Rim of the Valley Corridor Special Resource Study

Newsletter #1 • June 2010

Dear Friends,

The National Park Service (NPS) is conducting a "special resource study" of the Rim of the Valley Corridor surrounding five valleys in Los Angeles and Ventura Counties of southern California. The valleys specifically mentioned in the legislation that authorized this study include the San Fernando, La Crescenta, Santa Clarita, Simi and Conejo Valleys. The purpose of this special resource study is to determine 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 an existing national park. The study will also explore other ways that private or governmental entities can protect resources and provide more outdoor recreation opportunities.

The U.S. Congress directed us to carry out this study because of the importance of the resources in the study area. The rugged mountains surrounding these valleys provide habitat corridors for migrating wildlife and spectacular vistas for recreationists. Rivers and creeks in the region provide continuous open space that serve as habitat for migrating birds and mammals. Other areas are important to the history of California and our nation. The natural areas and rivers supply drinking water for the region, and offer opportunities for recreation and enjoyment.

Many people, organizations and agencies are working to conserve resources in this area to provide recreational opportunities, habitat restoration and connectivity, and watershed improvement. We will be working in partnership with the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC), California State Parks, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and many others. We hope that this study will build on and complement the many efforts underway.

As we begin this study, we would like to know more about what you envision for the Rim of the Valley corridor area. The initial comment period for this study has started, and will extend through October 29, 2010. We hope you'll take the time to let us know your thoughts and ideas. There will also be other opportunities for public input throughout the study process, as described in this newsletter.

We look forward to hearing from you!

— the Study Team

About the National Park Service

The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. The NPS cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world.

The national park system is comprised of many types of park units. Administration of park units occurs in many ways, from traditional units which are federally managed, to non-traditional units, which rely on partnerships and may have little, if any, federal landownership.

Newsletter Contents

This newsletter provides an introduction to the special resource study, including:

- **What is a special resource study?**
- **Why the NPS is conducting this special resource study?**
- **Frequently asked questions**
- **Study area map and description**
- **Study process description**
- **How you can participate**
- **Comment Form**
- **Public meeting schedule**

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Special Resource Study?

The purpose of this special resource study is to determine 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 an existing national park unit (see pages 4-5). The study will also explore other ways that private and governmental entities can protect resources and provide more outdoor recreation opportunities.

The study process provides an opportunity for the NPS and local communities to think creatively about how to care for the resources that they value; how to tell the stories of the important events that occurred there; how to protect significant natural and cultural resources; and how to highlight the uniqueness and vitality of the study area. Study recommendations may consider the entire study area or only portions of it.

Why is the National Park Service conducting this Special Resource Study?

The Consolidated Natural Resources Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-229 - May 2008) directed the NPS to conduct a Special Resource Study of the area known as the Rim of the Valley Corridor, generally including the mountains encircling the San Fernando, La Crescenta, Santa Clarita, Simi, and Conejo Valleys in California.

How will this study affect management by local communities and existing agencies?

In this study, the NPS will only consider management alternatives that respect and retain the authorities of existing local, state and federal agencies, including USFS management of the Angeles National Forest. The NPS will seek to work collaboratively with local communities and existing agencies.

How will this study affect property rights?

This study will not consider any alternatives that would adversely affect private property rights. A new national park unit designation, if recommended by this study and authorized by Congress, would not give the NPS any regulatory authority over private land. If the study recommends any NPS land acquisition, it will stipulate that land will only be acquired from willing sellers.

