



# San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study

## Summary and Final Recommendations

April 2013



Dear Friends,

The National Park Service is pleased to announce the completion of the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study. The Secretary of the Interior transmitted the final study to Congress on April 10, 2013. This document summarizes the final study report which includes the NPS determinations about the eligibility of the study area as a unit of the national park system (pp. 6-8), as well as the selected alternative recommended to Congress by the Secretary of the Interior (pp. 10-18).

### **National Park Service Selected Alternative**

The alternative recommended to Congress is the National Park Service Director's most effective and efficient alternative for the long-term protection and public enjoyment of nationally significant resources in the San Gabriel watershed and mountains. The selected alternative is primarily a combination of management concepts from alternative A (San Gabriel Mountains National Recreation Area) and alternative D (San Gabriel Region National Recreation Area), as presented in the draft special resource study. The selected alternative offers what the NPS believes is the most effective and efficient means to provide the resource protection and public enjoyment opportunities that have been central to this study.

The selected alternative takes advantage of the existing National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service presence in the Los Angeles area, while directing the two agencies to expand their scope to the San Gabriel Valley, the San Gabriel Mountains and foothills, and the Puente Hills. It encourages collaborative programs and shared staffing while reducing overlap and redundancy. It also takes advantage of the newly established Service First authority, which allows the NPS and US Forest Service to work together in new ways.

Implementation of the selected alternative would require Congressional legislation. If Congress does not pass legislation to implement the study's recommendations, then the study would simply remain as a recommendation.

The selected alternative includes four primary recommendations for the long-term protection and public enjoyment of nationally significant resources in the San Gabriel watershed and mountains, including:

- 1. Designation of a San Gabriel Unit of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area** (p. 10) The new unit would include areas of the San Gabriel Mountain foothills, portions of the San Gabriel and Rio Hondo river corridors, and the western Puente Hills. The NPS would work primarily through partnerships with existing landowners in areas of mutual interest such as resource protection, ecological restoration, and education programs. NPS land management policies and regulations would only apply to lands that the NPS acquires. The NPS would only acquire land on a limited basis from willing sellers. The designation would not transfer any land to the NPS.
- 2. Additional federal recognition, tools, and support to the Angeles National Forest** to steward watershed resources and ecosystems and improve recreational opportunities (pp. 10-18).
- 3. Direction for the U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service to collaborate** through the Service First authority (p. 13) and other mechanisms to protect the significant resources of the San Gabriel watershed and mountains and provide high quality recreation and educational opportunities.
- 4. NPS technical assistance** to interested communities, agencies, and organizations to protect the region's wildlife corridors; provide close-to-home recreational opportunities; educational opportunities; and to provide an array of seamless outdoor experiences in the San Gabriel watershed and mountains (p. 12).

Thank you for your involvement in the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study.

*Sincerely,*  
NPS Study Team

## HOW TO OBTAIN A COPY OF THE FINAL STUDY REPORT AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

The NPS published the Draft San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment in September 2011. The final report, available now, is comprised of the previously published draft report, a list of errata, and a Finding of No Significant Impact, containing the selected alternative. These documents are posted on the project web site at:

<http://www.nps.gov/pwro/sangabriel>

A public comment summary and NPS responses to comments received on the draft report are also available on the web site.

Limited printed and CD-ROM copies of the full draft report and errata are available. If you have not received a copy of the draft report and would like one, please contact us by mail or e-mail and provide your name and mailing address.

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## The Four Components of the Selected Alternative



# Introduction

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

The purpose of the special resource study was to determine whether any portion of the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains study area is eligible to be designated as a unit of the national park system. By reaching out to the public, stakeholders, and resource experts, the NPS determined eligibility and identified alternative strategies to manage, protect, or restore the study area's resources, and to provide or enhance recreational opportunities. The study conveys this information to the U.S. Department of the Interior and Congress to aid in determining whether designation of a unit of the national park system is desirable and appropriate.

The NPS found that many of the resources evaluated through the study are nationally significant, suitable, feasible and appropriate for NPS management. These findings are described on the following pages. This document identifies the most effective and efficient alternative for management selected by the NPS ("the selected alternative").

## Study Area

The study legislation directed the NPS to conduct a Special Resource Study of the following areas: (1) the San Gabriel River and its tributaries north of, and including, the city of Santa Fe Springs; and (2) the San Gabriel Mountains within the territory of the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy.

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

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) manages approximately two thirds of the study area (415,000 acres in the San Gabriel Mountains) as part of the Angeles National Forest (Angeles NF). With the exception of private inholdings, permitted cabins, ski areas, roads, and flood protection structures and other utilities, the forest remains primarily undeveloped, with four designated wilderness areas. In close proximity to highly urban areas, the forest provides a refuge for wildlife and recreational opportunities for the greater Los Angeles metropolitan region.

Over fifty communities are located in the study area, with approximately 1.5 million residents. The Los Angeles metropolitan region is home to over 16 million residents. The largest communities in the study area include Pomona and Santa Clarita, with populations near 150,000. The City of Palmdale is the largest community at the northern end of the study area with approximately 115,000 residents.



## STUDY TIMELINE



## Study Process and Public Involvement

The study team conducted extensive public outreach throughout the study process and throughout the region. Five newsletters were published at various stages of the study process and distributed to the study mail and email lists. All information sent by mail and email has been available on the study website, [www.nps.gov/pwro/sangabriel](http://www.nps.gov/pwro/sangabriel).

The NPS initiated this special resource study in January 2005 with a newsletter describing the study process and opportunities for the public to participate. Public meetings were held in March 2005, comments were accepted, and the study team published the results of the scoping process in a second newsletter. Numerous meetings with agencies, elected officials, and organizations were held into 2006.

Throughout 2006 and 2008, the team worked with local recreation and land conservation agencies and resource experts to analyze the significance of the study area resources and develop preliminary alternative management concepts. In the fall of 2009, the study team presented draft alternative management concepts for public review in a newsletter distributed to over 3,000 individuals and organizations. The study team held six public meetings at locations throughout the study area, as well as numerous meetings with local, state and federal government agencies, organizations, communities, and Congressional offices. The team received and analyzed approximately 4,800 comments.

