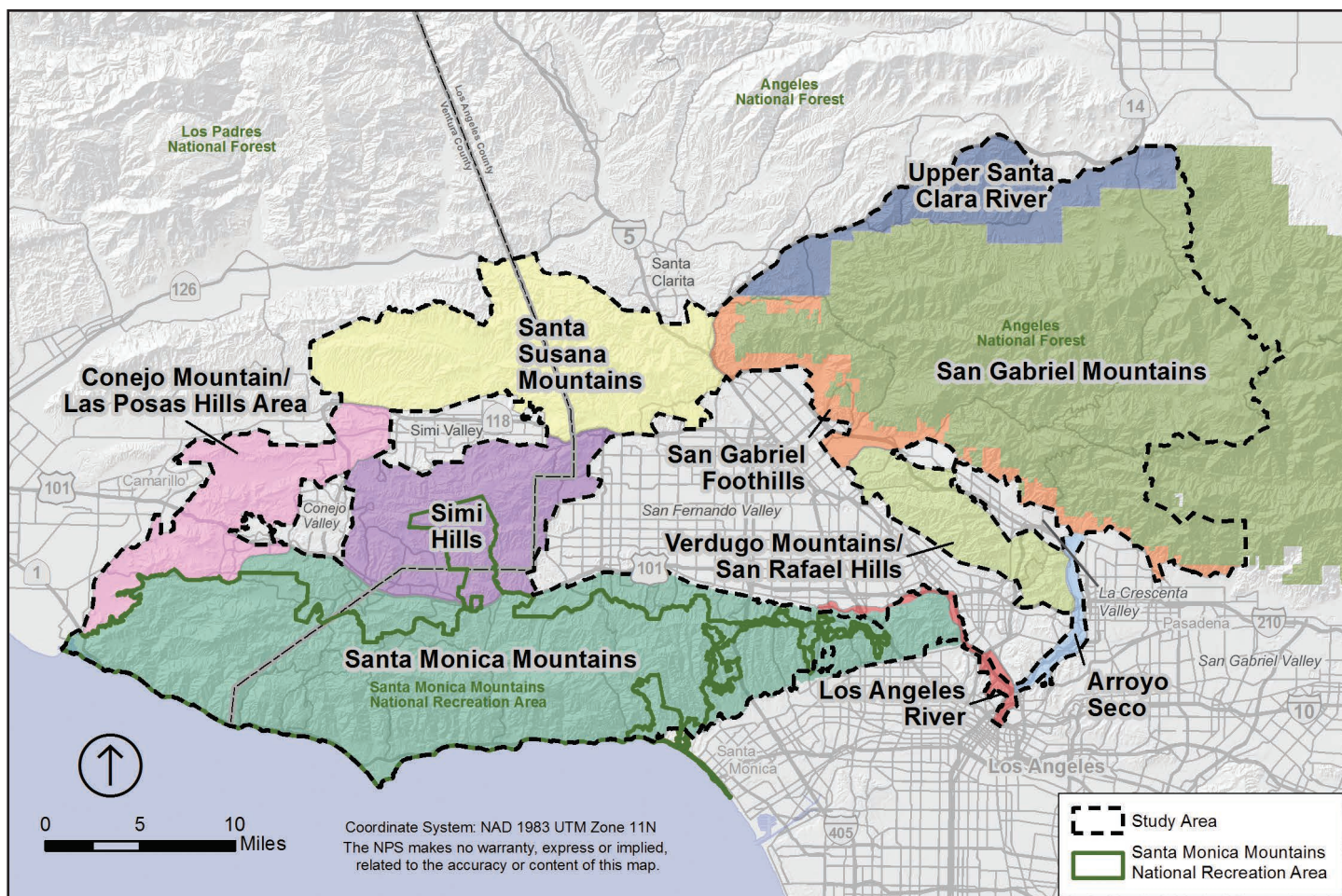
The majority of the lands in the study area (approximately 84%) are undeveloped open space or areas protected for conservation and recreation purposes. Federally protected areas within the study area include SMMNRA, a unit of the national park system, the Angeles National Forest, and the San Gabriel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

Of the 650,000 acre-study area, approximately one-quarter (approximately 153,000 acres) is within the existing boundary of SMMNRA. SMMNRA protects the largest expanse of mainland Mediterranean ecosystem in the national park system. No other national park features such a diverse assemblage of natural, cultural, scenic, and recreational resources within easy reach of a population of more than 18 million. For over 30 years, the NPS has managed SMMNRA through a unique partnership in which the federal government works collaboratively with state, and local park agencies and private landowners to protect the natural and cultural resources of the area. Within SMMNRA, the NPS directly owns and manages over 23,000 acres, or 15% of the 153,000 acres within the national recreation area boundary.

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) manages approximately one-quarter of the study area (approximately 180,000 acres in the San Gabriel Mountains) as part of the Angeles National Forest and the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument. Together, the mountains within SMMNRA and the U.S. Forest Service lands 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, including the Simi Hills, the Santa Susana Mountains, Verdugo Mountains-San Rafael Hills, the Los Angeles and Santa Clara Rivers and their tributaries, provide additional habitat and corridors that connect the region's core habitat areas.

Public Involvement Public Scoping

The NPS launched public scoping for this study in summer 2010. A notice of scoping was published in the Federal Reg-



ister (Vol. 75, No. Number 167 (Monday, August 30, 2010), pp. 52969-52971). The study team produced and distributed an informational newsletter and press releases to the media, individuals, organizations, and government officials. Public information was made available on the National Park Service's Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website and project website at www.nps.gov/pwro/rimofthevalley.

In September and October 2010, the NPS hosted nine public meetings within the study area (Chatsworth, Los Angeles, Santa Clarita, Thousand Oaks, Calabasas, Tujunga, Altadena, and Sylmar). In all, more than 400 people participated in the public workshops. The NPS received more than 2,000 comment letters and emails from federal and state agencies, cities, organizations, and community members regarding the scope of the study. The NPS shared a summary of the public comments in *Newsletter #2* during summer 2011.

Preliminary Findings and Alternative Concepts

NPS published preliminary findings and alternative concepts in *Newsletter #3*, which was distributed in October 2012, and accepted public comments on these ideas through January 2013. 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 of SMMNRA would be less costly and more efficient than establishment of a new stand-alone park area. During this period the NPS hosted seven public meetings (Thousand Oaks, Santa Clarita, Glendale, Chatsworth, Encino, Moorpark and Pasadena) and two on-line forums in November and December 2012. A total of 125 people participated in meetings and more than 5,000 written comments were received.

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 this time, the final recommendations will be made available to the public.



The study finds that the Rim of the Valley Corridor contains nationally significant natural resources. Examples from left to right include geologic history of the Transverse Ranges Province, as shown in the Simi Hills; diverse fossils, as shown by these 12 million year old fish fossils; and high biodiversity, as shown by the native grassland vegetation and at Laskey Mesa and the previously believed extinct San Fernando Valley spineflower (*Chorizanthe parryi* var. *fernandina*). Photos: NPS.

Study Findings

The study process includes two 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 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 to an existing national park area. Both sets of criteria require proposals to be feasible and demonstrate a need for NPS management over management by other entities.

New National Park Unit

National Significance

The National Park Service (NPS) uses four basic criteria to evaluate the significance of proposed areas. These criteria, listed in the NPS *Management Policies 2006*, state that a resource is nationally significant if it meets all of the following conditions:

- It is an outstanding example of a particular type of resource.
- It possesses exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the natural or cultural themes of our nation's heritage.
- It offers superlative opportunities for public enjoyment, or for scientific study.
- It retains a high degree of integrity as a true, accurate, and relatively unspoiled example of a resource.

The NPS evaluates national significance for cultural resources by applying the national historic landmarks (NHL) criteria contained in 36 CFR Part 65.