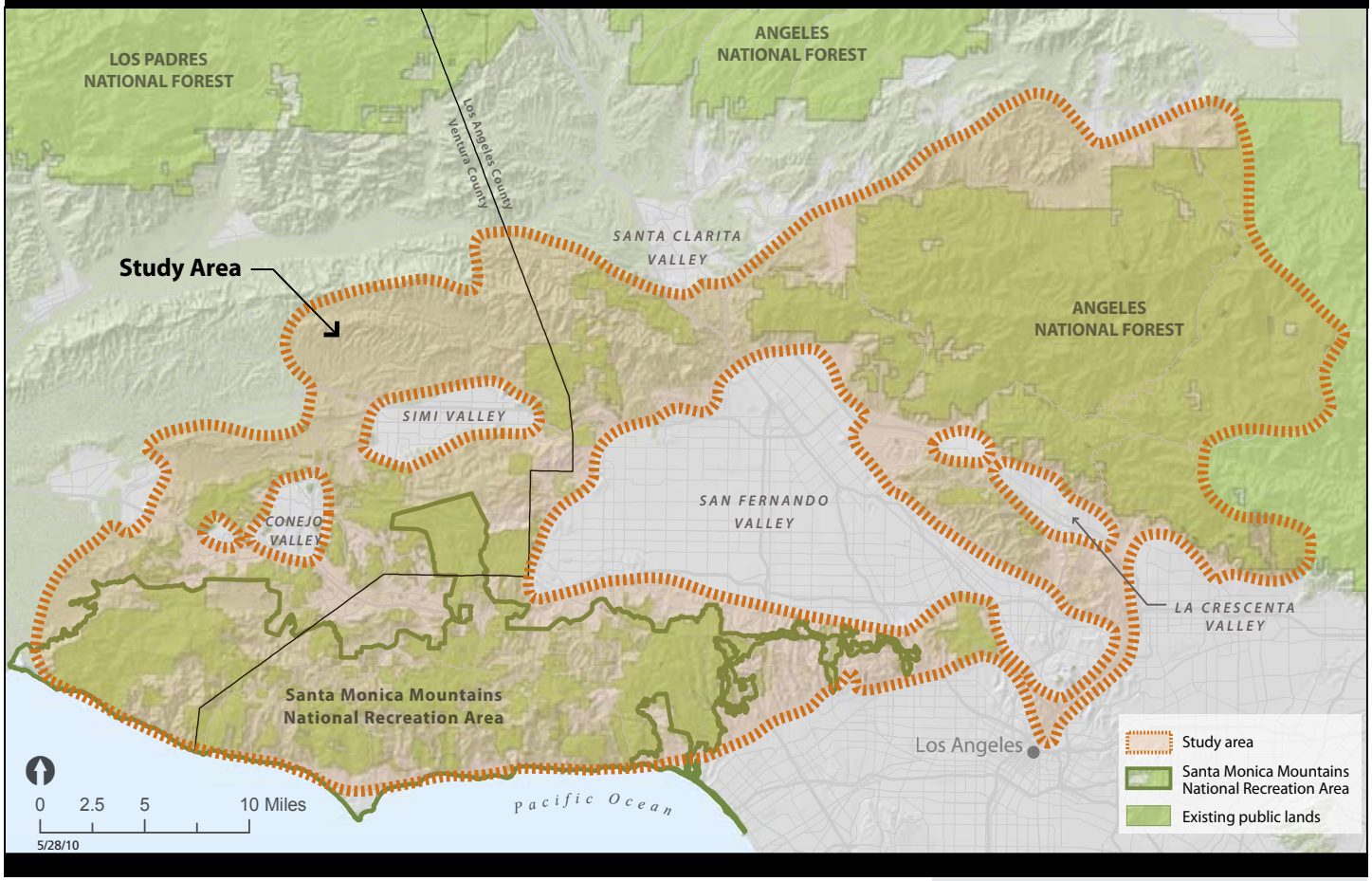
Isn't there already a special resource study underway for the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains area? How does that effort relate to this study?

The San Gabriel and the Rim of the Valley Corridor studies were each authorized through separate legislation, at different times and for different geographic areas. The NPS initiated the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study in 2005, as directed by legislation passed by the U.S. Congress in 2003 (P.L. 108-042). There is an overlapping portion of the two study areas in the western San Gabriel Mountains. Because this area is being studied through the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains study, information from that study will be considered and integrated as appropriate into the Rim of the Valley Corridor Special Resource Study. To learn more about the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study, please visit: www.nps.gov/pwro/sangabriel/

How does this study relate to Santa Monica Mountains NRA?

The Rim of the Valley Corridor study area includes all of Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA). The SMMNRA is interested in promoting resource protection and additional opportunities for public use and enjoyment of various lands around the park, but does not have any preconceived outcome for this study. The Rim of the Valley Corridor study is being independently managed from the Pacific West Regional Office of the NPS, and the study team will work closely with SMMNRA staff throughout the study process.

Rim of the Valley Corridor Special Resource Study Area



What are some of the possible outcomes of the study?

The study will explore many issues including: protection of wildlife habitat and linkages between open space areas; completion of the Rim of the Valley Trail system; preserving recreational opportunities and facilitating access to recreation for a variety of users; protection of rare, threatened or endangered species and rare or unusual plant communities and habitats; and the needs of communities within and around the study area.