After a period of public comment review, alternative revisions, and environmental analysis, the study team released the *Draft San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment* for review and comment in 2011. Four hundred participants, including elected officials and stakeholders, participated in public meetings and 12,000 comments were submitted online or by mail. On the basis of those comments and in consultation with other agencies, the NPS has since made necessary corrections to the draft study and selected an alternative that it believes is the most effective and efficient way to manage the natural, cultural, and recreation resources of the San Gabriel watershed and mountains.



# Findings

## Four Criteria for Evaluating Potential Additions to the National Park System

The National Park System New Area Studies Act and NPS management policies establish the basic process for evaluating potential new additions to the national park system. According to NPS management policies, a proposed addition to the national park system will receive a favorable recommendation from the NPS only if it meets all of the following four criteria for inclusion:

- 1 It possesses **nationally significant natural or cultural resources**.
- 2 It is a **suitable** addition to the system.
- 3 It is a **feasible** addition to the system.
- 4 There is a **need for direct NPS management**, instead of alternative protection by other public agencies or the private sector.

National Park Service management alternatives are developed for study areas that meet all four of the criteria for inclusion, as listed above. The following section explains how the NPS, in consultation with scientists, scholars, and other experts, found that all four criteria were satisfied in the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study.

### 1 Evaluation of Nationally Significant Resources

Within the large and diverse landscape of the study area, two regions were found to be nationally significant: the San Gabriel Mountains and the Puente-Chino Hills. Because these regions have not been as heavily urbanized as the lowland valleys and floodplains of the study area, they are outstanding examples of the native southern California landscape. The San Gabriel Mountains are also culturally rich, with a long history of human use.

There are significant resources in other portions of the study area. However, these resources are highly fragmented and surrounding development has, in many cases, negatively impacted their integrity.

### San Gabriel Mountains

The San Gabriel Mountains and foothills are nationally significant for their geologic resources, high biodiversity, dynamic river systems, and the long history of scientific study and discovery. Early conservation of the San Gabriel Mountains ensured that these areas were protected from rapid urbanization, which began in the late 19th century. Within a short distance, the mountains and foothills feature coastal, desert, montane, and sub-alpine ecological communities.

#### MOUNTAIN BUILDING AND DIVERSE GEOLOGY

- The San Gabriel Mountains are among the fastest growing mountains in the world. Forces from the San Andreas Fault to the north and a series of thrust faults on their south face are causing the San Gabriel Mountains to rise as much as 2 inches a year. This distinction makes the San Gabriel



San Gabriel Mountains, NPS Photo

Mountains an excellent location to research or study mountain-building.

- Among the most geologically diverse ranges in Southern California, the San Gabriel Mountains are comprised of rock units from all the major geologic eras. The San Gabriel Mountains contain the most extensive, best-exposed, and most completely studied exposures of several geologic formations including the San Gabriel Mountains anorthosite massif, the Mount Lowe plutonic suite, and Pelona schist. Some of the oldest rocks (over one billion years old) on the west coast of the United States are located in the San Gabriel Mountains.
- There is a long history of scientific study of the San Andreas Fault in southern California. Several

historically significant geologic discoveries occurred in the San Gabriel Mountains.

- The dramatic change in elevation from sea level to 10,000 feet, coupled with striking landforms such as the Devil’s Punchbowl, makes for a highly scenic landscape of contrasts.



Clockwise, from top left: Arroyo Toad, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Photo; Mount Wilson Observatory; Southern California black walnut, NPS Photo; Augen gneiss boulder, western San Gabriel Mountains, NPS Photo

## HIGH LEVELS OF BIODIVERSITY

- The topographically and geologically diverse mountains contain high levels of biodiversity. The plant communities in the San Gabriel Mountains provide habitat for 76 plant species and 77 wildlife species considered sensitive, rare, threatened or endangered.
- Outstanding examples of rare southern California ecological communities in the San Gabriel Mountains and foothills include: alluvial fan sage scrub, bigcone Douglas-fir, coastal sage scrub, relict juniper communities, riparian areas, and subalpine habitat.

## DYNAMIC RIVER SYSTEMS



- River systems within the San Gabriel Mountains meet the eligibility criteria for National Wild and Scenic River designation. Free-flowing sections of Little Rock Creek and the North, East, and West forks of the San Gabriel River retain high levels of integrity and support sensitive wildlife.
- Some of the best remaining alluvial fan sage scrub vegetation in the Los Angeles Basin is found within the study area.
- The San Gabriel Mountains are among the richest areas for freshwater fishes in southern California.

## SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND DISCOVERY

- Data collected in the San Dimas Experimental Forest since 1933 represents some of the earliest and most comprehensive records from continuously monitored U.S. Forest Service experimental watersheds in the United States. In 1976, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) Man and the Biosphere Program recognized the San Dimas Experimental Forest as a “Biosphere Reserve.” The San Dimas Experimental Forest contains structures that are excellent examples of Forest Service architecture constructed and maintained through Depression-era relief programs, as well as a lysimeter facility that is the largest structure of its type ever built.

- The Mount Wilson Observatory, established in 1904, includes five significant telescopes that laid the technological foundation for all large modern telescopes. Many of the major advances, such as the Big Bang theory and the greatest names in 20th-century astronomy, are associated with the observatory.

## Puente-Chino Hills

The Puente-Chino Hills in the Los Angeles basin contain rare native plant communities. Although this area is somewhat of an island of open space surrounded by urbanized areas, the Puente-Chino Hills and the Santa Ana Mountains to the southeast together encompass about 500,000 acres of wildlands containing significant biological resources.

## HIGH LEVELS OF BIODIVERSITY

- The Puente-Chino Hills are part of a biologically diverse regional wildlife corridor that provides habitat for ecological communities with an abundance of endemic, threatened, and rare plants and animals.
- Outstanding examples of southern California communities in the Puente-Chino Hills include coastal sage scrub, one of the most endangered plant communities in California, and the best remaining stands of California walnut-dominated forests and woodlands south of Ventura County.

