



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Finding of No Significant Impact
Rim of the Valley Corridor Special Resource Study

Los Angeles and Ventura Counties, California

November 2015

Introduction

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.

The study was prepared following the process established by the National Park System New Area Studies Act (P.L. 105-391, 16 U.S.C. Sec. 1a-5). This law requires that special resource (new area) studies be prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (42 U.S.C. § 4321-4347). The determination of whether any part of the study area qualifies as an addition or boundary adjustment to an existing unit of the national park system is based on criteria for boundary adjustments as described in NPS *Management Policies 2006* (Section 3.5).

This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) documents the determination of the National Park Service (NPS) that resources evaluated through this study meet the criteria for a proposed boundary adjustment to the SMMNRA; the selection of the most effective and efficient alternative; and the determination that there are no associated significant impacts on the human environment.

Purpose and Need

Purpose: The Consolidated Natural Resources Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-229, May 2008) directed the National Park Service (NPS) to conduct a special resource study of the area known as the Rim of the Valley Corridor. The legislation directed that the study determine (1) the suitability and feasibility of designating all or a portion of the corridor as a unit of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (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-profit organizations.

To achieve the first objective, this study analyzed 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 Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area park unit. To achieve the second objective the study analyzed the methods and means for protecting and interpreting the natural and cultural resources of the study area by the National Park Service, other federal, state, and local government entities and/or private and nonprofit organizations.

The study legislation also requires the Secretary of the Interior to document the process used to develop the *Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area 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 the draft study report's *Appendix G: Process Used to Develop the 2005 Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area Fire Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement*.

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

Need: The study evaluated the location, character, and condition of resources in the Rim of the Valley Corridor, their relationship to SMMNRA, and the range of issues associated with their protection and interpretation. While much of this information and analysis is related to both study objectives, the definition of issues facing the Rim of the Valley Corridor was necessary to identify potential roles for the NPS and other federal, state, and local government entities and/or private and nonprofit organizations, as called for in objective two of the study legislation. Four main issues were identified through comments received during public scoping, legislative testimony for the authorizing legislation, and resource inventories.

The four main issues are:

1. ensuring long-term conservation of nationally significant resources;
2. protecting or enhancing the remaining wildlife and plant habitat connections within the Rim of the Valley Corridor;
3. preserving and enhancing access to recreational opportunities and open space in the study area for visitors and residents in the second largest metropolitan area in the country; and
4. providing regional coordination to complete the Rim of the Valley Trail system and achieve other resource conservation goals.

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). Similar to SMMNRA, numerous agencies and conservation organizations manage lands within the study area. Portions of at least 27 communities are located in the study area, with approximately 5.1 million people living in the study area, and another 13 million living in surrounding communities within the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area. Land use is diverse and includes large natural areas, parks and recreation areas, suburban communities, farms and ranches, highly urbanized areas, freeways, and an array of public infrastructure. The vast majority of land, over 80%, is primarily undeveloped or vacant.

Study Findings

The study included two analyses: one that focused on potential adjustment of the existing boundary of Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA); and a second that focused on the potential creation of a new unit of the national park system.

BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENT EVALUATION FINDINGS

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 found eligible for addition to SMMNRA 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 geologic and paleontological resources, thousands of acres of open space and recreation areas, miles of trails, hundreds of sites of historical value, and national historic trails, all of 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 connect with communities in some of the most ethnically diverse and densely populated areas in the United States.

Maintaining SMMNRA's habitat value and high biodiversity depends in part on functional habitat connectivity and protection of its broader ecosystem. A boundary adjustment to include the Rim of the Valley Corridor areas would provide the widest range of tools to maintain habitat connectivity and protect significant resources. The boundary adjustment would include the authority to inventory, monitor, and study resources, and to provide additional protection through targeted land acquisition.

An adjustment to the boundary of SMMNRA is feasible using the collaborative partnership-based management model exemplified by existing SMMNRA management, which respects the complex mix of existing land use, ownership, and regulatory authorities within its boundary. Most feasibility factors (land use, access and public enjoyment potential, boundary size and configuration, public interest and support, social and economic impacts, and costs) could be met.

There is considerable potential for public access and enjoyment within the proposed boundary addition, including many existing trails, parks, and open space areas, as well as opportunities to expand trail systems and provide additional recreational areas. Inclusion of lands that are within the Rim of the Valley Corridor in SMMNRA would

contribute to protection of significant resources and expand opportunities for public enjoyment at SMMNRA. Along with California State Parks and the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, the National Park Service is working on an interagency trails management plan environmental impact statement and environmental impact report. This plan will include the portions of the Rim of the Valley Trail system that traverse the Santa Monica Mountains and Simi Hills that are within SMMNRA.

NEW NATIONAL PARK UNIT CRITERIA ANALYSIS 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 that are 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 less feasible, when compared to the resource management and operational efficiencies afforded by adding areas to SMMNRA. Many of the significant resources within the study area augment the national significance of SMMNRA and provide the 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.

Alternatives Analyzed

Four alternatives were analyzed in the *Rim of the Valley Corridor Draft Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment*. The alternatives are based on the purpose and need for the study and are consistent with existing laws, NPS policy and the special resource study legislation.

- Alternative A: Continuation of Current Management (No Action) served 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, an approximately 173,000-acre addition to SMMNRA 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, an approximately 313,000 acre addition to SMMNRA 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.

Alternatives Considered But Dismissed

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and NPS policy, alternatives may be eliminated from detailed study based on the following reasons [40 CFR 1502.14 (a)]:

- Technical or economic infeasibility;
- Inability to meet project objectives or resolve need for the project;
- Duplication of other less environmentally damaging alternatives;
- Conflicts with an up-to-date valid plan, statement of purpose and significance, or other policy; and therefore, would require a major change in that plan or policy to implement; and
- Environmental impacts too great.