The study finds that the Rim of the Valley Corridor contains resources of national significance, many of which have been identified as nationally significant through previous studies or designations. This includes national park or trail system designations (Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area,

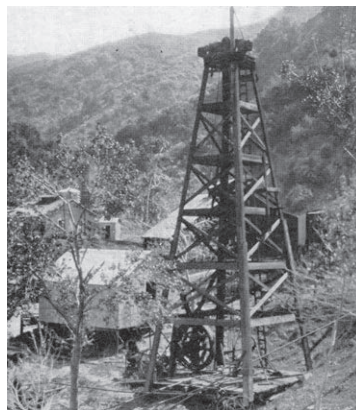
Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail and Old Spanish National Historic Trail), and national historic landmarks.

Nationally significant natural resources include: 1) outstanding examples of geologic history including the evolution of the Transverse Ranges Province; 2) a diversity of well-preserved marine and terrestrial paleontological resources; and 3) high biodiversity, including outstanding examples of native grasslands, coastal sage scrub, chaparral, dry coniferous forests, and alluvial fan sage scrub.

Nationally significant cultural resources represent a wide range of themes related to human use and settlement in the region. High concentrations of archeological resources provide insight into more than 10,000 years of Native American history. Outstanding examples of cultural resources also include national historic landmarks representing topics such as architecture, recreation, space exploration, and oil extraction, as well as national historic trails that mark important national events related to migration and commerce. Additionally, the study area features cultural resources identified as significant through national historic landmark theme studies in areas such as astronomy and astrophysics.

The nationally significant resources of the study area offer superlative opportunities for public enjoyment and scientific study. The varied topographic features provide highly scenic landscapes including seashore, mountain views, and verdant canyons within a two hour drive of more than 18 million people. Existing public open spaces, recreation areas, and trails provide superlative opportunities for hiking, biking, outdoor education, and birding. Cultural resources depict a wide range of historical themes and provide opportunities to interpret the region's rich cultural heritage.

The dynamics between areas of exceptionally high biodiversity and long history of human settlement and development provide unique opportunities for scientific research and study. The Santa Monica Mountains and the San Gabriel Mountains have a long history of research in geology, Mediterranean



Nationally significant cultural resources relate to a variety of themes including archeological resources, as shown by rock art; oil extraction, represented by Well No. 4 Pico Canyon; architecture, including the Gamble House; and space exploration resources, such as the Space Flight Operations Center at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. Photos (left to right): NPS, Herald-Examiner Collection/Los Angeles Public Library, NPS, NASA.

ecosystems, and astronomy. Comparatively fewer studies have been published on the natural and cultural resources of the Simi Hills, Santa Susana Mountains, and Verdugo Mountains, which have high potential for scientific study.

The study area retains a high degree of integrity and contains relatively unspoiled examples of significant resources, despite impacts in some areas from agriculture, urban development, and associated infrastructure. Approximately 84% of the study area lands are protected recreation areas, conserved open spaces, or vacant undeveloped lands. Isolated pockets of both nationally significant natural and cultural resources are present in the more urbanized portions of the study area.

Suitability

To be considered suitable for addition to the national park system, an area must represent a natural or cultural resource type that is not already adequately represented in the national park system, or is not comparably represented and protected for public enjoyment by other federal agencies; tribal, state, or local governments; or the private sector.

The NPS has determined, based on the character, quantity and quality of resource values in the study area, that there are nationally significant resources in the Rim of the Valley Corridor study area suitable for inclusion in the national park system. These resources are primarily located in the San Gabriel Mountains and foothills, Upper Santa Clara River, Santa Susana Mountains, and Arroyo Seco area. Each of these areas contain natural and/or cultural resources that represent themes not currently represented in the National Park Service or comparably managed sites, including:

- The **San Gabriel Mountains and Upper Santa Clara River** depict unique geological features and dramatic geologic processes, a wide diversity of rare habitats located in close proximity given the dramatic changes in topography, and technological advances in the areas of astronomy, chaparral ecosystems, and watersheds.

- The **Santa Susana Mountains** contain a convergence of montane and desert influences that create rare and unusual plant communities not found in other comparably managed areas. Well No. 4, Pico Canyon Oil Field National Historic Landmark, represents the birth of California's oil industry which was once the second most prolific oil-producing state.
- Suitable national historic landmarks in the culturally rich **Arroyo Seco** include the Rose Bowl National Historic Landmark, representing a unique aspect of recreation in America, and the Space Flight Operations Center and Twenty-five Foot Space Simulator national historic landmarks which embody significant advances in deep space exploration.

The Santa Monica Mountains and Simi Hills (outside SMMN-RA), Conejo Mountain-Las Posas Hills, Los Angeles River and Verdugo Mountain-San Rafael Hills areas contain resources of national significance but are similar to those already protected in SMMNRA. These resources do not meet suitability requirements for a new unit of the national park system, but would expand and enhance resource protection and visitor use opportunities currently represented in SMMNRA.

Feasibility

To be feasible as a new unit of the national park system, an area must be: (1) of sufficient size and appropriate configuration to ensure sustainable resource protection and visitor enjoyment (taking into account current and potential impacts from sources beyond proposed park boundaries), and (2) capable of efficient administration by the National Park Service at a reasonable cost.

In evaluating feasibility, the NPS considers a variety of factors for a study area, such as the following:

- Land use, current and potential site uses, ownership patterns, planning and zoning
- Access and public enjoyment potential

- Boundary size and configuration
- Existing resource degradation and threats to resources
- Public interest and support
- Social and economic impact
- Costs associated with operation, acquisition, development, and restoration

The feasibility evaluation also considers the ability of the NPS to undertake new management responsibilities in light of current and projected availability of funding and personnel. An overall evaluation of feasibility is made after taking into account all of the above factors.

The feasibility evaluation generally found that most feasibility factors could be met. Although the study area has a diverse array of land uses, ownership, and management, the area could be feasibility managed as national park unit using the collaborative management model exhibited by SMMNRA. There is considerable potential for public access and enjoyment including many existing trails, parks, and open space and opportunities to expand trails systems and provide additional recreational areas. Lands within the study area are of sufficient size and configuration to protect nationally significant resources. Social and economic impacts would largely be beneficial, as a new park unit would bring new jobs and revenue to the region. However, costs of a new national park unit are not feasible when compared to the lesser costs of expanding the existing SMMNRA boundary, which is also under consideration in this study.

The study finds that creation of a new national park unit is not feasible, in comparison to the resource management and operational efficiencies afforded by a boundary adjustment to SMMNRA. Many of the significant resources within the study area augment the national significance of SMMNRA and provide habitat connectivity essential for long-term preservation of the significant resources within the Santa Monica Mountains, thus warranting physical connection to the SMMNRA boundary and a seamless interagency management approach.

Need for NPS Management

The need for direct NPS management is the final criterion for a favorable recommendation for a proposed new unit of the national park system. Only areas that are determined significant, suitable, and feasible as a new national park unit are evaluated for this final criterion. Because a boundary adjustment was found to be a more feasible option for NPS management within the study area, this criterion need not be evaluated.

Conclusions – New National Park Unit

The NPS finds that the study area contains nationally significant resources suitable for inclusion in the national park system. While the study found that that multiple feasibility factors relevant to establishing a new unit of the national park system

could be met, the assessment of boundary adjustment criteria identified resource management and operational efficiencies that could not be achieved through the establishment of a new unit. It was recognized that a new unit would not compare favorably with a SMMNRA boundary adjustment in terms of costs, the duplication of management structures, and the complexity involved in operating two similar but independent units. The study team concludes that it would not be feasible to establish a new partnership unit that would have similar purposes to the existing park, and adjacent to or within close proximity to it. A boundary adjustment to SMMNRA would be more feasible. Therefore, the study area does not meet the feasibility criterion and is not eligible for designation as a new unit of the national park system.

Addition to Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (Boundary Adjustment)

In accordance with section 3.5 of *NPS Management Policies 2006*, the NPS evaluated whether boundary adjustments (additions to) SMMNRA would protect significant resources related to the purpose of the national recreation area, address operational issues, or otherwise protect resources critical to fulfilling the authorized purpose of SMMNRA. The evaluation also determines the feasibility of administering the newly added lands in terms of size, configuration and ownership, costs, impacts on local communities and surrounding jurisdictions, and other factors such as the presence of hazardous substances or exotic species. Finally, the evaluation determines whether other alternatives for management are adequate or not.