## 2 Evaluation of Suitability

This study concludes that portions of the San Gabriel Mountains and Puente-Chino Hills are suitable for inclusion in the national park system, based upon an evaluation of the study area resources and their relative quality, character, and rarity. Together, the San Gabriel Mountains and Puente-Chino Hills contain a combination of themes and resources not found in any national park unit or comparably managed area.

## 3 Evaluation of Feasibility

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

## 4 Need for NPS Management

The study concludes that a collaborative management approach which includes a leadership role for the NPS is a superior management option for meeting the complex conservation and recreation needs of the study area. In particular, the NPS has the ability to work in a coordinated fashion, on a regional basis, to address equitable access to open space, protection of significant resources, and interpretation and education about significant resources. Existing NPS assistance programs are currently insufficient to address these needs in the study area.



Wild cactus in bloom, Santa Fe Dam Natural Area, NPS Photo

# Alternatives Analyzed

Four alternatives were analyzed in the *San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Draft Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment*. The alternatives are based on the purpose and need for the project and are consistent with existing laws, NPS policy and the special resource study legislation.

## No Action Alternative: Continuation of Current Management

Public land management agencies and local governments would continue their land management, visitor services, public education, recreation and interpretive programs at approximately the current levels of activity and funding, according to current plans. Existing cooperative management efforts would continue. The NPS would have no role in the study area beyond the existing segments of two national historic trails, some ongoing technical assistance from the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, and limited financial assistance through the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

## Alternative A: San Gabriel Mountains National Recreation Area

Congress would designate the San Gabriel Mountains as a National Recreation Area (NRA) that would continue to be managed by the Angeles National Forest (Angeles NF). The designation would bring additional recognition, tools, and support to the Angeles NF in order to steward watershed resources and ecosystems, and improve recreational opportunities. The NPS would have no role in the NRA beyond a continuation of the informal partnership between the U.S. Forest Service and Santa Monica Mountains NRA.

## Alternative C: San Gabriel Watershed National Recreation Area

Congress would designate a National Recreation Area comprised of the upper San Gabriel River watershed within the Angeles NF and a half-mile corridor around the San Gabriel and Rio Hondo rivers within the study area to be managed by a voluntary partnership of agencies and organizations with land and interests in the designated area. The primary roles of the NPS would be coordination of the partnership and taking a lead role in coordinating interpretative and educational messages about significant resources. Each partner and other jurisdictional authorities would retain land ownership, management, and decision-making authority for lands that they own. The partnership would work to create new recreational and open space opportunities that are compatible with maintaining watershed values, water supply, flood protection, and habitat values.

## Alternative D: San Gabriel Region National Recreation Area

Congress would designate Angeles NF lands within the San Gabriel Mountains, adjacent foothill areas with ecological resource values, areas near the San Andreas Fault, portions of the western Puente Hills, and half-mile corridors along the San Gabriel and Rio Hondo rivers as a National Recreation Area. The NRA would be managed much the same as described under alternative C, under a partnership comprised of agencies and organizations with interests in the area. The NPS role would be essentially the same as in alternative C, but with the addition of a technical assistance program to provide conservation and recreation planning assistance to interested public agencies, private landowners, and organizations beyond the NRA boundaries to create and connect parks, conserve habitat and provide new recreational experiences throughout the region.

## Alternatives Considered But Dismissed

Alternative B, the San Gabriel Parks and Open Space Network, was initially presented to the public as an alternative management concept. Public review revealed a high level of dissatisfaction for this concept. Alternative B envisioned a network of public and private partners engaged in collaborative planning and information sharing, focused on open space, recreation, wildlife corridor, and interpretive opportunities. It did not include designation of a National Recreation Area. This alternative was dismissed for its inability to meet project objectives, as determined through agency and public input.



Children playing in the North Fork of the San Gabriel River, NPS Photo

# The Selected Alternative

## Concept

The selected alternative is primarily a combination of management concepts from alternative A (San Gabriel Mountains National Recreation Area) and alternative D (San Gabriel Region National Recreation Area), as presented in the *Draft San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study*. Some additional refinements have been made to reflect public concerns, provide for efficient management, and to take advantage of new authorities provided to the National Park Service (NPS) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) through the Service First authority.

The selected alternative would establish a San Gabriel unit of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area which would provide the NPS, and other land management agencies and organizations with guidance and direction to work together in new ways. Partnership arrangements among federal and state agencies, local governments, non-profit organizations, and area landowners would be the primary means to achieve the conservation, recreational, and educational goals of the San Gabriel unit. Although the Angeles National Forest (Angeles NF) would not be included in the San Gabriel unit, the NPS and USFS would be directed to work in partnership. In addition, legislative guidance would provide additional support and authorities for the Angeles NF to steward resources and improve recreational opportunities.

Specifically, components of the selected alternative would include:

**San Gabriel unit of the Santa Monica Mountains NRA (San Gabriel unit).** The San Gabriel Mountains foothills, San Gabriel and Rio Hondo river corridors and the western Puente Hills (alternative D south of the Angeles NF) would be established as an additional unit of the Santa Monica Mountains NRA. The NPS and numerous other agencies and organizations with land and interests in the area would: 1) work collaboratively to protect significant resources, restore ecological communities, and improve recreational opportunities; 2) provide technical assistance to willing communities for conservation planning to extend open space connections and form a network of parks, habitats, and open spaces; and 3) offer new educational and interpretive opportunities.

**Angeles National Forest.** The selected alternative would also bring additional recognition, tools, and support to the Angeles NF in order to steward watershed resources and ecosystems and improve recreational opportunities. In lieu of a new designation for the Angeles NF, this guidance would: 1) reaffirm the primary importance of the Angeles

NF in preserving watershed and natural resources, while continuing to provide for multiple use management; and 2) prioritize funding for resource protection, recreation, and education, and establish mechanisms to increase funding for facilities, maintenance, ecological restoration, visitor management; and offer new educational programming, and stewardship activities. This would be accomplished without a national recreation area designation on the Angeles NF.