There were four preliminary alternatives considered during public scoping which were modified to become the alternatives in the environmental assessment. The NPS also initially considered a Rim of the Valley Trail alternative which would have focused only on completion of the trail. This alternative was dismissed because it did not fully meet the purpose and need of the study.

The Selected Alternative - SMMNRA Boundary Adjustment with Cooperative Conservation Emphasis

The National Park Service special resource study process requires that the study identify the alternative or combination of alternatives that in the professional judgment of the NPS Director is most effective and efficient in protecting nationally significant resources and providing for visitor enjoyment. Based on public and stakeholder input and professional judgment, the NPS selected a hybrid alternative that is a combination of alternatives C and D. The National Park Service has determined that the selected alternative is the most effective and efficient alternative.

The actions encompassed in the selected alternative are primarily the same as those identified and analyzed in alternative C (preferred alternative) in the environmental assessment, with the exception of minor modifications made as a result of information and comments derived from public review of the environmental assessment. The total acreage of the selected alternative is approximately 170,000 acres, similar to alternative C (173,000 acres). Relative to alternative C, the selected alternative:

- Adds approximately 52,000 acres of land considered in alternative D, including portions of the Conejo Mountain area, western Santa Monica Mountains, and western Simi Hills that contain important habitat connections to the Santa Monica Mountains.
- Includes the cooperative conservation approach for areas beyond the proposed boundary addition as proposed in alternatives B and D in the draft study report.
- Removes approximately 55,000 acres of land including: built-out, high density residential, commercial, and industrial areas on the periphery of the boundary adjustment; areas with landfills or other solid waste facilities; and areas with high concentrations of oil and gas production in the Santa Susana Mountains. These areas were removed to the degree possible, while retaining key resources and public enjoyment opportunities.
- Within the Los Angeles and Arroyo Seco river corridors, areas included in the revised boundary adjustment are focused on public rights-of-way and adjacent public lands. The historic areas in downtown Los Angeles remain in the boundary adjustment.

The above modifications would not add to environmental impacts analyzed in the environmental assessment. The modifications, which reduce the amount of non-park (urban and developed) land in the boundary adjustment also would protect important habitat connectivity and benefit SMMNRA and the Rim of the Valley Corridor. The following is the full description of the selected alternative.

SELECTED ALTERNATIVE DESCRIPTION (CONCEPT)

The selected alternative 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 (if requested) to maintain habitat connectivity, protect key resources, and plan for new parks and trails. The boundary adjustment would provide recreational opportunities to a broad range of urban communities, including many that are underrepresented in national parks and underserved by state and local parks.

The proposed boundary adjustment would add approximately 170,000 acres to SMMNRA's authorized boundary. In areas beyond the proposed boundary addition, SMMNRA would use existing authorities to partner and provide technical assistance to land managers and private landowners to maintain and enhance habitat connections to the Los Padres and Angeles national forests and to assist local communities in planning for recreational opportunities.

PROPOSED AREA

The proposed boundary adjustment would add portions of the Los Angeles River and Arroyo Seco corridors, the Verdugo Mountains-San Rafael Hills, the San Gabriel Mountains foothills, the Simi Hills, the Santa Susana Mountains, and the Conejo Mountain area to SMMNRA. Existing parks such as Griffith Park, Hansen Dam Recreation Area, Sepulveda Basin (recreation areas and wildlife reserve), Los Encinos State Historic 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 Corridor area (see Map: Selected Alternative). The selected alternative includes the areas with the highest concentration of resource values and public enjoyment opportunities in the study area. Areas with landfills or other solid waste facilities and high concentrations of oil wells in the Santa Susana Mountains that were considered as part of a boundary adjustment in the draft study report, are not included in the selected alternative. If at some point in the future, such areas are no longer used for these purposes, they could be considered for inclusion in the national recreation area.

The proposed boundary adjustment would add approximately 170,000 acres to SMMNRA and would require congressional legislation for implementation. Approximately 41.5% of the 170,000-acre addition is currently protected by other land management agencies and organizations for purposes that include conservation, open space, and/or recreation.

Angeles National Forest and San Gabriel Mountains National Monument lands are not included in the boundary adjustment. The National Park Service (NPS) and U.S. Forest Service would continue to explore partnership opportunities using existing authorities.

The NPS recognizes that the proposed boundary adjustment would include hills and mountain systems beyond the Santa Monica Mountains and that Congress may consider revising the name of the broader national recreational area to better reflect the extent of the national park unit if a boundary addition is implemented.

MANAGEMENT APPROACH

Management by existing agencies, local governments, organizations, private landowners, and institutions described under the no action alternative would continue under the selected alternative. Agencies and local governments would maintain existing authorities and land management responsibilities. However, the NPS would become another partner in the management of an additional 170,000 acres within the study area. Cooperative conservation approaches would continue to be a component of the management approach for the proposed addition to SMMNRA.

NPS Roles

Through legislation, Congress could authorize the NPS to manage the new additions as part of SMMNRA and explore partnerships with existing land management agencies, private landowners, and organizations. The NPS could then expend funds on resource protection, visitor services, land acquisition, and the planning and development of visitor facilities such as trails, waysides, etc. within the expanded NPS boundary. 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 also expand its capacity to provide technical assistance to agencies and organizations in the Rim of the Valley Corridor area with the intent of increasing outreach efforts to surrounding local communities. Beyond SMMNRA, NPS technical assistance could be provided for: natural resource protection and restoration, including protection of regional wildlife corridors and adjacent tributaries; 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

The NPS would work with local, state, and federal agencies to administer a cooperative land protection program and management framework. 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 newly added

areas. The NPS would expand the cooperative management agreement with California State Parks, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, and Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority to provide coordinated management in the boundary addition. Through cooperative management agreements, the NPS, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Land Management could explore new opportunities to leverage resources for protecting habitat linkages and providing visitor services.