Protect Significant Resources and Values, or to Enhance Opportunities for Public Enjoyment Related to Park Purposes

The study finds that the addition of lands in the study area to SMMNRA would enhance protection of significant resources and expand opportunities for public enjoyment related to the purpose of SMMNRA. Areas eligible for addition to SMMNRA (approximately 313,000 acres of land) include: habitat types that contribute to the high biodiversity of the Santa Monica Mountains; functioning wildlife corridors; highly scenic landscapes; and archeological sites. Eligible areas also include thousands of acres of open space and recreation areas, miles of trails, hundreds of sites of historical value, and national historic trails which provide exceptional public enjoyment opportunities. Expanding SMMNRA to the east into the City of Los Angeles would provide new opportunities for the NPS to reach out to communities in some of the most ethnically diverse and densely populated areas in the United States.

Otherwise Protect Park Resources that are Critical to Fulfilling Park Purposes

Including study area resources in SMMNRA allows for greater protection of national recreation area resources and fulfillment of park purpose. Maintaining SMMNRA's habitat value and high biodiversity will depend in part on functional habitat connectivity and protection of the broader ecosystem. A boundary

adjustment that would include the Rim of the Valley Corridor areas would provide the widest range of tools to maintain habitat connectivity and protect significant resources including authority to expend funds to inventory, monitor, and study resources, as well as protection through land acquisition.

Feasibility to Administer Lands Added through the Boundary Adjustment

Added lands must be feasible to administer considering their size, configuration, and ownership; costs; the views of and impacts on local communities and surrounding jurisdictions; and other factors. Lands eligible for inclusion in SMMNRA include approximately 313,000 acres of land in the study area and along the Los Angeles River that are not already within the boundaries of SMMNRA. Eligible areas include the Santa Monica Mountains outside of the current boundary, the Arroyo Seco and Los Angeles River corridors, the Verdugo Mountains-San Rafael Hills, the San Gabriel Foothills, the Upper Santa Clara River corridor, portions of the Santa Susana Mountains and Simi Hills, and the Conejo Mountain-Las Posas Hills. Areas determined ineligible for inclusion in a boundary adjustment include lands within the San Gabriel Mountains that are currently managed by the U.S. Forest Service.

Within these 313,000 acres, two boundary adjustment configurations are considered feasible additions to SMMNRA. *Chapter 5: Alternatives*, explores these two different approaches to a SMMNRA boundary adjustment. The first configuration (defined as alternative C) would expand the national recreation area to include 173,000 acres to the north and the east, focusing resources in more urban areas, where there is a greater need for recreational opportunities and access to open space. The second configuration (defined as alternative D) would include all 313,000 acres determined eligible for inclusion in SMMNRA and therefore would provide greater inclusion of nationally significant resources and important regional wildlife corridors that support the area's high biodiversity.

The cost of an addition to the boundary of SMMNRA is feasible using the existing collaborative partnership-based management model exemplified by SMMNRA, which respects and builds upon the complex mix of existing land use, ownership, and regulatory authorities. A boundary adjustment would enhance opportunities for collaborative management with local, state, and federal managers to protect natural and cultural resources and provide recreation, public access, and other compatible uses. Given the high cost of land in Los Angeles and Ventura counties, limited, strategic land acquisition would likely be most feasible. Land acquisition would only be considered where there are willing sellers.

The social and economic impacts of a boundary adjustment appear to be largely beneficial. The addition of new areas to SMMNRA would not necessarily establish new regulatory or land use authority over local governments or private lands within the boundary.

Adequacy of Protection Alternatives Considered

This report determines that a boundary adjustment would provide the greatest opportunity for protection of resources related to SMMNRA's purpose when compared to other protection alternatives evaluated in the draft study report. Although other agencies and organizations would provide some level of protection under current conditions (alternative A) and additional NPS tools and resources for regional cooperation (alternative B) would contribute to the long-term protection of SMMNRA, a boundary adjustment would provide NPS with the fullest range of conservation tools and authorities to protect significant resources and provide public enjoyment opportunities. These tools and authorities include direct land conservation by the NPS to protect the broader ecosystem and funding to provide facilities that support recreation and public enjoyment.

Broadening the NPS' ability to partner beyond the current SMMNRA authorized boundary would expand the efficient cooperative management approaches that have been applied in the Santa Monica Mountains for over 30 years. The NPS would be able to expand its current cooperative management agreement with California State Parks, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, and the Mountains and Recreation Conservation Authority, thus allowing for new visitor opportunities, scientific research and study, and coordinated management of essential wildlife corridors. Given the complexity of ownership and management, high cost of land acquisition, and demands of a growing metropolitan region, having multiple agencies working in partnership has been necessary to leverage adequate resources for land protection.

Conclusions – Boundary Adjustment Evaluation

An adjustment to the boundary of SMMNRA is feasible using the collaborative partnership-based management model exemplified by SMMNRA, which respects the complex mix of existing land use, ownership, and regulatory authorities. Inclusion of lands of the Rim of the Valley Corridor in SMMNRA would contribute to protection of significant resources related to the purpose of the national recreation area and expand opportunities for public enjoyment at SMMNRA.

Alternatives

The following section describes a range of management alternatives that are being considered by the National Park Service in the draft study report.

Overview of the Alternatives

The study team developed four alternatives based on information gathered from public and stakeholder input, internal NPS discussions, evaluation of special resource study and boundary adjustment criteria, historical research, and NPS management models. The four alternatives considered are a “no action” alternative, which serves as a baseline for comparison, and three “action” alternatives.

- **Alternative A: Continuation of Current Management (No Action)** serves as a baseline for evaluating the action alternatives;
- **Alternative B: Cooperative Conservation Partnership** would foster cooperative planning and funding tools for the NPS, partner agencies and landowners in the study area and conserve key habitat linkages to the Los Padres and Angeles national forests;
- **Alternative C: Rim of the Valley Boundary Adjustment (Preferred Alternative)** includes a SMMNRA boundary adjustment (approximately 173,000-acre addition) that would provide more recreational opportunities and protect habitat linkages, with an emphasis on creating more opportunities near urban areas; and
- **Alternative D: Regional Rim of the Valley Boundary Adjustment and Cooperative Conservation Areas** includes a SMMNRA boundary adjustment (approximately 313,000-acre addition) with an emphasis on protecting regional wildlife corridors that would include most areas within the Rim of the Valley Corridor (excluding U.S. Forest Service managed areas). Cooperative conservation approaches are recommended for key habitat linkages between the Rim of the Valley Corridor study area and the Los Padres and Angeles national forests.

The alternatives explore ways to meet study objectives and opportunities to address primary issues identified by public and stakeholder scoping comments, provide long-term protection of nationally significant resources, and meet important objectives for the next century of NPS management, as identified through the NPS *Call to Action* initiative (NPS 2012a). These issues include:

- **Protection of Nationally Significant Resources.** The study identifies nationally significant natural and cultural resources in need of protection in the study area.
- **Habitat Fragmentation and Loss of Open Space.** Perhaps the greatest threat to the protection of the nationally significant natural resources in SMMNRA is the loss of habitat connections to other large protected areas.
- **Preservation of Recreational Opportunities and Access to Open Space.** Regional population growth continues, increasing demand for recreational opportunities. Existing park, open space, and recreation areas are unevenly distributed, with the fewest park areas most frequently occurring in low income communities of color and in areas with high numbers of children.
- **Regional Coordination.** The study area includes a diverse array of land managers and resource management agencies. The alternatives explore opportunities for greater efficiency, collaboration, priority setting, and funding to enhance resource protection and public enjoyment opportunities.

Elements Common to All Action Alternatives

A Partnership Approach to Management

The National Park Service recognizes that many other public agencies, private conservation organizations, and individuals successfully manage important natural and cultural resources and recreational opportunities within the study area. The NPS applauds these accomplishments and actively encourages expansion of conservation activities by state, local, and private entities, and by other federal agencies.

For over 30 years, the NPS has managed SMMNRA through a unique partnership in which the federal government works collaboratively with state, and local park agencies and private landowners to protect the natural and cultural resources of the area. In alternatives C and D where new areas are proposed for addition to SMMNRA, this cooperative management approach would continue to apply. It would also continue to be used in ongoing management of SMMNRA (all alternatives).