**Collaborative Federal Management.** The NPS and USFS would collaborate through the Service First authority and other mechanisms to protect the significant resources of the San Gabriel watershed and mountains, provide high quality recreation and education opportunities, and assist the surrounding communities in providing community-based recreation and conservation opportunities. The NPS and the USFS would work together:

- To explore opportunities to protect and enhance interconnected ecosystems essential for long-term viability of significant natural resources.
- To help communities provide close-to-home outdoor recreation, conservation and education opportunities for their residents, as well as to better connect to the nearby national park and national forest areas.
- To provide an array of seamless outdoor experiences in the San Gabriel watershed and mountains.

## Proposed Area

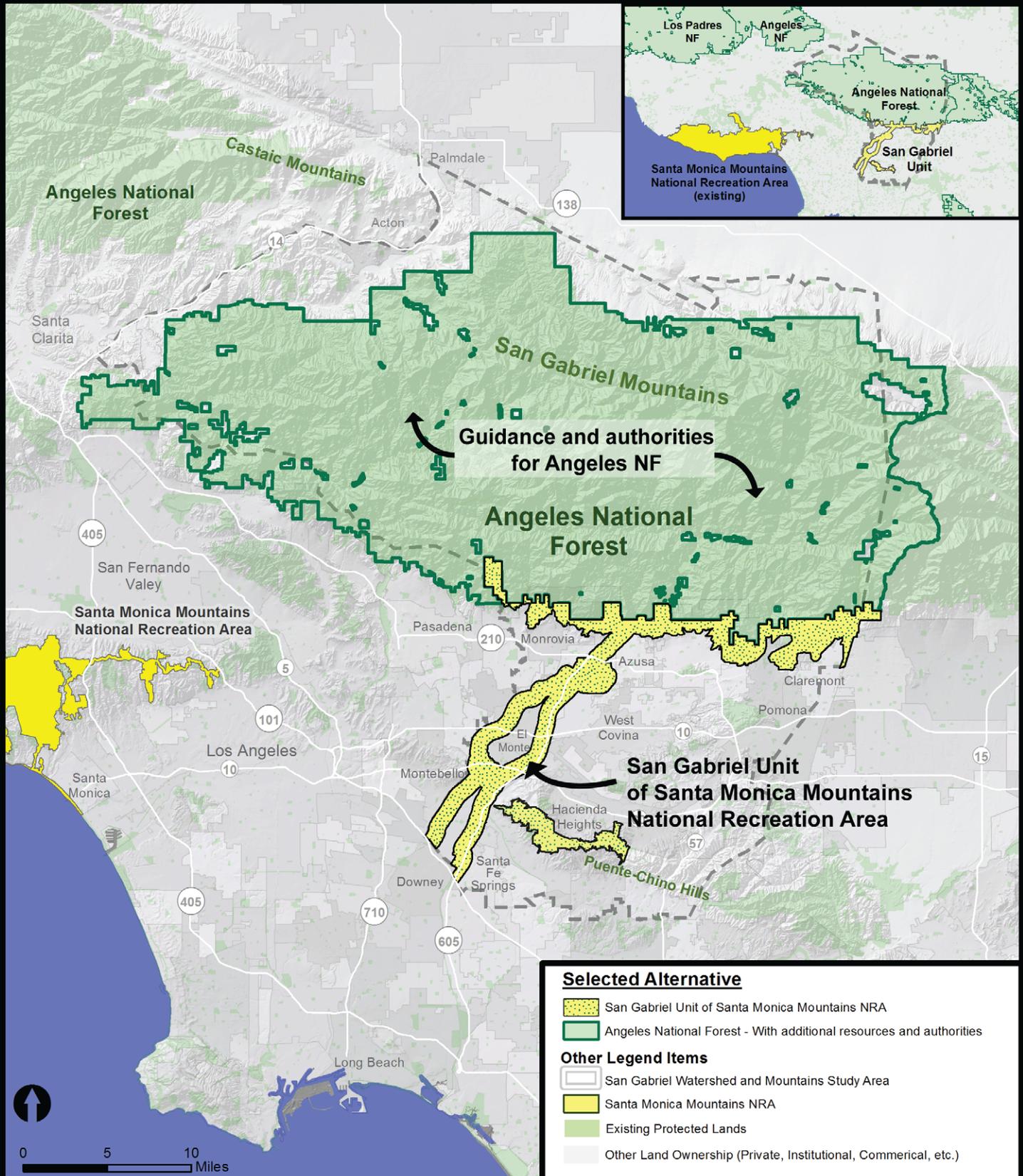
The San Gabriel unit of the Santa Monica Mountains NRA would include:

- The San Gabriel Mountains foothill areas in the San Gabriel Valley (but outside of the Angeles National Forest) with ecological resource values. Areas with ecological resource values include designated critical habitat for federally listed threatened or endangered species, and areas within one of the Los Angeles County proposed significant ecological areas;
- A half-mile corridor around the San Gabriel and Rio Hondo rivers from the Angeles NF boundary south to Santa Fe Springs; and
- Portions of the western Puente Hills with ecological resource value and recreational potential (areas west of Harbor Boulevard). This primarily includes lands owned/or and managed by the Puente Hills Habitat Preservation Authority and lands proposed by Los Angeles County to be included in the Puente Hills Significant Ecological

# Selected Alternative



## San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study



Area. The Puente Hills Landfill would not be included in the boundary. However, at some time in the future, the NPS and the Puente Hills Habitat Preservation Authority could enter into management agreements with the Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County to provide recreational opportunities in this area.

The San Gabriel unit would include approximately 49,000 acres of land; approximately 37% of this area is already protected for conservation or recreation by existing agencies and organizations.

The San Gabriel Mountains within the Angeles NF are also addressed in the selected alternative. However, no new designation would be applied to this area.



