

San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study Draft Alternatives Public Outreach Results

April 2010

The purpose of this document is to provide information about the public comments received on the draft alternative concepts for the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study in 2009. This document does not include responses to the comments. The National Park Service study team will consider these comments in preparing the draft study report.

Public Involvement Overview

The National Park Service (NPS) San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study team released draft alternative concepts in a newsletter for public review in the summer of 2009. The public comment period was open from August to November 2009. The study team produced and distributed over 3,000 newsletters to organizations and individuals on its mailing list, partner agencies, and at public and stakeholder meetings. A limited number of newsletters translated into Spanish were also distributed. The newsletter was also available for comment on the National Park Service's Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website. News releases announcing the availability of the alternatives newsletter and the public meetings schedule were distributed to local media, and several newspaper stories were published.

The purposes of the newsletter were to: 1) present preliminary study findings; 2) present preliminary alternatives; and 3) solicit comments on the preliminary findings and alternatives. The newsletter also contained information on the date, time, and location of public meetings that were held to solicit comments on the preliminary findings (see Newsletter 4 for a description of the preliminary findings and alternatives).

Between August and October 2009, the study team held six public meetings at locations throughout the study area including Diamond Bar, El Monte, Santa Clarita, Glendora, Palmdale, and Tujunga. At each meeting, the study team gave a presentation describing the preliminary findings and alternatives and answered questions. Participants shared comments and suggestions in small groups facilitated by the study team and Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC) staff, and other volunteers. The facilitators recorded comments on flipcharts during the discussion. All of the meetings were well attended by diverse groups of community members (approximately 450 total) despite the fact that the Station Fire, which significantly affected the Angeles National Forest, was burning during this time. In addition to the public meetings, the NPS study team held meetings with local, state and federal government agencies, organizations, communities, and Congressional offices.

Public Comments

The NPS received approximately 4800 comments. Most of these comments were submitted via written letters and through e-mail. There were 205 unique letters and 4,600 form letters of 5 different types. The NPS received comments from 36 different agencies and organizations. The remainder were from individuals. The public meeting transcripts are also part of the public comments.

A variety of views were expressed, but the majority of comments support combining different aspects of the alternatives and having more NPS involvement and leadership. Some communities and agencies expressed concerns about loss of local control, or restrictions on their ability to carry out necessary functions. Other commenters expressed concerns about restrictions on recreational activities or impacts on their communities from increased recreational use. Better access to recreation and providing close to home opportunities was an important goal for some commenters. Others expressed interest in furthering opportunities for connecting wildlife habitats and protecting watershed values.

Public Meetings

Location	Date and Time
El Monte	August 31, 2009, 7:00 p.m.
Diamond Bar	September 2, 2009, 7:00 p.m.
Santa Clarita	September 3, 2009, 7:00 p.m.
Glendora	September 14, 2009, 7:00 p.m.
Palmdale	September 15, 2009, 7:00 p.m.
Tujunga	October 28, 2009, 7:00 p.m.

Note to Readers:

Public meeting notes were transcribed as precisely as possible from the participants' own words. In a few places in these notes, the meaning of a statement may be obscured or lost; this is a result of manual transcription and/or human error.

The following acronyms and abbreviations were used in the transcriptions.

ADA – Americans with Disabilities Act
 Alternative A, Alt. A, Concept A, or A – San Gabriel Mountains National Recreation Area
 Alternative B, Alt. B, Concept B, or B – Parks and Open Space Network
 Alternative C, Alt. C, Concept C, or C – San Gabriel Watershed National Recreation Area
 ANF – Angeles National Forest
 CBWA – Central Basin Water Association
 CBO – Community Based Organization
 CDFG – California Department of Fish and Game
 CFR – Code of Federal Regulations
 DMCA – Desert and Mountain Conservation Authority
 EIS – Environmental Impact Statement
 JPA – Joint Powers Authority
 LA – Los Angeles
 LWCF – Land and Water Conservation Fund
 MRCA – Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority
 NEPA – National Environmental Policy Act
 NPS – National Park Service
 NRA – National Recreation Area
 OHV – Off-highway Vehicles
 PCT – Pacific Crest Trail
 PHLF – Puente Hills Landfill
 RCD – Resource Conservation District
 RLC – Research Learning Center
 RMC – Lower Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers and Mountains Conservancy
 SAMO – Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area
 SBF – San Bernardino National Forest
 SCAG – Southern California Association of Governments
 SGV – San Gabriel Valley
 SGVCOG – San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments
 SGM – San Gabriel Mountains
 USDA – United States Department of Agriculture
 USFS – United States Forest Service
 USFWS – United States Fish and Wildlife Service
 WCA – Watershed Conservation Authority
 WRP – Water Reclamation Plan