Local Land Use and Regulatory Authorities

Lands included in the proposed boundary addition 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 SMMNRA where the NPS has proprietary jurisdiction, lands not owned by NPS are typically regulated by local and state agencies or other federal authorities. 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 for certain activities, regardless of federal land ownership, within authorized national park unit boundaries. These regulations are found in Title 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Chapter 1.

Lands within the proposed boundary addition, unless purchased by or donated to the NPS, would generally be subject to existing general plans and local zoning, as well as state and local laws and policies. In some cases, where activities must cross federally-owned lands such as for access roads, NPS regulations may apply. 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 area was established to reduce downstream impacts on national recreation area resources when possible.

NPS regulations that could pertain to activities on lands considered for addition to SMMNRA include regulation of mineral extraction and the exercise of nonfederal oil and gas rights per 36 CFR Chapter 1, Parts 9A and 9B. These regulations respect existing rights and are not intended to result in the taking of a property interest, but rather to impose reasonable regulations on activities which involve and affect federally-owned lands. Valid existing mineral rights would be retained. The 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. Solid waste disposal sites, if located within the boundary, 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.

Most areas with these types of existing land uses (mineral extraction, the exercise of nonfederal oil and gas rights, and solid waste disposal) have been excluded from the proposed boundary adjustment. A limited number of areas with those types of land uses that are located within the proposed boundary adjustment remain within it because of their importance for resource values and habitat connectivity. The extent to which such regulations would affect these land uses would be dependent on what is specified in the legislation authorizing the boundary expansion, and the nature of the activities. Access to valid existing rights to minerals would not be affected by inclusion in the boundary. Mining operations in expanded park areas are also subject to state and local laws, ordinances, and rules. The NPS would continue its longstanding practice of working with all other permitting entities to reduce duplication and maximize efficiencies.

Legislation would be required to expand the SMMNRA boundary. It should be noted that through any resulting legislation, Congress has the final authority to make determinations about uses and regulations within a specific park unit, regardless of what is proposed in this study. For example, some national recreation areas are open to mineral leasing if specified resource protection and administrative objectives can be met.

Privately Owned Lands

Administratively, SMMNRA is a cooperative effort that joins federal, state, local park agencies with non-profit organizations and private landowners to protect resources and provide public enjoyment opportunities. While NPS shares responsibility for management of the national recreation area, it currently has direct responsibility for 15% of the land (23,500 acres). Approximately half of the lands within the national recreation area remain privately owned. In these areas local ordinances determine allowable uses on private lands. The ordinances provide a framework of policies and development standards that protects park resources and encourages compatible development.

The proposed boundary adjustment would not affect private property or other valid existing rights, such as mineral rights. Within the SMMNRA boundary, the NPS only has authority to directly regulate lands under NPS ownership (with the exception of certain regulations 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. In some cases Congress has expressly limited NPS land acquisition authorities. Any legislation, if crafted by Congress for the boundary addition, could expressly limit NPS land acquisition to lands for which there are willing sellers.

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), including assistance through cooperative fire agreements. NPS fire management practices such as brush clearing would only apply to land acquired by the NPS. See *Appendix G, Process Used to Develop the 2005 Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area Fire Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* in the draft study report for additional information on the SMMNRA fire management plan.

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

The greater Los Angeles metropolitan region has highly complex systems of public infrastructure related to telecommunications and energy, the transport and storage of local and regional water supplies (including recycled water), and infrastructure related to flood protection. In addition, numerous facilities are necessary to treat wastewater and manage solid waste. The selected alternative is not intended to affect existing public rights-of-way, water supply operations, water treatment operations, electrical or telecommunications infrastructure, or flood protection efforts. Management of water supply and treatment plants would continue under current authorities.

The selected alternative would not affect existing or future water rights. The areas proposed for inclusion in the SMMNRA boundary are not intended to propose any new or future beneficial uses or requirements for water supply, water quality, or air quality regulations. The NPS would be required to regulate solid waste facilities per 36 CFR, Chapter 1, Part 6 in areas proposed for addition to SMMNRA. Such facilities have been excluded from the proposed boundary addition. Additionally, through any resulting legislation, Congress could make an exception to this regulation.

Non-Governmental Organizations and Private Land Stewardship

The NPS would work cooperatively with non-governmental organizations and private landowners (upon request) to undertake cooperative conservation efforts that do not require federal land acquisition. These efforts could apply not only to areas in the proposed boundary adjustment, but also to cooperative conservation areas beyond the boundary that are important for wildlife movement and trail connections.

Non-Governmental Land Conservation. 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. Land trusts often work with private landowners to purchase conservation easements which maintain private ownership and use while providing compensation for land

conservation.

Private Land Stewardship. Private land stewardship would continue to play a key role in the conservation of resources. Privately owned open space, whether undeveloped or in agricultural use, often provides habitat for wildlife and contributes to scenery. Some private lands have trail easements or rights-of-way for equestrian or other recreational activities. Additional options would include developer dedications, targeting federal and state incentive programs for private land conservation, and technical assistance from agencies and organizations for land conservation and habitat restoration. Local ordinances would continue to determine appropriate uses for private lands. Private land stewardship actions would 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. For example, the NPS and other state and local agencies are currently preparing a *SMMNRA Interagency Trail Management Plan*. The trail management plan will include proposals for existing and proposed alignments for the Rim of the Valley Trail system within the current SMMNRA boundary.

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 that cross NPS managed land within the expanded boundary of SMMNRA.