Clockwise, from top left: Santa Fe Dam Recreation Area, NPS Photo; Eaton Canyon, NPS Photo; San Gabriel River Trail, NPS Photo

The San Gabriel unit partners could include, but would not be limited to, the following agencies: the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, the Lower Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, the Puente Hills Habitat Preservation Authority, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the California Department of Parks and Recreation, the California Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, Los Angeles County, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, the Wildlife Corridor Conservation Authority, the Mountains and Recreation Conservation Authority, and the Watershed Conservation Authority. Local communities/cities could also participate in the partnership. Through cooperative management agreements, partners would be able to provide coordinated educational and recreational programming, and share funding, staff, and facilities. In existing public land areas, interagency agreements could augment agency staffing to manage heavily used areas providing higher levels of visitor services, education, and safety. Other partnerships could also be established, such as with community-based organizations and tribal groups.

**NPS Role.** The NPS would take a lead role in coordinating partnership-based activities within the San Gabriel unit. Through cooperative management agreements, the NPS could also provide educational, interpretive, law enforcement and other services to partner agencies. The NPS would also take a lead role in providing coordinated interpretative and educational messages about the significance of the San Gabriel watershed and mountains for existing nature centers, museums, park programs, etc.

The NPS would have no land use regulatory authority for lands that it does not own. As funding permits, the NPS would be authorized to acquire lands from willing sellers within the San Gabriel unit to protect significant resources or for operational purposes.

The NPS would offer technical assistance to interested public agencies, private landowners, and organizations to create and connect parks, conserve habitat, provide new recreational experiences, and foster a sense of regional identity. The NPS could also assist in organizing volunteer programs within the San Gabriel unit and on the Angeles NF.

## Angeles National Forest

The Angeles NF would continue to be managed by the USFS according to existing guiding policies. Additional guidance would authorize the USFS to enter into cooperative management agreements with local agencies and conservancies to protect biodiversity and watershed resources, interpret significant resources, enhance recreational opportunities, and provide more educational and interpretive opportunities within San Gabriel Mountains. In addition, the Angeles NF would have the

## Management

### San Gabriel Unit

The San Gabriel unit of the Santa Monica Mountains NRA would be managed in partnership with agencies and organizations with land and interests in the area. Agencies and organizations that own and manage land within the San Gabriel unit would continue to manage their lands according to their own policies and regulations. NPS policies would only apply to lands that the NPS acquires. As much of the land within the NRA is currently in public ownership and much of the remaining land is comprised of commercial and residential uses inappropriate for NPS management, land acquisition by the NPS would be limited.

# Service First

In December of 2011, the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture were given the authority (Public Law 112-74) to establish programs involving certain land management agencies to:

- Conduct activities jointly or on behalf of one another;
- Collocate in Federal offices or leased facilities; and
- Make reciprocal delegations of their respective authorities, duties and responsibilities
- Make transfer of funds and reimbursement of funds on an annual basis, including transfers and reimbursements for multi-year projects.

The Service First authority provides for interagency operational efficiency in attaining shared goals and missions, allows agencies to develop programs and projects tailored to meet shared objectives, allows agencies to share equipment, facilities and other resources to accomplish mutually agreed-upon work, and allows the re-delegation of staff authorities, duties and responsibilities among participating Service First agencies (NPS, USFS, BLM, FWS). These partnership efforts are achieved through a Service First agreement, which documents the agencies' commitment to work collaboratively.

Stories of successful Service First partnerships are beginning to emerge as the authority is implemented around the country. In Colorado, for example, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service have integrated management of public lands and national forest system lands in and around the San Luis Valley. The two agencies share funding, staff and authority under a robust agreement intended to maximize efficient use of personnel and provide one-stop service to visitors and stakeholders. In Arizona and Utah, the Grand Canyon Parashant National Monument is co-managed by the BLM and the NPS with an integrated staff and a streamlined process for transferring funds. These success stories and more are described at [www.fs.fed.us/servicefirst](http://www.fs.fed.us/servicefirst).

ability to accept donations from philanthropic and partner organizations to improve facilities and resources.

Legislative guidance would also direct the USFS and the NPS to engage in partnership efforts and interagency coordination to protect the significant resources of the San Gabriel watershed and mountains, provide high quality recreation and education opportunities, and assist the surrounding communities in providing community-based recreation and conservation opportunities. Such partnerships could be facilitated through the Service First authority and other mechanisms.

## Existing Agencies, Regulatory Authorities, and Land Use

### San Gabriel Unit

Much of the land within the proposed San Gabriel unit (approximately 37%) is already protected by various agencies and organizations. The National Park Service recognizes that existing public agencies, private conservation organizations, and individuals successfully manage important natural and cultural resources and recreational opportunities within the proposed San Gabriel unit. The NPS applauds these accomplishments and actively encourages the expansion of conservation

activities by state, local, and private entities and by other federal agencies.

**Retention of Local Land Use and Existing Regulatory Authorities.** The designation of an NPS national recreation area unit would not establish additional regulatory or land use authorities over local governments. The NPS is not a regulatory agency. NPS land management policies and regulations would only apply to lands that the NPS acquires. The NPS would only consider acquiring land on a limited basis from willing sellers. The selected alternative would respect existing general plans and local zoning, as well as state and local laws and policies for lands that are not federally owned.

**Protection of Water Supply, Flood Protection, and Sanitation Infrastructure Facilities and Functions.** The Los Angeles metropolitan region has highly complex systems of public infrastructure to transport and store local and regional water supplies. In addition, numerous facilities are necessary to treat wastewater and manage solid waste. Many of these facilities are located on or near the San Gabriel River. The **San Gabriel River Watershed Study Act of 2003 (P.L. 108-042)** directed that the study consider regional flood control and drainage needs and publicly owned infrastructure such as wastewater treatment facilities. The study recommends that any resulting legislation ensure that infrastructure designed for flood



protection, storage and transport of water supplies, treatment of water and wastewater, and management of solid waste would be unaffected by the designation. This includes exemption from 16 U.S.C. § 460l-22(c) (prohibition of solid waste disposal operations in national parks) for existing solid waste facilities and operations, such as landfills and transfer stations, within the San Gabriel unit.

The selected alternative would retain existing water rights. Management of water supply and treatment plants would continue under current authorities. The proposed San Gabriel unit designation would not entail any new or future beneficial uses or requirements for water supply, water quality, or air quality regulations.