U.S. Forest Service Management

The alternatives do not include any U.S. Forest Service (USFS) managed lands in a boundary adjustment for SMMNRA. Management and ownership of the Angeles National Forest and San Gabriel Mountains National Monument lands would be maintained in all alternatives. USFS policies would continue to be applied to management of these lands. The NPS and USFS could work cooperatively through cooperative management agreements on initiatives to protect resources, provide visitor services, and conduct public outreach.

Retention of Local Land Use and Existing Regulatory Authorities/ NPS Regulatory Authorities

In all alternatives, lands would continue to be managed through a variety of public and private mechanisms by private landowners, federal, state and local agencies, universities, and organizations. In Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA) where the NPS has proprietary jurisdiction, lands not owned by NPS are typically regulated by local and state agencies or other federal authorities that have jurisdiction in the area. In proprietary jurisdiction parks, the state government has not ceded the state's jurisdiction over the park area to the NPS. However, under the National Park Service Organic Act 1916, which established the National Park Service, the Secretary of the Interior has broad authority to establish regulations on certain activities, regardless of ownership, within authorized national park unit boundaries. Such regulations are found in 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Chapter 1.

As described in the social and economic impacts section of *Chapters 3 and 4*, additional NPS regulations that could pertain to activities on lands considered for addition to SMMNRA in alternatives C and D include regulation of mineral extraction and the exercise of nonfederal oil and gas rights. These regulations are designed to insure that activities undertaken pursuant to these rights are conducted in a manner consistent with

the purposes for which the national park system and each unit thereof were created.

New or existing solid waste disposal sites would be regulated under 36 CFR Chapter 1, Part 6. These regulations prohibit the operation of any solid waste disposal site, except as specifically provided for, and govern the continued use of any existing solid waste disposal site within the boundary of any unit of the national park system. For example, within SMMNRA, the Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County obtains a permit from NPS to operate the Calabasas landfill in Agoura Hills.

The extent to which such regulations would affect land uses would be dependent on what is specified in the legislation authorizing the boundary expansion, and the nature of the activities. Legislation would be required to implement a boundary addition to SMMNRA. It should be noted that through any resulting legislation, Congress can make determinations about uses and regulations within a specific park unit. For example, some national recreation areas are open to mineral leasing if specified resource protection and administrative objectives can be met. Congress would also specify which areas would be included or excluded. Additional information on regulations related to mineral extraction and an assessment of land use and social and economic impacts related to these regulations is provided in the evaluation of land use impacts in *Chapter 6: Environmental Consequences*.

All of the study alternatives would adhere to existing general plans and local zoning, as well as state and local laws and policies on lands that are not federally owned. The NPS is authorized to provide comments on proposed projects within SMMNRA and the broader Santa Monica Mountains Zone (SMMZ). SMMNRA's 1978 authorizing legislation established the SMMZ which includes 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, but the NPS retains, by law, reviewing authority on projects involving federal funds, permits, or licenses that may affect the national recreation area. This authority was provided by Congress when the national recreation was established to reduce downstream impacts on national recreation area resources when possible.

Privately Owned Lands

Within the national recreation area boundary, the NPS only has authority to directly regulate lands under NPS ownership (with the exception of solid waste facilities and oil and gas extraction as described above). Neither inclusion in the national recreation area nor consideration of cooperative conservation approaches would impact local land use authority over lands not owned by the NPS.

NPS policy is to acquire lands and interests in lands only from willing sellers, with condemnation as a means of last resort.

Land acquisition by the NPS would be targeted and limited by funding availability. A land protection plan would set priorities for NPS land acquisition. In some cases Congress has expressly limited NPS land acquisition authorities. Legislation would be required for a boundary expansion to SMMNRA. Such legislation could expressly limit NPS land acquisition to lands for which there are willing sellers.

Rim of the Valley Trail

The NPS would support completion of the Rim of the Valley Trail through partnerships and technical assistance. Once established, the Rim of the Valley Trail could be eligible for designation as a National Recreation Trail, through the existing application process, which is voluntary and could be initiated by trail managers.

Fire Protection

Fire protection would remain the responsibility of existing federal, state, and local agencies (Los Angeles and Ventura counties, U.S. Forest Service, NPS, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection). NPS fire management practices would only apply to land purchased by the NPS.

Water Supply, Flood Protection, and Sanitation Infrastructure Facilities and Functions

The greater Los Angeles metropolitan region has highly complex systems of public infrastructure to transport and store local and regional water supplies, and to manage flood protection. In addition, numerous facilities are necessary to treat wastewater and manage solid waste. The alternatives would not affect existing public right-of-ways, change existing water rights, water supply operations, water treatment operations, or flood protection efforts.

As described in the section on local land use and regulatory authorities, NPS would be required to regulate solid waste facilities per 36 CFR, Chapter 1, Part 6, in areas proposed for addition to SMMNRA. However, through any resulting legislation, Congress could make an exception for this regulation should this prove an undue burden on the NPS and sanitation agencies given the number of solid waste facilities needed to support adjacent urban areas. Such facilities could also be excluded from a boundary adjustment.

The proposed alternatives would not affect existing and future water rights. Management of water supply and treatment plants would continue under current authorities. In alternatives C and D, the areas proposed for inclusion in the SMMNRA boundary would not entail any new or future beneficial uses or requirements for water supply, water quality, or air quality regulations.

Geographic Database

SMMNRA would work with partners to develop a collaborative geographic database to support decision-making in the study area. Universities and other partners would be engaged to assist in building scientific knowledge to support decision-making.

Alternative A: Continuation of Current Management (No Action Alternative)

Concept

The no action alternative is required by the National Environmental Policy Act to provide a baseline from which to compare action alternatives. Current programs and policies of existing federal, state, local and non-profit organizations would continue at existing levels and current conditions and trends would continue. The geographic focus of alternative A includes the 650,000-acre study area known as the Rim of the Valley Corridor.

The National Park Service would have no role in the study area beyond efforts related to existing national park or historic trail units (Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail, the Old Spanish National Historic Trail) and existing financial and technical assistance programs such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund grant program, Federal Lands to Parks Program, the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, and the National Historic Landmark program.

Proposed Area

The area examined in the no action alternative is the 650,000-acre study area known as the Rim of the Valley Corridor. This is also the authorized area or jurisdiction for the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, a state land conservancy (Figure 5-1: *Alternative A: No Action Alternative*).

Existing Management

Federal, state, and local government agencies and conservation organizations own and manage a little over half of the land in the study area. A full description of these agencies is described in the feasibility section in *Chapter 3: New National Park Unit Criteria Analysis*.

NPS Management

In the no action alternative, the NPS would continue to manage Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA) in partnership with existing agencies and organizations in accordance with the 2002 *General Management Plan*. Land identified for conservation in the national recreation area's land protection plan would be acquired as funds are available. Any SMMNRA management activities in areas beyond the current national recreation area boundary would be limited to projects that further SMMNRA's defined purpose. Current efforts include urban outreach efforts in Los Angeles and resource management cooperation and assistance. In addition to management of SMMNRA, the NPS would continue to manage the two national historic trails (NHT) which traverse the study area, the Juan Bautista de Anza NHT and the Old Spanish NHT. The NPS would continue to provide technical assistance to local communities and organizations through the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program and various grant programs that support land conservation and various aspects of historic preservation.

Management by Other Agencies and Organizations

Other federal land management agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Bureau of Land Management would continue to manage study area lands according to existing plans and policies; as would state and

local land management agencies as described in the feasibility section of *Chapter 3*.

In the no action alternative, existing cooperative management efforts between agencies would continue, and current efforts to protect significant resources and provide new recreational opportunities would continue to occur based on current programs and plans as funding allows. Although fluctuations are inevitable, it is assumed that these efforts will continue at current levels.

Private Land Stewardship

Under the no action alternative, private land conservation efforts and private recreational opportunities would continue at current levels. Local ordinances and initiatives would continue to determine appropriate uses for private lands. Private land protection efforts such as conservation easements, however, would continue to be uncoordinated with broader regional goals for conservation and recreational opportunities.