Once established, the Rim of the Valley Trail would be eligible for designation as a national recreation trail, through the existing application process, which is voluntary and could be a cooperative management action initiated by trail managers.

RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND ACCESS

Inclusion in the SMMNRA 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 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.

In coordination with existing Los Angeles River initiatives, emphasis would be placed on creating more opportunities for recreation, interpretation, and education along the Los Angeles River and its tributaries, including the Arroyo Seco and Tujunga Wash. The NPS could develop partnerships with existing nature centers and recreational facilities to facilitate access and serve as local gateways to the broader Rim of the Valley Corridor area.

Providing improved access and alternative transportation opportunities to existing recreational opportunities and parks would be explored, particularly for communities that lack adequate access to parks and open space. This could occur through expansion of existing NPS or park partner bus leasing contracts, or through coordination and cooperation with existing transit agencies. For example, the NPS and partner agencies could explore creating recreational linkages to the Orange Line, a major public transportation corridor which connects downtown Los Angeles with San Fernando Valley communities.

The NPS would emphasize and promote the public health benefits of outdoor recreation. Children in communities that do not have adequate access to outdoor recreation tend to have higher rates of childhood diseases related to obesity, such as diabetes. 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 access to parks and open space. The NPS would conduct outreach to local communities, organizations, and schools to promote opportunities to visit parks for healthy recreational activities.

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 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. With the Los Angeles River and its tributaries providing close-to-home physical and recreational connections, watershed interpretive themes could also be emphasized. Adding more cultural resources in downtown Los Angeles and other urban communities to the boundary would also provide opportunities to interpret the diverse cultural heritage of the region.

Topics currently interpreted at SMMNRA such as film history and modern film production, Native American history and prehistory, and the significance of Mediterranean ecosystems would be expanded by the inclusion of new sites and resources that represent these themes. For example, the NPS currently interprets film history and film production at Paramount Ranch within SMMNRA. With the proposed boundary expansion, Griffith Park and Corriganville Ranch, two important sites in film history would be added to SMMNRA and would augment interpretation of this theme.

Beyond the boundary addition, the NPS could also use existing authorities to conduct outreach and educational programs in surrounding communities. NPS could also provide technical assistance to help partner agencies develop educational programming if it relates to resources and educational programming conducted in the expanded boundary.

RESOURCE PROTECTION

The boundary adjustment would add numerous natural and cultural resources to SMMNRA that would expand and enhance protection of significant resources already within SMMNRA, including portions of the Santa Monica-Sierra Madre wildlife corridor within the Simi Hills, the Conejo Mountain area, and the Santa Susana Mountains. Numerous studies have documented the importance of this corridor for wildlife movement. Also included are native grasslands, more oak woodland types, and habitat for a range of additional rare and sensitive species. The San Gabriel Mountains foothills included in the selected alternative 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, more connections to Griffith Park, and 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 would include cultural resources related to space exploration and the Cold War that are located in the Arroyo Seco corridor and Simi Hills. Other historical sites that reflect the settlement and economic development of the region include Pico Well No.4 National Historic Landmark, portions of the Butterfield Overland Trail, the Arroyo Seco Parkway, Route 66, and El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument. Portions of the Simi Hills and the Santa Susana Mountains that would be included in the boundary addition also contain numerous archeological sites, including rock art examples not found in SMMNRA.

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 in SMMNRA would be expanded to the new areas and would inform decision-making for resource management. To further engage 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 would 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.

Both within the expanded national recreation area and in areas beyond, the NPS could provide technical assistance in scientific study, restoration opportunities, and documentation of cultural and natural resources. SMMNRA would work with partners to develop a collaborative geographic database to support decision-making. More universities and other partners would be engaged to assist in building scientific knowledge to support decision-making.

Priorities for Land Conservation

In recent years, various agencies and park districts have acquired large areas of open space in areas such as the Verdugo Mountains, Simi Hills, and eastern Santa Susana Mountains. The NPS would work with these partners to identify common priorities for land conservation that would emphasize protecting and enhancing habitat connectivity between existing parks and open spaces. Other agencies and organizations within the added areas would likely continue to acquire lands for conservation and open space as permitted under existing authorities. The NPS would focus its own land acquisition on protection of core habitat areas in SMMNRA and in protecting nationally significant resources and wildlife corridors within the newly added areas. Having such areas within the SMMNRA boundary means that the NPS would have the authority to purchase lands for protection or expend funds on other means of land conservation. The NPS would also continue to collaborate regionally to share research and participate in strategies to protect important wildlife corridors beyond the SMMNRA boundary. Emphasis would be placed on private land stewardship and providing technical assistance to public and private landowners, as requested, to conserve these resources.

Restoration Opportunities. In more developed areas, the NPS could contribute to restoration efforts that would enhance biodiversity and create more resilient biological systems. The NPS could actively support current restoration efforts on the Los Angeles River, Arroyo Seco, and Tujunga Wash. Opportunities could also be explored, in cooperation with other agencies and landowners, for the Arroyo Simi and Calleguas Creek. These efforts would provide excellent opportunities to restore riparian areas and enhance regional habitat connectivity.

Cooperative Conservation. The NPS would also explore collaborative restoration efforts to conserve and enhance habitat linkages between the Santa Monica Mountains and other large conservation areas within the San Gabriel Mountains and the Sierra Pelona. The Consolidated Natural Resources Act of 2008 allows for the NPS to enter into cooperative and interagency agreements to protect natural resources. The NPS may also contribute financially to projects that protect wetlands, watersheds, and coastal resources if they also benefit park resources. For example, such funding could contribute to restoration projects on tributaries to the Los Angeles River that extend beyond the proposed boundary addition because these tributaries provide excellent opportunities for wildlife movement.