**Private Property Rights.** Any legislation proposed to implement study recommendations should specify that eminent domain would not be used for land acquisition within the San Gabriel unit. The NPS would only consider acquiring land on a limited basis from willing sellers. Designation would not impact local land use authority over lands not owned by the NPS.

**Fire Protection.** Fire protection would remain the responsibility of existing federal, state, and local agencies (Los Angeles County, U.S. Forest Service, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection). The San Gabriel unit partnership could work together to take a proactive approach to coordinated resource management to reduce catastrophic fires.

## **Angeles National Forest**

U.S. Forest Service management of existing Angeles NF lands would continue. USFS policies would continue to be applied to management of these lands.

## **Education and Interpretation**

### **San Gabriel Unit**

Through new interpretive and educational programs, the NPS would engage people of all ages in learning about the significant natural and cultural resources within the San Gabriel watershed and mountains. Examples of interpretive messages would include the history and importance of water resources, regional biodiversity, the geological significance of the San Gabriel Mountains, Native American history and prehistory, the role of fire on the landscape, and early California settlement.

The NPS would coordinate a voluntary information network to partner with established environmental education centers, visitor centers, etc. throughout the watershed to help augment and enrich interpretive and educational programming related to the significance of the San Gabriel watershed and mountains. The primary role of the NPS within the San Gabriel unit would be to lead the effort to provide coordinated interpretive messages and educational programs. The NPS would also work with partners to develop accessible interpretive and educational materials, including multi-lingual information and signage, to reach broader audiences.

In addition to programs conducted within the San Gabriel unit, NPS staff would coordinate with local school districts and area youth organizations to conduct environmental stewardship programs and engage youth in learning about the natural world around them. When needed and as funding permits, new facilities and programs could be developed to support educational efforts. The NPS Junior Ranger program could be promoted for school-aged children. There are also opportunities to inspire youth about the rich cultural heritage of the region.

### **Angeles National Forest**

The Angeles NF would be recognized for its nationally significant resources associated with the San Gabriel Mountains. Working through Service First agreements, the USFS and the NPS would provide more interpretive information about significant resources and offer new educational programs. Educational programs would emphasize to visitors the value of watershed resources and how to recreate in a way that is compatible with protecting such resources. New opportunities for educational programs associated with the San Dimas Experimental Forest would be explored.

## **Recreational Opportunities and Access**

### **San Gabriel Unit**

Within the San Gabriel unit, a variety of recreational opportunities would continue to be available to the public. Many communities in the region, however, lack appropriate access to park and recreational resources. Recreational uses and activities would be determined by the existing land management agency. The NPS and partner agencies would seek to improve recreational access and opportunities in urban areas that are deficient in recreation and park lands by offering assistance in planning for close-to-home recreational opportunities, better trail access, and improved public transportation options to recreational areas. Additionally, the NPS and partner agencies would explore opportunities to restore vacant or unused land to provide new recreational opportunities.

The NPS and partners would work together to target underserved and disadvantaged communities for engagement in the opportunities for and 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. The NPS would conduct outreach to local communities, organizations, and schools to promote opportunities for healthy recreation in the San Gabriel unit.

The NPS would also work with partners to seek ways to improve the recreational experience in more heavily impacted areas by providing more education, improving facilities, improving maintenance and law enforcement, and enhancing visitor management to reduce impacts. Improved recreational experiences in more rural areas could focus on protecting the rural recreational experience by providing better trail connections and improved equestrian staging areas.

A voluntary information network would identify parks and sites with recreational and learning opportunities. This network would be expansive, including sites with recreational and learning opportunities associated with the San Gabriel River watershed, the Puente Hills, and the San Gabriel Mountains. At each site, visitors could find maps and guides linking one site with others pertaining to the same or related themes.

Many agencies are currently working to improve accessibility, as is required by the Americans with Disabilities Act. The NPS would work with partners to improve recreational access to the area's parks and public lands for persons with disabilities.

## **Angeles National Forest**

Recreation is the primary use in the Angeles NF. With over 3 million annual visitors, the Angeles NF has one of the highest national forest visitation levels in the nation. Over the past ten years, funding for recreation, interpretation, and education has remained flat. Increased attention and focused management resulting from new legislative directives may encourage additional or reprioritized federal funding for enhancing recreation in the San Gabriel Mountains. This could include improved visitor management in heavily used recreational areas as a result of more forest rangers, better facilities, improved trail connections and trailheads, better educational efforts, and new approaches to manage visitation.

Existing recreational opportunities would remain on the Angeles NF pursuant to USFS established rules and regulations. Future decisions regarding appropriate recreational opportunities would continue to be determined by the USFS, including administration of any

recreational special use permits such as for recreational residences and ski areas.

New partnership opportunities may also assist the Angeles NF in fundraising for improved recreational experiences and planning for recreational connections (e.g. trails, bicycle paths). The NPS and USFS would partner and work together on recreational opportunities on the Angeles NF through Service First agreements. Such agreements allow the two agencies to share staff, funding, and offices to achieve mutual objectives.

## **Resource Protection (Ecological Communities and Cultural Resources)**

The selected alternative would emphasize protecting significant resources associated with the San Gabriel Mountains and Puente Hills.

### **San Gabriel Unit**

The NPS would facilitate opportunities to work in collaboration with resource management agencies and organizations to conserve and enhance resources through research, cooperative management, monitoring, and restoration. Ecological communities could be enhanced by additional scientific knowledge, expertise, and technical assistance.

The NPS and partner agencies would work together to identify opportunities to protect ecosystems and wildlife corridors. For example, the San Gabriel Mountains and Puente-Chino Hills are refuges for rare and endangered species. These species need to be able to move to and from these open space areas, particularly in the case of wildfire events and for adaptation associated with climate change. Better ecosystem connectivity also fosters greater biodiversity. The NPS and partner agencies would seek to leverage additional funding for ecological restoration and wildlife habitat conservation efforts.

Coordinated cultural resource management would also be an emphasis. The NPS would seek to document, protect and interpret cultural resources within the San Gabriel unit. Such efforts would improve the ability of the NPS to develop interpretive materials and programming related to cultural resources.