Ultimately, the study will consider options or alternatives that explore ways that federal, state, local and private entities can protect and interpret important cultural and natural resources and provide more access to outdoor recreational opportunities. These alternatives will also include the option of continuing current management of the area (the "no action" alternative). These alternatives will be developed collaboratively with local stakeholders and focus on a range of opportunities and management strategies.

Over the last 20 years, less than one-third of the special resource studies that have been authorized by Congress have found that the area under study is eligible for inclusion in the national park system. Many studies determine that existing management, technical or financial assistance, or local, state or private initiatives are preferable to the establishment of a new national park unit.

The final product of the study process will be a report to Congress that will include a recommended course of action to protect resources and provide opportunities for public use and enjoyment of the area.

About the Study Area

A general boundary of the study area is described in the authorizing legislation for the special resource study. This boundary does not define any kind of management or jurisdiction; it simply defines the resources that the NPS will evaluate through the study process.

As described in the legislation, the study is to include, *"...the area known as the Rim of the Valley Corridor, generally including the mountains encircling the San Fernando, La Crescenta, Santa Clarita, Simi, and Conejo Valleys in California."*

Numerous projects and initiatives are associated with the name "Rim of the Valley." However, the most widely used definition is the area defined by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC). As this area encircles the valleys described in the authorizing legislation, the SMMC's Rim of the Valley area is generally being used to guide definition of the study area. The significance of the area's resources will ultimately guide any proposals developed through this study process.

The Study Process

Study Process Overview

Under the NPS process for special resource studies, the study team evaluates an area based on criteria established by Congress. This flowchart explains these criteria and the study process. Through this process, we look at a broad range of management alternatives, and evaluate the environmental, social, and economic impacts of each. Public involvement is a key component of any study.

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1. Public Start-Up of the Study Process

Sometimes this phase of the study process is called "scoping," because with your input, we are determining the "scope" or overall approach to the study.

This stage of the study process will extend through October 29, 2010. During this time you can send us your comments (via mail, e-mail, or the project web site), or attend any of the public meetings that we will be holding. We will publish a summary of your comments in a newsletter and online so that you can see the full range of comments we have received.

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2. Resource Analysis: Significance and Suitability

During this stage of the study process, we evaluate the natural and cultural resources of the study area and determine whether there are resources that are nationally significant and suitable for inclusion in the national park system. We will research and evaluate these resources based on existing data, and will work with scientists, historians, local researchers, community members, and others who know the area's resources.

Significance: The NPS considers a resource to be nationally significant if it is an outstanding example of a particular type of resource, it possesses exceptional value or quality illustrating or interpreting the natural or cultural themes of the nation's heritage, it offers superlative opportunities for public enjoyment or for scientific study, and it retains a high degree of integrity as a true, accurate and relatively unspoiled example of a resource. This means that a nationally significant area contains the best example of a resource type, that is related to larger national themes, and could be available for recreation, education or scientific study.

Suitability: The NPS considers a resource to be suitable for inclusion in the national park system if it 1) is not already adequately represented in the national park system, or 2) is not comparably represented and protected for public enjoyment by another land managing entity. This means that a suitable area does not duplicate other areas that are already protected and available for public enjoyment, research, or education.

National Park Service Special Resource Study Criteria

For the NPS to recommend a new national park unit, an area must:

(a) contain nationally significant natural or cultural resources
(b) be a suitable addition to the national park system
(c) be a feasible addition to the national park system
(d) require direct NPS management, instead of alternative protection by others.

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3. Feasibility Analysis

In this stage of the study process, we determine what management alternatives might be feasible. National Park Service management can only be included in the alternatives if the NPS considers it to be feasible. NPS management will be considered feasible only if the area has adequate size and configuration to allow for resource protection and visitor enjoyment, and can be administered at a reasonable cost. Other considerations will include land ownership, access, threats to the resource, staffing and development requirements, and public support.

4. Development of Alternatives

In a special resource study, "alternatives" are possible ways of managing resources within the study area. During this stage of the study process, we will work with key stakeholders to develop a range of options to protect resources and provide for public enjoyment. Different alternatives might have different goals, or they might be different ways to achieve the same goals. Alternatives may focus on a part of the study area, or may relate to the entire study area. Examples of different alternatives might include recommendations for:

- New management initiatives, funding sources, or boundary expansions for existing land and resource management organizations
- Establishment of new "designations" or protected areas, such as state or local parks, national historic landmarks, wild and scenic rivers, recreational trails, etc.
- Cooperative management among several organizations.
- New units of the national park system may be considered only if the NPS criteria for significance, suitability and feasibility are met. A new national park unit can only be established by a law passed by Congress, or by Presidential proclamation (for existing federal lands).