Existing federal and state programs that provide financial incentives for private landowners to restore habitat could be leveraged to achieve restoration objectives. Federal and state agencies have established numerous incentive programs to assist private landowners in their conservation efforts. The NPS could help identify additional opportunities to leverage funding that could be used by private landowners to conserve or restore lands. Within the federal government, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of the Interior (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) offer numerous programs targeted to assist private landowner conservation. Several examples of the available opportunities are discussed below.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program provides both technical and financial assistance to landowners who want to develop and improve wildlife habitat on their agricultural land, nonindustrial private forest land, or tribal land. The Conservation Reserve Program (Farm Services Agency) funds farmland projects that provide vegetative cover, riparian buffers, and other resource conservation activities. Farmers who enter the program receive an annual rental payment of up to \$50,000 per person per year for the land taken out of agricultural production. Fifty percent cost sharing is also available for implementing conservation plans. Conservation Reserve Program contracts last 10-15 years. As of 2012, approximately 10,500 acres of farmland were converted to habitat under the Conservation Reserve Program in California. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has a Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program that provides technical and financial assistance to private landowners who

are willing to partner on habitat improvements for migratory birds, as well as other threatened and endangered wildlife.

Existing state programs to conserve farmlands such as those authorized by California's Williamson Act can also support conservation objectives. The Williamson Act established an incentive-based conservation program to protect agricultural resources, preserve open space, and promote efficient urban growth patterns. The Williamson Act enrollment is voluntary, and an agency cannot require a landowner to enter into a contract as a condition of approval for any permit or project.

Opportunities for technical assistance to conserve significant resources and wildlife habitat could also be facilitated through the three resource conservation districts (Antelope Valley, Santa Monica Mountains, and Ventura) that service the area.

Cultural Resources Documentation and Protection

The NPS would work collaboratively to document cultural resources within the newly added areas. Although comprehensive inventories have been completed of cultural resources in SMMNRA, for California State Parks, and recently for the City of Los Angeles, other portions of the proposed boundary addition are not as well documented. Additional inventories, documentation and mapping of cultural sites could be undertaken. Information about sensitive sites need not be released to the public; details and locations may need to be withheld to protect the resources. The NPS could facilitate the development of a network of cultural resources stakeholders including historical societies, institutions, and other organizations. This network could explore and make recommendations related to cultural resources protection and interpretation.

Significant sites could be evaluated for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or designation as national historic landmarks. Such designations would help to document the historical, cultural and archeological significance of the area and could enhance funding and technical assistance opportunities.

Many sites within the study area are important to Native American tribes and other organizations. Tribes, organizations and others could continue to work with public and private landowners and managers to protect sacred sites and archeological resources, and to obtain access or ownership of important sites for ceremonial, interpretive, and educational purposes.

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 to operation of the expanded park area. However, additional staffing and expertise needed for the expanded area would include:

- **Natural resource management staff (~2-4 FTE)** - to conduct inventory and monitoring of resources and to provide technical expertise on conservation of wildlife corridors and habitat restoration in urban areas.
- **Staff with expertise in cultural resources management (~1-2 FTE)** - to document and manage the expanded scope of cultural resources within the newly added area.
- **Outreach coordinator and interpretive rangers (~3-5 FTE)** - to create and develop visitor programs.
- **Law enforcement rangers (~2-4 FTE)** - to protect resources and ensure a safe visitor experience.
- **Maintenance and facilities management staff (~2-4 FTE)** - would be required to care for any additional lands that the NPS would acquire and for any new facilities that the NPS would construct (trails, roads, etc.).
- **Planning staff (~1-2 FTE)** - to provide expertise in land conservation tools and strategies, park and trail development, and community partnerships.

SMMNRA would also work to expand its network of volunteers to assist in park operations and resource management activities in the newly added park areas. Volunteers for SMMNRA contribute many thousands of hours to all aspects of park management. SMMNRA and agency partners would also continue to rely on private fundraising through “friends” and partner groups such as the Santa Monica Mountains Fund.

FUNDING AND COSTS

Operational Costs

Given NPS budget constraints, it is likely that the newly added areas would initially be supported by existing SMMNRA operational funding. Initially, new 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 operating cost for SMMNRA was \$8.6 million in fiscal year 2012. These operational costs primarily support staffing. SMMNRA would also leverage NPS sources of funding beyond the annual operating costs for planning efforts, specific resource management objectives, and for the construction of visitor facilities. The annual NPS operating budget for the expanded SMMNRA 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).

Land Acquisition Costs

Land acquisition would be limited and subject to available funding. From 2001-2011, SMMNRA received approximately \$14 million for land acquisition, acquiring nearly 1,800 acres of land. Additional funding would be required to continue implementation of current land acquisition priorities in the Santa Monica Mountains and to pursue targeted land acquisition in the newly added areas. The NPS and partner agencies could also explore new opportunities to leverage funding for land acquisition.

Planning and Implementation Projects

Planning and implementation projects are not reflected in the projected operational budget. If the boundary adjustment were authorized by Congress, SMMNRA would be eligible to receive funding for planning and projects through NPS funding sources. For example, the NPS could provide initial planning funds for a management plan which would define management priorities, more specific actions, and funding needs for the new areas. The management plan would be completed in collaboration with the partnership agencies. A management plan for a partnership park the size and scale of which is proposed in the selected alternative would likely take 4 to 5 years to complete and could cost between \$500,000 and \$700,000. Additional NPS funding may also be available for specific projects such as trail development and interpretive materials. A management plan would identify more specific implementation needs.