### **Angeles National Forest**

The Angeles NF would continue to balance use and resource protection in accordance with its multiple-use policy. Legislative guidance could affirm the original intent of the national forest to protect watershed resources. Legislation could bring additional, tools, and resources to the Angeles NF in order to steward the significant geological and biological resources associated with the San Gabriel Mountains. For example, the San

Gabriel Mountains function as a refuge for many rare and endangered species. To protect the habitats and ecosystems associated with these species, the USFS could enter into management agreements with non-federal agencies and organizations to protect habitat that spans multiple jurisdictional boundaries, providing opportunities for the dispersal of wildlife and plants within the forest and into other areas. Protection of habitat across the region would also benefit wildlife and plant adaptation to climate change. In general, a higher priority would be placed on ecological restoration.

The San Gabriel Mountains are rich in cultural resources including archeology, Native American resources, historic recreation sites, historic mining sites, architecture, and historic flood protection structures. New resources could be allocated to document, protect, and interpret cultural resources in the San Gabriel Mountains. Programs could be designed for the public to experience the cultural, historical, and spiritual value of the San Gabriel Mountains.

## **Operations and Maintenance**

### **San Gabriel Unit**

Existing agencies would continue to be responsible for the operation and maintenance of their lands and facilities. The NPS would be responsible for operations and maintenance of lands which it acquires.

**Staffing.** Given NPS budget constraints, it is likely that the San Gabriel unit would initially have a small staff, or rely on support from existing staff at Santa Monica Mountains NRA. However, funding would likely increase over time, subject to Congressional budget priorities. Soon after establishment, the NPS would complete a unit management plan that would identify park priorities, management emphases, and required NPS staffing for a 15-20 year timeframe.

Because the San Gabriel unit would be managed as part of the Santa Monica Mountains NRA and managed in partnership with other agencies, less staff would be required than what would be expected in a traditional national park. Partnership parks typically require staff to handle park coordination and outreach, assist partners with conservation planning, and provide interpretive and educational programs.

Based on comparisons of staffing levels for existing partnership parks of similar size and with small NPS landownership, the following types of staff might be recommended for the selected alternative. Some positions would be shared with the Santa Monica Mountains NRA staff based in Thousand Oaks, CA.

- Partnership Specialist
- Unit Manager
- Administrative Assistant
- Visitor Use Assistant
- Interpretive Park Rangers
- Law Enforcement Park Rangers
- Teacher Ranger
- GIS Technician
- Volunteer/Outreach Program Coordinator
- Education Program Specialist
- Cultural Resource Specialist
- Outdoor Recreation Planner/Community Planner
- Wildlife Ecologist
- Biological Technician

Through Service First or cooperative management agreements, the NPS and other partner agencies could share staff, facilities, and funding to assist in the operations and maintenance of heavily used visitor areas. For example, the NPS could provide rangers to supplement USFS staff in high use areas of the Angeles NF. The NPS and partner agencies could also leverage funding and resources to improve existing facilities or provide new facilities where necessary.

The NPS would coordinate new partnerships and facilitate the development of more volunteer programs to assist in the maintenance of facilities, preservation/restoration



Fishing, West Fork of the San Gabriel River, NPS Photo

efforts, and interpretation of significant resources. Additionally, the NPS would provide opportunities for job training and conservation stewardship programs for youth and community members.

**Land Acquisition.** Lands within the San Gabriel unit would remain under their current jurisdictions, with each land management agency continuing to fund its own operations. Approximately 37% of the land in the proposed NRA is already protected for recreation and conservation by partner agencies (18,500 of approximately 49,000 acres). Much of the remaining lands are comprised of commercial and residential uses that would not be appropriate or feasible for NPS land acquisition. The NPS could request funding for land acquisition for acquisition of areas with resource significance such as a historic site or open space with native habitat. NPS land acquisition funding is extremely limited. Partner agencies may also pursue land acquisition within the San Gabriel unit. The NPS would be directed to identify priority parcels for acquisition (through donation or purchase) within two years of designation.

**Operational and Visitor Facilities.** Construction of new administrative facilities for NPS operations and management would not likely be required to support the proposed San Gabriel unit. Some staff and operational work could be accomplished at existing facilities within the Santa Monica Mountains NRA. However, given the distance to the San Gabriel Valley, an operational presence would also be necessary in the San Gabriel unit, particularly for education, outreach, and agency coordination positions. Given the existing amount of office space available in and near the proposed San Gabriel unit, it is likely that the NPS could share administrative and operational facilities with partner agencies or lease other office space available in the area. There may also be opportunities to adaptively reuse an historic building or property if the NPS acquired land that contained such facilities. The NPS could also use partner facilities or adaptively reuse buildings to provide visitor facilities. The Angeles NF and various local and state park and recreation agencies also operate and manage existing visitor facilities. If established, the NPS would identify specific operational and visitor facilities needs through a unit management plan.

## Angeles National Forest

Legislative guidance may direct additional funding for operations and maintenance of the Angeles NF to provide more rangers and other staff in heavily used visitor areas. New volunteer programs would be developed to assist in the maintenance of facilities, preservation/restoration efforts, and interpretation of significant resources.

Use of the Service First authority would improve the customer service, effectiveness and efficiency of the NPS



Clockwise, from top left: Jackson Lake; Lashbrook Park; Devils Punchbowl; Pio Pico State Historic Park

and Angeles NF in attaining shared goals by authorizing the two agencies to use each other's staff, equipment, facilities, and other resources, as appropriate, to accomplish mutually agreed-upon work.

## Funding and Costs

The selected alternative would rely on the funding streams of partner agencies, as well as newly authorized NPS funding. Legislative guidance for the Angeles NF may authorize additional funding. Working in partnership with the NPS and other agencies, partners may be able to explore new fundraising opportunities to achieve resource restoration and protection goals, as well as provide improved recreation, interpretation, and educational facilities and programs.