Rim of the Valley Trail

Legislation in 1983 extended the geographic limits of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy's authority to encompass an area known as the Rim of the Valley Trail Corridor. Under the no action alternative, various agencies and organizations would likely continue to develop proposed segments of the Rim of the Valley Trail system. The NPS would continue to plan and implement portions of the trail that traverse park boundaries as funds become available. NPS technical assistance in completion of the full trail would be limited to existing technical assistance and grant programs. Other agencies and organizations along the trail corridor would continue to work on existing conservation goals and efforts.

Recreational Opportunities and Access

Under the no action alternative, new recreational opportunities and access would occur through existing agencies, organizations, and local governments as funding permits. The U.S. Forest Service, and other state and local agencies and organizations would continue to manage recreational opportunities

according to current plans. Recreational opportunities would continue to be limited in some portions of the study area, including Los Angeles in the east and in certain neighborhoods of the Camarillo community in the west. However, existing collaborative efforts among the City of Los Angeles, Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and many other agencies and organizations would continue to expand recreational activities along the Los Angeles River, including expansion of the Los Angeles River Trail.

Resource Protection

Protection of natural and cultural resources under the management of existing agencies would continue. Government grant programs, California state land conservancies, local governments, and non-profit land conservancies/trusts throughout the study area would continue to conserve and restore native ecosystems and habitat. Coordination among agencies to protect wildlife habitat and corridors and cultural resources would continue to occur on a case-by-case basis in various locations throughout the study area.

Operations and Maintenance

Operations and maintenance of existing parks and open space would be assumed to remain at existing levels, with fluctuations over time due to local and state budget priorities. For some agencies, more resources are available for the acquisition of lands than are available for operations and management.

Funding and Costs

Alternative A assumes that current authorized funding levels for the NPS within SMMNRA would continue. Some fluctuations would occur to account for inflation, new management needs, and to reflect national budget priorities. The NPS base budget for SMMNRA in fiscal year 2012 was \$8.6 million, which includes employee salaries and day-to-day operating expenses. SMMNRA also receives funding from other NPS programs such as those that fund construction projects and biological monitoring.



Many partnership efforts between public agencies and non-governmental organizations occur in the region. Examples include land protection, such as the purchase of Elsmere Canyon in the study area through partnership between local and state agencies (top); recreation planning, such as establishment of the Los Angeles River Recreation Zone (center); and study of wildlife movement in the region which has included SMMNRA (bottom). Photos: NPS.

Alternative B: Cooperative Conservation Partnership

Concept

Congress would authorize and direct SMMNRA to facilitate a partnership of public and private landowners, organizations, and institutions to establish an interconnected system of parks, habitat, and open space within the study area. Rim of the Valley Corridor area partners would also collaborate to provide coordinated education and interpretation focused on connecting people to the special resources and stories in the study area. The geographic focus of alternative B includes the 650,000-acre study area known as the Rim of the Valley Corridor and habitat linkage areas that connect the Rim of the Valley Corridor to the Los Padres National Forest and the Sierra Pelona unit of the Angeles National Forest. Existing agencies, organizations, and landowners would continue to own and manage lands within these areas. The existing SMMNRA boundary would remain unchanged.

These objectives would be achieved through the development of a cooperative conservation plan. The plan would identify shared goals and identify specific strategies for connecting open space, providing new recreational opportunities, and coordinated education and interpretation. Implementation of the plan would be accomplished by the public and private organizations and individuals that own and manage land in the area.

The NPS would continue to manage SMMNRA in partnership with other agencies and organizations. Beyond SMMNRA, the NPS would work through existing authorities to provide technical assistance to partners to achieve the goals of the plan.

Proposed Area

There would be no boundary adjustment to SMMNRA. The geographic focus of the partnership efforts and NPS technical assistance would generally include the Rim of the Valley Corridor study area and habitat linkage areas important for protection of significant resources, including areas connecting the Santa Susana Mountains to the Topatopa Mountains and areas connecting the San Gabriel Mountains to the Sierra Pelona (Figure 5-2: Alternative B: Cooperative Conservation Partnership).

Management Approach

Achieving Goals through Cooperative Conservation

Existing management by agencies, local government, organizations, landowners, and institutions as described under the no action alternative would continue under this alternative. However, through the development of a cooperative conservation plan, agencies, organizations, and landowners would work together to establish regional goals and priorities for protection of significant resources, including key wildlife corridors, and new opportunities for recreation, and educational programming throughout the area. Federal, state, local, and private organizations could participate to develop and initiate implementation of the cooperative conservation plan. The cooperative conservation planning effort would not establish additional regulatory or land use authority over existing governmental agencies or other regulatory authorities. Local government participation and implementation actions would be voluntary.

Congress would direct the NPS to facilitate the development of the conservation plan for the Rim of the Valley Corridor area and adjacent habitat linkages. Following completion of the plan, SMMNRA would provide technical assistance to

agencies and organizations in the Rim of the Valley Corridor area to achieve the goals of the plan and to increase outreach efforts to local communities. NPS technical assistance could be provided for natural resource protection, trail and park planning, and partnership development between agencies, organizations, and landowners to facilitate achievement of common goals.

Non-Governmental Organizations and Private Land Stewardship

Additional resources, strategies, and opportunities for private conservation efforts and land stewardship would be a key component of the cooperative conservation plan. Local landowners and organizations could participate in the development of the plan. Private land stewardship actions would be voluntary on the part of the landowner. The cooperative conservation plan could identify additional opportunities to provide technical assistance and leverage funding and for private landowners to conserve or restore lands.

Non-governmental organizations would be part of the cooperative conservation planning effort and could work collaboratively with agencies and private landowners to help protect significant resources and critical wildlife corridors.

Rim of the Valley Trail

The cooperative conservation plan would identify opportunities, priorities, and specific strategies for completion of the Rim of the Valley Trail. Planning and implementation of the trail would be supported by the NPS through technical assistance and partnerships. The trail would continue to be owned and managed by partner agencies and organizations. Those agencies and organizations would continue to be responsible for trail development.

Recreational Opportunities and Access

The cooperative conservation plan would identify priorities for recreational opportunities with particular emphasis on connecting existing trail systems and park units and targeting new recreation and open space for communities that currently lack adequate access.

The NPS would provide technical assistance to communities and organizations within the Rim of the Valley Corridor area to plan for parks and trails, and to provide interpretation and education about significant resources and conservation efforts. The NPS would coordinate and collaborate with the U.S. Forest Service's Southern California Consortium to conduct outreach with schools and youth.

Education and Interpretation

The cooperative conservation plan would evaluate needs and opportunities for interpretation and education. The NPS could provide technical assistance in interpretive and educational messaging in partnership with existing agencies and organizations throughout the cooperative conservation area. Public engagement in resource protection through both interpretation and citizen science would be explored in the cooperative conservation plan.

Resource Protection

The cooperative conservation plan would identify common priorities for land conservation that would emphasize protecting and enhancing habitat connectivity between existing parks and open spaces, and protection of nationally significant resources. Existing park and open space authorities would use the plan to target future land conservation efforts around priorities established in the cooperative conservation plan. Emphasis would also be placed on private land stewardship and providing technical assistance to public and private landowners, as requested, to conserve resources. The NPS would continue to purchase lands to protect core habitat areas and wildlife corridors within the existing SMMNRA boundary and collaborate regionally to share research and information to protect important wildlife corridors.

In more developed areas, the cooperative conservation plan would identify priority areas where restoration could enhance biodiversity and create more resilient biological systems. Restoration objectives explored in the plan could create new habitat linkages between the Santa Monica and San Gabriel Mountains. In more rural and undeveloped areas, existing federal and state programs that provide financial incentives for private landowners to restore habitat could be leveraged to achieve plan objectives.

Partner agencies and organizations would make recommendations related to cultural resources protection and interpretation and would engage key educational and research institutions to implement the recommendations. Additional inventories, documentation and mapping of cultural sites



In alternative B, the NPS would provide technical assistance and partnership support for planning and implementation of the Rim of the Valley Trail. Photo: NPS.

could be undertaken both on public lands and on the land of willing private landowners. Information about sensitive sites need not be released to the public; details and locations may need to be withheld to protect the resources. Native American tribes and organizations with ties to the area could continue to work with landowners and managers to protect sacred sites and archeological resources, and to obtain access or ownership of important sites for ceremonial, interpretive, and/or educational purposes.