Why the Selected Alternative Will Not Have a Significant Effect on the Quality of the Human Environment

The NPS has determined that the selected alternative can be recommended with no significant adverse effects on land use (including prime and unique farmlands, and urban quality and design of the built environment); paleontological resources; water resources (water quality and quantity); vegetation; wildlife; special status species; prehistoric and historic archeological resources; traditional cultural (ethnographic) resources, historic structures I cultural landscapes; visitor experience; park operations and partnerships; socioeconomics; or environmental justice. This determination is based on the environmental impact analysis (environmental assessment) published in the draft study report which analyzed four alternatives related to future management of Rim of the Valley Corridor resources.

As defined in 40 CFR §1508.27, significance of impacts is determined by examining the ten criteria below.

IMPACTS MAY BE BOTH BENEFICIAL AND ADVERSE. A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT MAY EXIST EVEN IF THE FEDERAL AGENCY BELIEVES THAT ON BALANCE THE EFFECT WILL BE BENEFICIAL.

The NPS evaluated the potential environmental consequences of each alternative related to the above resource topics. A range of low level adverse and beneficial effects is associated with the selected alternative.

Environmental effects would generally be beneficial. The effort to protect sites associated with the Rim of the Valley Corridor would result in long-term beneficial effects on natural and cultural resources, as well as on visitor experience, including access, visitor use opportunities, education and interpretation.

THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE PROPOSED ACTION AFFECTS PUBLIC HEALTH OR SAFETY.

The selected alternative will not adversely affect public health or safety. Impacts on safety would primarily be beneficial from establishment of an NPS unit because NPS standard safety policies and guidelines would be employed and would be used to minimize risk. Because no specific risks associated with the alternatives were identified, this topic was dismissed from additional environmental analysis.

UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GEOGRAPHIC AREA SUCH AS PROXIMITY TO HISTORIC OR CULTURAL RESOURCES, PARK LANDS, PRIME FARMLANDS, WETLANDS, WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS, OR ECOLOGICALLY CRITICAL AREAS.

There are no wild and scenic rivers within the study area. This topic was dismissed from additional environmental impact analysis.

Although situated in a large metropolitan region, portions of the study area contain wetlands, some prime farmlands, ecologically critical areas, and an array of municipal, state, and federal park lands. These types of resources are among the values that the selected alternative would enhance and protect. Therefore, implementation of the recommendations in the study would avoid adverse impacts to these resources.

The actions associated with the selected alternative would result in long-term beneficial effects on the preservation of cultural resources within the expanded boundary and potentially on those outside through cooperative conservation partnerships.

THE DEGREE TO WHICH EFFECTS ON THE QUALITY OF THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT ARE LIKELY TO BE HIGHLY CONTROVERSIAL.

There were no highly controversial effects identified during either initial public scoping or preparation of the environmental assessment. Although some concerns related to socioeconomic impacts on the oil and gas industry and on existing landfills in the study area were identified, these concerns have been alleviated by removing most such areas from the proposed boundary addition. Valid existing mineral rights would be retained.

THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS ON THE QUALITY OF THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT ARE HIGHLY UNCERTAIN OR INVOLVE UNIQUE OR UNKNOWN RISKS.

There were no highly uncertain, unique or unknown risks identified during either preparation of the environmental assessment or the public review period.

THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE ACTION MAY ESTABLISH A PRECEDENT FOR FUTURE ACTIONS WITH SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS OR REPRESENTS A DECISION IN PRINCIPLE ABOUT A FUTURE CONSIDERATION.

The selected alternative neither establishes an NPS precedent for future actions with significant effects nor represents a decision in principle about a future consideration. Although the study area is large and complex and the boundary addition is the same, existing management of SMMNRA is expected to be a model for how management would occur in the expanded area.

WHETHER THE ACTION IS RELATED TO OTHER ACTIONS WITH INDIVIDUALLY INSIGNIFICANT BUT CUMULATIVELY SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS. SIGNIFICANCE EXISTS IF IT IS REASONABLE TO ANTICIPATE A CUMULATIVELY SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT. SIGNIFICANCE CANNOT BE AVOIDED BY TERMING AN ACTION TEMPORARY OR BY BREAKING IT DOWN INTO SMALL COMPONENT PARTS.

Other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable actions were analyzed for their potential to contribute to cumulative impacts in association with implementation of the selected alternative, if enacted by Congress.

The effects of the selected alternative would comprise a very small component of these cumulative impacts, given the size and scope of the landscape within and surrounding the study area. Overall, the predominantly beneficial impacts of the selected alternative, combined with the negligible to major range of adverse impacts from other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, would not result in a significant cumulative adverse effect.

THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE ACTION MAY ADVERSELY AFFECT DISTRICTS, SITES, HIGHWAYS, STRUCTURES, OR OBJECTS LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES OR MAY CAUSE LOSS OR DESTRUCTION OF SIGNIFICANT SCIENTIFIC, CULTURAL, OR HISTORIC RESOURCES.

The selected alternative would either have no effect or would result in beneficial effects to properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places and other significant scientific, cultural or historical resources. Adding the proposed boundary addition lands to SMMNRA would improve opportunities to protect and preserve the significant cultural resources that are present. There could be minor impacts to cultural resources through improvements in some areas to provide for the health and safety of employees and visitors, but every effort will be made to avoid, minimize or mitigate these impacts.

Increased educational and interpretative programs will result in a broader understanding of the significant cultural and scientific resources in the area and provide the opportunity for more preservation. Although it is likely that there would continue to be a wide range of adverse and beneficial effects on sites not included in the boundary expansion, overall protection of cultural resources would be enhanced as part of the selected alternative. There would be no adverse effect or no effect on historic structures or identified cultural landscapes within the area of potential effects as a result of implementation of the selected alternative.

THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE ACTION MAY ADVERSELY AFFECT AN ENDANGERED OR THREATENED SPECIES OR ITS HABITAT THAT HAS BEEN DETERMINED TO BE CRITICAL UNDER THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT OF 1973.

The selected alternative would have no effect on endangered or threatened species or habitat. If the selected alternative were implemented, NPS would have authority protect important resource areas. As a result, there would be mandates from more than one agency to protect sensitive species and habitats, likely resulting in long-term beneficial effects from targeted actions to protect these species.

WHETHER THE ACTION THREATENS A VIOLATION OF FEDERAL, STATE, OR LOCAL LAW OR REQUIREMENTS IMPOSED FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT.

The selected alternative would not violate federal, state, or local environmental protection laws.

Public Engagement

Throughout the special resource study process, the NPS used workshops, public meetings, stakeholder meetings, field trips, newsletters, and websites to gather additional input on issues, opportunities, and alternatives. A web page for the Rim of the Valley Corridor Special Resource Study (www.nps.gov/pwro/rimofthevalley) was developed to provide updates on the study for the public. It contained detailed information about the special resource study process, background information about the study area, and was updated periodically to include newsletters and other documents. The NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website was also used for sharing information and for receiving comments online. Spanish translations of study newsletters were also made available.

PUBLIC SCOPING

The NPS initiated public scoping on the special resource study in June 2010. The scoping process included meetings with agencies, elected officials and organizations, public meetings and workshops, a news release, two newsletters, a web page, and written public comments. Nine public meetings were held in September and October 2010 in locations throughout the study area including Chatsworth, Los Angeles, Santa Clarita, Thousand Oaks, Calabasas, Tujunga, Altadena, and Sylmar. These public scoping outreach opportunities were used to identify the issues, significant resources, ideas for alternatives, and impact topics to be considered for environmental analysis.

During the public scoping period, the NPS received over 2,100 comment letters, including e-mails, from individuals, agencies, cities, organizations and elected officials. Input on the scope of the study was also provided by the approximately 400 people who attended the public meetings. Additional input was gathered through meetings with various individuals, agencies, organizations, cities, and local elected officials. Following receipt of scoping comments, the NPS published a second newsletter summarizing the comments. The majority of scoping comments were related to the study process and scope, opportunities, potential impacts, and important resources to consider.

PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVES

The study team held a workshop with agency partners and NPS professionals to discuss resource significance and generate ideas for alternatives in early 2012. Based on ideas from public scoping and this workshop, the study team generated a set of preliminary alternative concepts for public review and input. The study team released preliminary alternative concepts in a newsletter for public review in fall 2012. The public comment period was open from October 22, 2012 to January 7, 2013. News releases announcing the availability of the preliminary alternative concepts newsletter and the public meeting schedule were distributed to local media, and several news stories were published.

The NPS received approximately 5,200 comment letters, including e-mails. Most commenters suggested that the NPS develop an alternative that explored a broader boundary adjustment for SMMNRA that would include all of the areas proposed in boundary adjustments to SMMNRA considered in the preliminary alternatives. Some commenters had specific suggestions for areas to be considered, or not considered. Some agencies and individuals that own and manage land in the study area expressed concern that inclusion in SMMNRA could impact or limit future uses of such lands.

PUBLIC REVIEW OF THE SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY

The National Park Service (NPS) released the *Rim of the Valley Corridor Draft Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment* (draft study report/EA) in April 2015. In addition to the methods of release generally described for public scoping and preliminary alternatives identified above, there was a link about the Rim of the Valley Special Resource Study on the SMMNRA website during the public review period. The public comment period extended from April 14, 2015 to June 30, 2015. The study team held six public meetings in May and June

2015 at locations throughout the study area. These and an online meeting were attended by approximately 280 participants.

A press release announcing completion of the draft study report/EA and a series of public meetings was sent to approximately 230 media contacts in southern California on April 14, 2015. From that time until the public comment period closed on June 30, 2015, media coverage about the draft study report/EA included articles in several local and regional newspapers, including the Los Angeles Times, Ventura County Star, LA Daily News, and San Gabriel Valley Tribune; additionally, an Associated Press (AP) article was published in newspapers around California. There were also posts about the draft study in a variety of Internet blogs associated with recreation, the environment, politics, communities, or business. Other media coverage included stories broadcast on community radio stations.

The NPS received approximately 1,800 written comments from individuals, agencies, elected officials, and organizations. Approximately 75% of the 1,800 comment letters received were submitted as a result of several organized campaigns. Most comments were submitted via written letters and e-mail. There were approximately 360 unique comment letters and over 1,350 form letters of several different types. Campaigns organized by the National Parks Conservation Association and the Rim of the Valley Coalition accounted for the majority of the comment letters submitted. Public comments were also summarized from notes recorded in the small group discussions held at each public meeting. The NPS received comments from nearly 130 agencies, local governments, private businesses and organizations. Comments were also received from 12 elected officials, including a congressional delegation letter submitted jointly by seven members of Congress.

Summary of Comments on the Draft Report.

Most of the comments received were about the study alternatives. The vast majority of comments supported a boundary adjustment to the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation with most commenters preferring Alternative D: Regional Rim of the Valley Boundary Adjustment with Cooperative Conservation Areas. These commenters expressed a desire for NPS involvement in conservation efforts over the broadest geographic area. Many commenters thought that alternative D would provide greater protection of biological resources including wildlife corridors and the most potential for expansion of recreational opportunities and visitor services. Commenters that supported Alternative C: Rim of the Valley Boundary Adjustment (Preferred Alternative) liked the focus on engaging urban communities and the focus on areas with the greatest need for new recreational opportunities and open space. Other supporters of alternative C noted that this alternative was more likely to be implemented with limited NPS resources. Some commenters suggested a hybrid boundary adjustment where areas considered in alternative D would be added to the alternative C boundary adjustment proposal. Many others supported Continuation of Current Management, the no action alternative, questioning, in some cases, the need for NPS management, or, in other cases, expressing concern that NPS involvement would lead to more restrictions on private landowners. Others were concerned about the cost and feasibility of implementing a boundary adjustment. In comparison, support for or other comments on alternative B, Cooperative Conservation Area, were few.