Alternatives will be presented in a newsletter so that you can tell us what you think about them and help us shape them.

5. Analyze Environmental Impacts

During this stage, the NPS will analyze the potential for environmental and socioeconomic impacts of the alternatives, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

6. Draft Report

The findings of the special resources study (analysis of resource significance, suitability, feasibility, proposed alternatives, and environmental impact analysis) will be published in a draft study report for public review and comment. The report will comply with the National Environmental Policy Act. There will be public meetings and a public comment period.

7. Final Report / Transmittal to Congress

During this stage of the study process, we will revise the report, as needed. Added to the final report will be a determination from the Director of the National Park Service of the alternative(s) that in the Director's professional judgment would be most effective and efficient in protecting significant resources and providing for public enjoyment. The final step in the special resource study process is transmittal of the final report from the Secretary of the Interior to Congress, along with a recommendation regarding the Secretary's preferred management option for the area.

Implementation of any of the recommendations in the report is a separate process, whether by private, local, state or federal actions, or some combination.

Get involved...here's how!

This special resource study depends on input and participation from a broad range of local residents, organizations, agencies, and environmental, business, community and political leaders.

There will be several opportunities throughout the study process to provide comments, information, and opinions. The formal public comment opportunities will be during the public start-up, alternatives development, and draft report stages of the process. However, you may contact the study team members at any point during the process.

Your ideas will be combined with resource analysis and NPS criteria to develop the study's findings and recommendations. We will send out newsletters to report back to you what we learn from your input and from research and analysis throughout the study process.

We are now at the first stage of the study process, public start-up or "scoping." The goal of this stage is public outreach and information gathering. The NPS will introduce the study, explain the process and inform the public and interested parties on how to participate.

The initial public comment period for the study will be open through **October 29, 2010**. During this period, public meetings will be held throughout the study area. See the back page of the newsletter for dates, times, and locations. Information that you provide to the NPS at this stage will help to guide and inform the study.

We encourage you to send us comments through the study website or via e-mail, but you can also submit comments through mail. In addition, we have provided a comment form on page 7 that you may use to provide your comments.

Learn about the Special Resource Study Process and Share Your Ideas

We encourage you to learn more about the Special Resource Study process, share your ideas, and provide us with information. Here are some ways to do so:

- Visit the study web site: www.nps.gov/pwro/rimofthevalley
- Sign-up for the study mailing list or e-mail list
- Send us your thoughts, comments, and information by letter, e-mail, or through the study website.
- Attend public meetings to share information, discuss issues, concerns, and potential outcomes.

We look forward to hearing your ideas throughout the study process.

Comment Form and Mailing List Sign-up

Feel free to use this form to send us your comments or to sign-up for the mailing list or e-mail list. Alternatively, you can sign-up for these lists on the study website. You may also send us your own comment letter by mail, e-mail, or by inputting your comments directly on the study web site. Please send comments by **October 29, 2010** using contact information on the following page.

Name (*required*): _____ E-mail: _____

Street: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Please check: ☐ I prefer to receive information via e-mail.
☐ I prefer to receive information by mail sent to the above address.
☐ I do not wish to receive further information.

The following types of information would be most helpful to us at this stage:

- What is your vision for the Rim of the Valley Corridor area?
- What ideas or concerns do you have that the NPS should be aware of and/or address in the study process?
- What natural and cultural resources in the area do you believe are most important? Why?
- Is there anything else you woud like to share with us?

Our practice is to make comments, including names, home addresses, home phone numbers, and email addresses of respondents, available for public review. Individual respondents may request that we withhold their names and/or home addresses, etc., but if you wish us to consider withholding this information you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comments. In addition, you must present a rationale for withholding this information. This rationale must demonstrate that disclosure would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of privacy. Unsupported assertions will not meet this burden. In the absence of exceptional, documentable circumstances, this information will be released. We will always make submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives of or officials of organizations or businesses, available for public inspection in their entirety.

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National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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Public Meeting Schedule

Stay tuned....

A series of public workshops will take place in September and October, 2010. Check our website for updates or sign-up for e-mail alerts at www.nps.gov/pwro/rimofthevalley.