Operations and Maintenance

Existing public and private landowners and managers would continue to operate and manage their land and facilities. The cooperative conservation plan could identify additional needs for operations and maintenance as well as opportunities where cooperative management approaches could streamline the operation and maintenance of parks and open space.

Funding and Costs

The cooperative conservation plan would identify ways to leverage additional resources from existing incentive programs and outside funding sources. To facilitate development of the cooperative conservation plan, the NPS would require funding for coordination of the plan. Given the complexity of jurisdictions and land ownership in the region, and the amount of public engagement that would be anticipated, the total one-time cost of the effort could range from \$500,000-\$700,000. These costs would include staffing, public outreach, and development of publications and outreach materials.

Although the NPS would not have direct management responsibilities for areas beyond SMMNRA, additional resources would be required for the NPS to engage in cooperative efforts and to provide long-term technical assistance in the implementation of the cooperative conservation plan. The annual NPS operating budget increase for these cooperative conservation efforts (based on FY2012 costs) is estimated to be approximately \$400-1,000,000, primarily for staffing. The level of staffing would indicate the degree to which the NPS could provide technical assistance and additional outreach and education programs.

Alternative C: Rim of the Valley Boundary Adjustment (Preferred Alternative)

Concept

Alternative C would include a boundary adjustment to Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA) to provide more recreational opportunities to a broad range of urban audiences, including many who are under-represented in national parks and underserved by state and local parks. This alternative would also provide for protection of significant resources and habitat connections within the proposed addition to SMMNRA.

The proposed boundary adjustment would add 173,000 acres to SMMNRA's authorized boundary. Areas included in the boundary adjustment generally include the portions of the study area bordering the most populous areas of the Los Angeles region, including the mountains surrounding the San Fernando and La Crescenta Valleys, and the Los Angeles River and Arroyo Seco corridors. The boundary adjustment would not include any area of the Angeles National Forest or San Gabriel Mountains National Monument.

SMMNRA would be authorized to partner and provide technical assistance to land managers and private landowners to protect habitat connections to the national forests and to assist local communities in planning for recreational opportunities.

Proposed Area

In alternative C, the proposed boundary adjustment would add the Los Angeles River and Arroyo Seco corridors, the Verdugo Mountains-San Rafael Hills, the San Gabriel Mountains foothills, and the eastern portions of the Simi Hills and the Santa Susana Mountains to SMMNRA. Existing parks such as Griffith Park, Hansen Dam, Sepulveda basin, Los Encinos State Park, Debs Park, El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument, and Los Angeles State Historic Park would serve as major portals into the Rim of the Valley area. U.S. Forest Service managed lands would not be included in the boundary adjustment (*Figure 5-3: Alternative C: Rim of the Valley Boundary Adjustment*).

The proposed boundary adjustment would add 173,000 acres to SMMNRA and would require Congressional legislation for implementation. Approximately 40% of the 173,000-acre addition is currently protected by other land management agencies and organizations for purposes that include conservation, open space, and/or recreation.

Management Approach

Management by existing agencies, local governments, organizations, private landowners, and institutions described under the no action alternative would continue under alternative C. However, the NPS would become another partner in the management of an additional 173,000 acres within the study area. Cooperative conservation approaches described under alternative B would be a component of the management approach for the proposed addition to SMMNRA.

The NPS could expend funds on resource protection, visitor services, land acquisition, and the planning and development of visitor facilities such as trails, waysides, etc. within the NPS boundary. NPS land acquisition would be targeted, with an emphasis on significant resources, maintaining and enhancing habitat connectivity, and providing recreational opportunities.

The NPS would only consider purchase of land from willing sellers.

As in alternative B, the NPS would also expand its capacity to provide technical assistance to agencies and organizations in the Rim of the Valley Corridor area for natural resource protection and restoration, trail and park planning, and to bring agencies, organizations, and landowners together towards achieving common goals.

Local Land Use Authorities

The SMMNRA boundary addition would not establish additional regulatory or land use authority over local governments. Local ordinances would continue to determine appropriate uses for private lands. Private land stewardship actions and conservation efforts would continue to be voluntary on the part of the landowner.

Rim of the Valley Trail

Various agencies and organizations would continue to develop proposed segments of the Rim of the Valley Trail. Overall planning and implementation of the Rim of the Valley Trail would be supported by the NPS through technical assistance and partnership development. Planning would include careful coordination with existing agencies, organizations, and private landowners to ensure that trail alignments do not conflict with existing land uses and ownership. The NPS could develop and manage new segments of the Rim of the Valley Trail within the expanded boundary of SMMNRA.

Recreational Opportunities and Access

Inclusion in the NPS boundary would give NPS the authority to expend funds on creating new trails and other facilities where appropriate. As requested, and contingent on funding, the NPS would provide technical assistance to surrounding communities (the San Fernando Valley and other urban areas) to enhance access to SMMNRA and other open space areas

through trail connections and public transportation options and to increase the overall diversity of public parklands. The NPS would emphasize and promote the public health benefits of outdoor recreation. Expanding SMMNRA into urban areas to the north and east would provide new close-to-home opportunities for those communities that do not have adequate parks and recreation areas. The NPS could also coordinate and collaborate with the U.S. Forest Service's Southern California Consortium to conduct outreach on recreational and learning opportunities with local schools and youth.

Education and Interpretation

The lands within the proposed boundary adjustment in alternative C would provide new opportunities for educational and interpretive programs and more engagement of urban communities. The NPS would seek opportunities to coordinate interpretive and educational messaging and programs in partnership with existing agencies and organizations. Interpretive themes related to nationally significant resources throughout the Rim of the Valley Corridor area would be emphasized (e.g. biodiversity, geology, paleontology, technology, economic development, and the interaction between human culture and the environment). With the Los Angeles River and its tributaries providing close-to-home physical and recreational connections, watershed interpretive themes could also be emphasized. Cultural resources in downtown Los Angeles and other urban communities would also provide opportunities to interpret the rich cultural heritage of the region.

Resource Protection

The alternative C boundary adjustment would also add to SMMNRA numerous natural and cultural resources that would expand and enhance protection of significant resources within SMMNRA including portions of the Santa Monica-Sierra Madre wildlife corridor within the Simi Hills and Santa Susana Mountains. Numerous studies have documented the importance of this corridor for wildlife movement (Spencer et al. 2010, Penrod et al. 2006). Also included are native grasslands, more oak woodland types, and habitat for a range of additional rare and sensitive species in the Simi Hills and Santa Susana Mountains. The San Gabriel Mountains foothills included in alternative C contain alluvial fan sage scrub, a distinct and sensitive natural community that has adapted to the unique fluvial processes of the Los Angeles basin. The boundary adjustment would also include the Verdugo Mountains, and more connections to Griffith Park, as well as remnant riparian areas along the Los Angeles River which are important ecological stepping stones between the Santa Monica and San Gabriel mountains.

The boundary adjustment in alternative C would include significant cultural resources related to space exploration and the Cold War that are located in the Arroyo Seco corridor and Simi Hills. Other significant historical sites that reflect the settlement and economic development of the region include the Pico Well. No.4 National Historic Landmark, portions of

the Butterfield Overland Trail, the Arroyo Seco Parkway, Route 66, and the El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument. The Simi Hills and Santa Susana Mountains contain numerous archeological sites, including rock art examples not found in the Santa Monica Mountains. Many sites of architectural significance would also be within the boundary adjustment, including the Gamble House National Historic Landmark in Pasadena.

With a focus on engaging urban populations, the NPS could create a network of partners to develop natural and cultural resource management programs that would engage the public through expanded citizen science, volunteer programs, education, and interpretation. The NPS could partner with stakeholders to develop a collaborative land protection program that includes both cooperative conservation planning tools and strategic land acquisition.

Including such resources in SMMNRA would allow the NPS to use its full range of tools and authorities for resource protection including land acquisition, inventorying and monitoring, and a variety of resource protection projects. The current inventory and monitoring program of SMMNRA would be expanded to include the new areas and would inform decision-making for resource management.