Various suggestions for different boundary adjustment configurations were provided in the comments. Some comments provided specific suggestions for implementation actions the NPS should take if a boundary adjustment were implemented by Congress. It was suggested that the NPS consider another alternative that would include all of the tributaries of the Los Angeles River within a boundary adjustment to SMMNRA. Some commenters provided information on the significance of the Santa Susana Field Laboratory and requested that it be designated a national monument.

Primary concerns raised included the potential for regulatory and/or socioeconomic impacts on oil and gas operations, mineral extraction, grazing activities, public utilities and infrastructure, existing recreational uses (e.g. hang gliding and recreational mining), water rights, and private property. A number of agencies and organizations suggested specific language for any implementing legislation that would protect existing valid rights, certain recreational uses, and infrastructure related to public utilities, flood protection, water supply, and telecommunications facilities. Various technical corrections were suggested and have been incorporated into the errata for the special resource study.

The complete public comment and response report summarizing comments received by the National Park Service during the public comment period is available on the study website at www.nps.gov/pwro/rimofthevalley.

Agency Consultation

The National Park Service sent letters to agencies and tribal organizations announcing the commencement of the study and requesting their input. Agency consultation also continued throughout preparation and release of the environmental assessment.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE (SECTION 106 OF THE NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACT)

The California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) was notified by letter in January 2011 of the beginning of the special resource study and was sent a copy of the draft study report. Because inclusion of historic properties in the boundary of Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area would not result in a change in the characteristics that may qualify historic properties for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. There would be no effect to no adverse effect (potential beneficial effects) on historic properties. Impacts associated with a boundary addition are more likely to have long-term beneficial effects because of improved knowledge and access to NPS cultural resources staff. Additionally, the NPS would develop cultural resource inventories and protection plans for the cultural resources that it would directly manage. Such plans would identify the character-defining features of the historic structure and/or cultural landscape and identify the means to protect and/or to undertake preservation actions for these.

Federally Recognized Tribes

Letters were sent to the following tribal organizations to notify them of the study process and to seek their input:

- Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians
- San Manuel Band of Mission Indians
- Morongo Band of Mission Indians
- Pala Band of Mission Indians

Other Tribal Organizations

- Fernandeño Tataviam Band of Mission Indians
- L.A. City/County Native American Indian Commission
- Ti'At Society/Inter-Tribal Council of Pimu
- Kitanemuk & Yowlumne Tejon Indians
- San Fernando Band of Mission Indians
- Gabrieleño/Tongva San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians
- Gabrielino/Tongva Nation
- Gabrielino Tongva Indians of California Tribal Council
- Gabrieleño Band of Mission Indians
- Gabrielino-Tongva Tribe
- Tongva Ancestral Territorial Tribal Nation
- Barbareño/Ventureño Band of Mission Indians
- San Luis Obispo County Chumash Council
- Coastal Band of Chumash Nation

In addition, letters were sent to a number of individuals suggested by the Native American Heritage Commission.

The study team received comments on the draft special resource study and environmental assessment from the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians and the Fernandeño Tataviam Band of Mission Indians. The Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians provided information on the status and significance of the Santa Susana Field Laboratory property in the Simi Hills. Portions of this property have been designated a sacred site by the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash. The study document has been corrected to reflect this status. The comment letter also advocated for designation of a

portion of the Santa Susana Field Laboratory property as a national monument. This area is within the proposed boundary adjustment in the selected alternative.

The National Park Service also received comments from the Fernandeño Tataviam Band of Mission Indians. On June 25, 2015 NPS representatives met with the Tribal Historic and Cultural Preservation Officer to discuss corrections to the draft study report related to Tataviam and future consultation should a boundary adjustment to SMMNRA be implemented as a result of the study. The NPS has included technical corrections regarding the Tataviam, as suggested by the Fernandeño Tataviam Band of Mission Indians, into the errata for the special resource study.


U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE (SECTION 7 OF THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT)

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA), directs every federal agency to ensure that any action it authorizes, funds, or carries out is not likely to jeopardize the existence of any listed species or destroy or adversely modify critical habitat (50 CFR 400). The study team reviewed lists of species considered rare, threatened or endangered by the State of California and by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Although there are numerous ongoing threats and benefits to sensitive species in the study area there would be no effect on species listed or proposed from implementation of the selected alternative, if enacted by Congress.

Findings

The NPS has determined that this special resource study does not constitute an action that normally requires an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The findings of the study will not have a significant effect on the human environment, and no major environmental impacts are foreseen. There are no significant adverse impacts on public health, public safety, threatened or endangered species, historic properties either listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or other unique characteristics of the region. No highly uncertain or controversial impacts, unique or unknown risks, significant cumulative effects, or elements of precedence were identified. Implementation of the recommended actions will not violate any federal, state, or local environmental protection law. This determination also included due consideration of the supportive nature of public comments and agency, tribal and county recommendations which were submitted. Based on the foregoing, it has been determined that an environmental impact statement is not required for this special resource study and thus will not be prepared.

Approved



Martha J. Lee
Acting Regional Director

Nov. 24, 2015

Date

Selected Alternative

Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area Boundary Adjustment with Cooperative Conservation Emphasis



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

