

Saint Francis Dam Disaster National Memorial and Monument

Angeles National Forest Land Management Plan - Part 2

Administrative Change adding to Appendix A

Special Designation Overlays – Monument

Established

Saint Francis Dam Disaster National Memorial and Monument	353 Acres	Places: Santa Clara Canyon
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Located within San Francisquito Canyon, the Saint Francis Dam Disaster National Memorial and Monument was designated on March 12, 2019 by the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act, Sec. 1111. This Act also authorized the establishment of a future Saint Francis Dam Disaster National Memorial. This legislation was signed exactly 91 years after the 200-foot high Saint Francis Dam broke, sweeping away over 400 victims and scouring the floodplain for 52 miles until it emptied into the Pacific Ocean. The purpose of the Monument is to conserve and enhance the cultural, archaeological, historical, watershed, educational, and recreational resources and values of the Monument for the benefit and enjoyment of the public. The Memorial would be the first National Memorial managed by the U.S Department of Agriculture Forest Service and is intended to honor the victims and memorialize the history of the Dam Disaster.



Figure 1. Saint Francis Dam Disaster National Memorial and Monument

San Francisquito Canyon is known for its significant historical associations and values, not only from a Tribal and Native American historical context, but also because of the important use of this area during the Spanish, Mexican, and Early American periods. The first anthropologic and ethnographic recording of Native American communities identified the Tataviam as occupying the San Francisquito Canyon. While early physical evidence of their occupation of the area is scarce, early ethnographic and mission records, along with some archaeological evidence indicates their presence and use of the area ranges from 3,500 to 7,500 years ago, and likely even earlier. Recent studies of indigenous lineages in southern California have confirmed the continued presence of the Tataviam people in the region, both in terms of culture history and language dialect, and in their ongoing traditional use of the area. Today, their descendants are citizens of the Fernandeano Tataviam Band of Mission Indians, a native nation of northern Los Angeles County.

The use of San Francisquito Canyon as a historic travel corridor during all cultural periods is well documented in ethnographic and historic records. While archaeological and ethnographic evidence indicates very early Native American use and movement through the area, early Spanish accounts also identify the area during their explorations of the Santa Clara watershed. During the Spanish period, the first account of the area appears during the expeditions of the Franciscan administrator Junipero Serra and the Spanish military in 1769. A few years later in 1772, Lieutenant Pedro Fages, with a small force of Spanish soldiers, became the first Europeans to set foot in San Francisquito Canyon.

Prominent use of the area in the following Mexican and American periods primarily involved transportation, mining, ranching, water conveyance, and electrical transmission. Significant events identified during these periods include the 1835 discovery of placer gold within San Francisquito Canyon and the construction and operation of the Butterfield Overland Mail Stagecoach line from 1857 to 1861. Other significant developments occurred during the early 1900s with construction of the Los Angeles Aqueduct and hydroelectric facilities (i.e., penstocks, powerhouses), including the Saint Francis Dam. Together, these features became one of the most important engineering achievements of their time and provided the resources necessary for the ultimate growth and tremendous expansion of the Los Angeles Basin.

The Monument encompasses Angeles National Forest administered lands within the San Francisquito Watershed on the Los Angeles Gateway Ranger District (former Santa Clara-Mojave Rivers Ranger District). One of the primary object of interest within the Monument is the material remains and location of the dam and wing wall which continue to serve as a reminder of this catastrophic event – one of the worst American civil engineering disasters of the 20th century and second greatest loss of lives in California's history. Since the Saint Francis Dam disaster, the public has commemorated the event by gathering every March 12th on the anniversary of the disaster.

The elevation ranges from 1,760 to 2,000 feet, with dominant vegetation types that include riparian, annual grasses and forbs, soft scrub- mixed chaparral, and some isolated stands of hardwoods and cottonwoods. Three species currently listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) occupy the Monument: the California red-legged frog, unarmored three-spine stickleback, and least Bell's vireo. Within the State of California, the geologic values associated with San Francisquito Creek are considered to be exemplary due to a combination of history and tectonics.

Because of its outstanding geology, fish & wildlife, and historic values, San Francisquito Creek has been an eligible Wild and Scenic River.

The Monument is located south of the town of Green Valley and north of the City of Santa Clarita along San Francisquito Canyon Road. National Forest System Road 5N27 runs along the eastern edge of the Monument boundary, while the County's San Francisquito Canyon road borders the western edge. In addition to the material remains of the dam, the Monument includes an abandoned section of the old San Francisquito Canyon Road (previously maintained by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works). Current access to the Monument is by foot, along the abandoned section of the old San Francisquito Canyon road, which runs through the middle of the Monument.

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