Operations and Maintenance

Existing land managers would continue to operate and manage their land and facilities. NPS would be responsible for operations and maintenance of lands that it acquires. Through cooperative management agreements, the NPS would have the opportunity to share staff, facilities and funding with partner agencies, streamlining operational efficiencies. Existing staff at SMMNRA would contribute toward operation of the expanded park area. However, additional staffing and expertise would be required for management of the new areas.

Funding and Costs

Initially, existing SMMNRA staff and operations would support the newly added areas. Initial staffing needs would primarily be for park planning, outreach, and coordination with other agencies and organizations. Increased staffing for the expanded SMMNRA would happen incrementally over time as implementation planning specifies objectives and as the NPS acquires land. Following completion of a management plan that would identify more specific goals for land protection, resource management, facilities, education, and outreach, more detailed operational costs and staffing needs would be identified. The annual NPS operating budget for the expanded SMMNRA in alternative C could range from \$9.5-\$10.5 million, an increase of \$900,000-\$1.9 million above SMMNRA's 2012 operating budget. The level of staffing needs would reflect the emphasis of future management (e.g. the amount and type of land acquired by NPS, ability to accomplish objectives through partnerships).

Alternative D: Regional Rim of the Valley Boundary Adjustment with Cooperative Conservation Areas

Concept

Alternative D includes a boundary adjustment to Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA) and authority for NPS to provide technical assistance to surrounding local communities, agencies, and private landowners to maintain habitat connectivity, protect significant resources, and plan for new parks and trails.

The alternative D boundary adjustment would add 313,000 acres to SMMNRA's authorized boundary to connect large natural areas and promote long-term resiliency of the significant natural resources within SMMNRA and the broader study area. The boundary expansion would also provide more recreational opportunities. The SMMNRA boundary addition would include most areas within the Rim of the Valley Corridor with the exception of lands owned and managed by the U.S. Forest Service as part of the Angeles National Forest and San Gabriel Mountains National Monument.

For critical habitat linkages outside of the proposed boundary addition, SMMNRA would be authorized to partner and provide technical assistance to land managers and private landowners to maintain and enhance habitat connections to the national forests (as in alternative B).

Proposed Area

SMMNRA Boundary Adjustment

The boundary adjustment would add 313,000 acres to SMMNRA. Approximately 23% of the new area is currently protected by existing land management agencies and organizations (Figure 5-4: *Alternative D: Regional Rim of the Valley Boundary Adjustment with Cooperative Conservation*).

The proposed boundary adjustment would add most of the areas within the Rim of the Valley Corridor study area to SMMNRA. Areas that would be included are the Los Angeles River and Arroyo Seco corridors, the Verdugo Mountains-San Rafael Hills, the San Gabriel Mountain foothills, the Upper Santa Clara River, the Santa Susana Mountains, the Simi Hills, and the Conejo Mountain - Las Posas Hills. Areas within the Santa Monica Mountains Zone such as Griffith Park and the western escarpment of the Santa Monica Mountains near California State University Channel Islands would also be included. This boundary adjustment includes the Santa Monica-Sierra Madre wildlife corridor within the study area.

U.S. Forest Service managed lands would not be included in the boundary adjustment. The National Park Service (NPS) and U.S. Forest Service would explore partnership opportunities similar to the no action and the cooperative conservation partnerships alternatives.

Cooperative Conservation Areas

Habitat linkages between the study area and the Los Padres and Angeles national forests would not be part of the expanded SMMNRA. However, the NPS would be authorized to partner with and provide technical assistance to land managers and private landowners to maintain and enhance habitat connectivity (as in alternative B).

Management Approach

Management by existing agencies, local governments, organizations, private landowners, and institutions as described under the no action alternative would continue under alternative D. Agencies and local governments would maintain authorities and land management responsibilities. However, the NPS would become another partner in the management of the additional areas with authority to expend funds on land protection, visitor facilities, interpretive and educational programs, and inventorying and monitoring of resources within the area.

NPS Roles

The NPS would work collaboratively with public and private partners to protect significant resources, expand public enjoyment opportunities, and provide interpretation and education about the area's resources.

The NPS could expend funds on land acquisition, and the planning and development of visitor facilities such as trails, waysides, etc. Land acquisition would be completed in partnership with other agencies and organizations. Any NPS land acquisition would be targeted, with an emphasis on protecting significant resources, maintaining and enhancing habitat connectivity, and providing recreational opportunities. The NPS would only consider purchase of land from willing sellers. The NPS would have no land use regulatory authority for lands that it does not own.

To facilitate habitat connectivity between the study area and the Los Padres and Angeles national forests, the NPS would be authorized to engage in cooperative conservation partnerships and provide technical assistance to public and private landowners, organizations, and institutions north of the study area (similar to alternative B). There would be no NPS land acquisition or management of these areas.

As in alternatives B and C, NPS would also expand its capacity to provide technical assistance to agencies and organizations in the Rim of the Valley Corridor area to increase outreach efforts to local communities. NPS technical assistance could also be provided for natural resource protection and restoration, trail and park planning, and to bring agencies, organizations, and landowners together to achieve common goals.

Other Federal, State and Local Land Management Agencies and Organizations

New planning efforts would explore opportunities for agencies to collaborate and set shared goals for resource protection, connecting parklands and trails, restoration objectives, and providing coordinated interpretive and educational opportunities that highlight nationally significant resources in the newly added areas.

Implementation of conservation efforts for cooperative conservation areas outside of the SMMNRA boundary adjustment would be executed by state and local governments, private entities, and other federal agencies. The NPS would provide technical assistance to these agencies and organizations where needed.

Local Land Use Authorities

The SMMNRA boundary addition would not establish additional regulatory or land use authority over local governments. Local ordinances would continue to determine appropriate uses for private lands. Private land stewardship actions and conservation efforts would continue to be voluntary on the part of the landowner.

Non-Governmental Organizations and Private Land Stewardship

The NPS would work cooperatively with conservation organizations and private landowners upon request to undertake cooperative conservation efforts (easements, grants, technical assistance for best management practices, etc.) that do not require federal land acquisition.

For the cooperative conservation areas outside of the SMMNRA boundary addition, private land stewardship would be a key component of conservation efforts. An implementation plan would identify a range of private land stewardship strategies that could maintain habitat linkages and protect habitat if implemented. Private land stewardship actions would be voluntary on the part of the landowner.

Rim of the Valley Trail

Because the expanded SMMNRA would encompass the entire Rim of the Valley Trail, this would provide the NPS with opportunities to own or manage new segments of the trail throughout its planned route. Other agencies and organiza-

tions would continue to develop proposed segments of the Rim of the Valley Trail. Overall planning and implementation of the Rim of the Valley Trail could be supported by the NPS through technical assistance and partnership development. Planning would include careful coordination with existing agencies, organizations, and private landowners to ensure that trail alignments do not conflict with existing land uses and ownership.

Recreational Opportunities and Access

Inclusion in the SMMNRA boundary would give NPS the authority to expend funds on facilities to support recreation and public enjoyment. Because alternative D would also include larger areas of undeveloped open space, the NPS would evaluate and explore opportunities for acquiring lands to provide new recreational opportunities. As requested and contingent on funding, the NPS could provide technical assistance to surrounding communities (the San Fernando Valley and other urban areas) to enhance access to SMMNRA and other open space areas through trail connections and public transportation options and to increase the overall diversity of public parklands.

As in alternative C, expanding SMMNRA into urban areas northward and eastward would provide new close-to-home opportunities for those communities that currently do not have adequate parks and recreation areas. The NPS would conduct outreach to local communities, organizations, and schools to promote healthy recreation. The NPS could also coordinate and collaborate with the U.S. Forest Service's Southern California Consortium to conduct outreach on recreational and learning opportunities with local schools and youth.