## San Gabriel Unit

The NPS would need additional federal funding for its administrative, educational, technical assistance, and interpretive roles. In addition, the NPS and partner agencies could establish a fundraising organization, be a coordinating body for existing grant programs, and work together to leverage funds from a variety of sources (e.g. state bonds, Land & Water Conservation Fund) to increase and prioritize funding for projects and staff in the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains. Partner organizations could also work together to leverage private funding and donations.

NPS operating costs for national recreation areas vary widely, depending on the amount and type of resources managed, number of visitors, level of programs offered, safety and security issues, and many other factors. While no formal estimates of operating costs have been completed for this study, budgets from comparable NPS units illustrate the potential range. Boston Harbor Islands

NRA, Chattahoochee River NRA, Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, and Santa Monica Mountains NRA are all partnership-based NPS units comprised primarily of non-NPS lands. The annual operating base budgets for these units range from \$1.22 million to \$8.9 million. Based on the size of the area, and the types of services and assistance offered through the partnership, the cost of NPS operations for the San Gabriel unit could be expected to be \$1 to \$3 million. The operational budget would primarily fund salaries. Additional costs would include leasing or maintaining administrative space, interpretive and educational materials or media, and maintenance of any NPS-owned facilities or lands.

**Planning and Implementation Projects.** The San Gabriel unit would be eligible to receive funding for planning and projects through the NPS. For example, soon after establishment, the NPS could provide initial planning funds for a unit management plan which would define management priorities, more specific actions, and funding needs for the San Gabriel unit. The unit management plan would be completed in collaboration with partners. A unit management for the size and scale of unit 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 planning and development and interpretive materials. A unit management plan would identify more specific implementation needs.

Many NPS partnership parks also rely on private fundraising through “friends” groups. The funds raised through these groups can be used to supplement the operating budgets of the partners. At Boston Harbor Islands NRA, for example, the Boston Harbor Island Alliance is a nonprofit organization authorized through legislation to raise and manage funds for facilities and programming on partner lands. In 2008, the Alliance spent \$2.25 million for visitor programming and capital improvements within the NRA on lands owned by state, federal, municipal, and private entities. In addition, the Alliance received \$5 million for environmental mitigation projects over several years, to be used on partner lands.

## **Angeles National Forest**

In order to accomplish the goals of the selected alternative, additional funding would be required, either through appropriations, partnerships, or philanthropy. The increased attention and a narrower management focus may encourage additional or reprioritized federal funding, over time, for the Angeles NF to achieve resource restoration and protection goals, as well as provide improved recreation, interpretation, and educational facilities, and programs.

The Angeles NF receives the majority of its funds through allocations appropriated by Congress. In FY2011, the Angeles NF received \$32 million in funding for the entire forest. Of this amount, 60%, or \$19.3 million, was budgeted for wildfire preparedness and fuels reduction, with the remaining 40 percent, or \$12.7 million, covering all other operations. Of this funding, \$2.9 million was appropriated for recreation, planning, resources, and wildlife management. Capital improvement funds, including facilities, trails, and roads maintenance totaled \$900,000 for the entire forest. When adjusted for inflation, the Angeles NF has had a continuing drop in non-fire operational funding since 1995. Within the study area, total funding for the Angeles NF for FY2011 is \$7.4 million (non-fire). Of this amount, \$1.7 million is allocated to recreation (700k), planning, resources, and wildlife management. Only \$540,000 is allocated to capital improvements including facilities, trails, and roads maintenance, \$78k of this is allocated for trail maintenance.

The Angeles NF does receive revenue from a variety of forest programs and users, especially use fees collected under the Recreation Enhancement Act (the Adventure Pass). This source of funding has become increasingly important, as it can be used for a wider range of purposes than reimbursable revenue, and has helped to supplement appropriated funds. However, the cost of enforcing and administering this program is almost equal to the revenue.

This study recommends that any resulting legislation provide for specific additional funding to be allocated each year for recreation, planning, visitor services, wildlife management, and resource protection. Without this legislative direction, the Angeles NF is not likely to experience an increase of appropriated funds to meet the objectives of the selected alternative.

Additional opportunities for increased funding exist from outside sources. Legislation could allow the USFS to accept direct donations and provide mechanisms for developing diverse partnerships with nonprofit fundraising, support or friends groups. The elevated visibility and attention of a new designation adjacent to the Angeles NF, coupled with an increased sense of identity for those living in the region, could enhance the ability of the Angeles NF to more successfully raise private funds and seek special appropriations for particular projects. Legislative guidance could also create new authorities to retain fees such as special use permits, etc. to fund forest operations and programs.

## Environmental Assessment

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 San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study to identify and analyze the potential environmental and socioeconomic consequences of each of the alternatives considered in the study.

The NPS evaluated the environmental consequences of each alternative on the following topics: biological resources, cultural resources, recreation use and visitor experience, socioeconomics, land use, and water resources.

A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was completed for this document. The FONSI also contains a summary of public comments on the draft study report. The FONSI can be found at <http://www.nps.gov/pwro/sangabriel>.

## Next Steps

Transmittal of the final study report to Congress officially completes the special resource study process. Implementation of the selected alternative would require Congressional legislation. If Congress does not pass legislation to implement the study's recommendations, then the study would simply remain as a recommendation. If Congress passes legislation addressing the San Gabriel area, the legislation would be the guiding policy for the park unit, and would supersede the recommendations of the study report.

If Congress establishes a national park unit, the NPS would begin implementing the Congressional legislation. **One of the first steps that the NPS would take would be to work with area partners on a management plan,** including a broad vision for the park unit and more detailed guidance for implementation. This management plan would be completed with public involvement and appropriate environmental compliance.



Puente Hills Habitat Preservation Authority Preserve, NPS Photo



**National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior**

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**HOW TO OBTAIN A COPY OF THE FINAL STUDY REPORT AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

This document presents a summary of the final San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study. The final study report, including the draft report and environmental assessment, errata, and the Finding of No Significant Impact, is posted on the project web site at:

<http://www.nps.gov/pwro/sangabriel>

A public comment summary and NPS responses to comments are also available on the web site.

Limited printed or CD-ROM copies of the full draft report and errata are available. If you have not received a copy of the draft report and would like one, please contact us by mail or e-mail and provide your name and mailing address.

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