Education and Interpretation

Educational and interpretive opportunities within the expanded SMMNRA would be similar to alternative C. The NPS would seek opportunities to coordinate interpretive and educational messaging and programs in partnership with existing agencies and organizations. Interpretive themes related to nationally significant resources throughout the Rim of the Valley Corridor area would be emphasized (e.g. biodiversity, geology, paleontology, technology, economic development, and the interaction between human culture and the environment). Cultural resources in downtown Los Angeles and other areas in the Rim of the Valley Corridor area provide new opportunities to interpret the rich cultural heritage of the region.

Topics currently interpreted at SMMNRA such as film production, Native American history and pre-history, and the significance of Mediterranean ecosystems would be expanded by the inclusion of new sites and resources. New cultural themes would include architecture, resource extraction and production, space exploration, astronomy, and the Cold War.



Resource protection efforts in alternative D would include long-term conservation of regional wildlife corridors. Similar to alternative C, alternative D would provide opportunities to engage urban audiences in recreation, education and interpretation. Photos: NPS.

Resource Protection

Significant cultural and natural resources described in the alternative C boundary adjustment would be included in alternative D. In addition to these resources, alternative D would include rare endemic plant and fossil resources associated with Conejo volcanic geologic features in the Conejo Mountain-Las Posas Hills area. This area also includes a western wildlife corridor connection to the Santa Susana Mountains. Alternative D would also include the Upper Santa Clara River area which is home to more sensitive plant community types than any other portion of the study area.

Within the boundary adjustment area, the NPS would partner with stakeholders to develop a collaborative land protection program that includes both cooperative conservation planning tools and strategic land acquisition. The current inventory and monitoring program of SMMNRA would be expanded to the new areas and would inform decision-making for resource management. The NPS could provide technical assistance in scientific study, restoration opportunities, and documentation of cultural and natural resources. Universities and other partners would be engaged to assist in building scientific knowledge to support decision-making.

The larger scope of alternative D provides the most opportunities for the NPS to play a direct role in long-term conservation of regional wildlife corridors through land acquisition and other means of land protection such as private land stewardship. Agencies and organizations within the added areas would continue to acquire lands for conservation and open space as permitted under existing authorities. The NPS would focus land acquisition on protection of core habitat areas in SMMNRA and in protecting critical wildlife corridors within the newly added areas.

Operations and Maintenance

NPS would be responsible for operations and maintenance of lands that it acquires. Existing land managers would continue to operate and manage their land and facilities. Through cooperative management agreements, the NPS would have the opportunity to share staff, facilities and funding with partner agencies, streamlining operational efficiencies. Existing staff at SMMNRA would contribute toward operation of the expanded park area. However, additional staffing and expertise would be required for management of the new areas.

Funding and Costs

Initially, existing SMMNRA staff and operations would support the newly added areas. Initial staffing needs would primarily be for park planning, outreach, and coordination with other agencies and organizations. Increased staffing for the expanded SMMNRA would happen incrementally over time as implementation planning specifies objectives and as the NPS acquires land. Following completion of a management plan that would identify more specific goals for land protection, resource management, facilities, education, and outreach, more detailed operational costs and staffing needs would be identified. The annual NPS operating budget for the expanded SMMNRA could range from \$10-\$12 million, an increase of \$1.4-3.4 million above SMMNRA's 2012 operating budget. The level of staffing needs would reflect the emphasis of future management (e.g. the amount and type of land acquired by NPS, ability to accomplish objectives through partnerships).

Environmental Assessment

Background

Before taking an action, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to identify a range of alternatives for that action and to analyze the potential environmental impacts of that action, including any potential adverse environmental effects that cannot be avoided if the proposed action is implemented. The NPS prepared an environmental assessment (EA) for the Rim of the Valley Corridor Special Resource Study to identify and analyze the potential environmental and socioeconomic consequences of each of the alternatives considered in the study.

Impacts

Consequences are determined by comparing likely future conditions under each alternative with the existing baseline conditions as described in the “no action” alternative. The analysis includes consideration of the context, intensity, and duration of direct and indirect effects of all the alternatives.

The NPS based analysis and conclusions on a review of existing literature, information provided by experts within the NPS as well as outside organizations, analysis of case studies of existing programs in other locations, and the professional judgment of the team members. The findings of this study will inform a recommendation by the Secretary of the Interior to Congress. If Congress takes action, then new environmental analysis would be undertaken prior to implementation actions. This new analysis would propose specific actions whose specific impacts would be assessed prior to implementation.

The NPS evaluated the environmental consequences of each alternative on the following topics: land use (including prime and unique farmlands and urban quality), paleontological resources, water resources, vegetation, wildlife, special status species, prehistoric and historic archeological resources, traditional cultural (ethnographic) resources, historic structures / cultural landscapes, visitor experience, park operations and partnerships, socioeconomics, and environmental justice.

The NPS finds that there would be no significant impacts associated with the proposed alternatives.

Environmentally Preferable Alternative

Implementing regulations for NEPA promulgated by the Council on Environmental Quality require that agencies identify “the alternative or alternatives which were considered to be environmentally preferable.” According to the Council on Environmental Quality, the environmentally preferable alternative is the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA’s Section 101. Ordinarily, this means the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment; it also means the alternative which best protects, preserves, and enhances historic,

cultural, and natural resources (46 FR 18026 - 18038). According to NPS Director’s Order 12, through identification of the environmentally preferable alternative, the NPS and the public are faced with determining the relative merits of the choices before them as represented among the alternatives and must clearly state through the decision-making process what values and policies were used in reaching a decision. Based on analysis of the alternatives, the alternative that would best protect, preserve and enhance historic, cultural and natural resources based on analysis of NEPA Section 101-B criteria is alternative D. Therefore, alternative D is the environmentally preferable alternative.

Consistency with NEPA Section 101-B

NEPA Section 101-B requires analysis of the following criteria:

1. Fulfilling the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations;
2. Ensuring for all generations safe, healthful, productive, and esthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings;
3. Attaining the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences;
4. Preserving important historic, cultural and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintaining, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice;
5. Achieving a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life’s amenities; and
6. Enhancing the quality of renewable resources and approaching the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources. (NEPA Section 101(b))

Each of the alternatives would meet criteria 1-5 to some degree. In each alternative, the NPS would work to achieve its mandate to protect significant resources for the enjoyment of future generations, thus meeting criterion 1. However, alternatives C and D would meet criterion 1 to the greatest degree by expanding the NPS mandate to additional areas in the Rim of the Valley Corridor. Alternatives C and D would also best meet the intent of criteria 2 and 3 through offering greater opportunities to protect esthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings and through the expansion of beneficial uses of the environment such conservation, recreation, and other public enjoyment opportunities. Alternative D would best achieve criterion 4 as it would provide the opportunity to protect a greater amount of historic, cultural and natural resources that depict important aspects of our national heritage. All alternatives would likely meet the principles identified in criterion 5 as local, state, and federal conservation efforts would continue to provide recreational opportunities and protect open space that contribute to a high quality of life in the greater Los Angeles metropolitan

area. Alternatives C and D would best meet this criterion as the NPS could improve coordination of collaborative efforts to protect open space and directly contribute NPS resources for land protection efforts. Criterion 6 does not apply to the alternatives because there are no specific plans for projects that would use depletable resources.

Alternative C best meets criteria 1, 2, 3, and 5, while alternative D best meets all five of the applicable criteria and therefore would best meet the Section 101-B criteria. Alternative D would best protect, preserve, and enhance historic, cultural, and natural resources in the Rim of the Valley Corridor. Because alternative D best meets all five of the five applicable criteria, alternative D would best meet the Section 101-B criteria.

Next Steps

After the distribution of the *Rim of the Valley Corridor Draft Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment*, there will be a minimum 60-day public review 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, including the selected alternative, 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.

A special resource study serves as one of many reference sources for members of Congress, the NPS, and other persons interested in the potential designation of an area as a new unit of the national park system. In this study, the NPS will also provide information to Congress and other interested persons regarding the potential of a boundary adjustment for Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. Readers should be aware that the findings and analysis contained in this special resource study do not guarantee the future funding, support, or any subsequent action by Congress, the Department of the Interior, or the NPS. Identification of an environmentally preferred alternative should not be viewed as a positive or negative recommendation by the NPS for any future management strategy or action.



Ranger led hike with youth in Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. Photo: NPS.