Outline of Comments Summary

The summary below provides an overview of the comments on the draft alternative concepts and study findings based on the input from public meetings and written comments. The summary is organized by the following topics:

(1) Draft Alternative Concepts

- Alternative Concept A: San Gabriel Mountains National Recreation Area
- Alternative Concept B: San Gabriel Parks and Open Space Network
- Alternative Concept C: San Gabriel Watershed National Recreation Area

(2) Proposals for a New Alternative

(3) Partnerships and Roles

- NPS Role
- Management and Partnerships
- National Recreation Area Concept
- Research/Research Learning Center
- U.S. Forest Service Management
- Access/Close to Home Recreation
- Concerns About Local Land Use Control and Existing Agency Authority

(4) Geographic Areas to Include or Exclude in the Study Alternatives

(5) Funding

(6) Significance and Suitability

- Comments in Support of Puente-Chino Hills Significance
- Comments Disagreeing with Puente-Chino Hills Significance and Suitability
- Other Areas that Should be Considered in the Significance Analysis
- San Gabriel Mountains Significance

(7) Resources, Recreation, Education, and Other Issues

- Cultural Resources
- Natural Resources
- Private Lands
- Study Process
- Recreation, Use, and Access
- Interpretation and Education
- Opportunities for Youth
- Natural Environment Values
- Economic Impacts and Tourism
- Enforcement and Illegal Activity

PUBLIC COMMENTS ON DRAFT ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTS

The following questions about the draft alternative concepts were asked in the newsletter comment form and at the public meetings:

- Is there one alternative concept or idea presented that you think is most valuable in terms of improving recreational opportunities and protecting significant resources? Tell us why you think this idea is valuable.
- What suggestions do you have for strengthening or improving on the alternative concepts? Do you have an entirely different vision of how the area should be managed? If so, please describe your vision.
- What concerns do you have about the alternative concepts?

(1) DRAFT ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTS

Alternative Concept A: San Gabriel Mountains National Recreation Area

Comments on alternative A were primarily supportive. Commenters preferred alternative A for its geographic extent, potential to bring more resources to the U.S. Forest Service, and continuation of U.S. Forest Service management. Some commenters suggested that this alternative could be strengthened by adding components from other alternatives such as the inclusion of urban areas or a role for the National Park Service. Concerns about alternative A primarily included the impacts of a new designation on water rights and water supply, impacts to adjacent communities from increased recreation, and concerns about having recreational facilities in Tujunga Canyon.

Comments in Support of Alternative A

Alternative A received favorable comments from a number of commenters, primarily because of the large geographic scope of the national recreation area (NRA) designation (when compared to alternative C) and the additional funding that it could bring for resource stewardship, recreation, education, and interpretation on the Angeles National Forest. Other aspects of alternative A that were favored include opportunities for connecting habitat and the retention of U.S. Forest Service management.

Suggestions for Strengthening or Improving Alternative A

Some of the commenters felt that alternative A would be stronger if it included elements from other alternatives, particularly National Park Service (NPS) participation. NPS management was desired for increased resources and funding, recognition, habitat restoration, wildlife corridor connections, education and interpretation, increased safety, and educational opportunities. Other elements that commenters suggested be included were the Research Learning Center component of alternative C and the partnership efforts in alternative B.

Some commenters felt that alternative A would be a stronger proposal if the boundary were expanded beyond the Angeles National Forest to protect open space in urban areas. Suggestions for additional areas included lower portions of the San Gabriel River Watershed, the Coyote Hills, the Castaic Mountains, Lytle Creek, Cucamonga Creek, Santa Clarita, San Antonio, Creek, Antelope Valley, and areas of the San Bernardino Mountains.

Concerns about Alternative A

While most of the comments on alternative A were supportive, some specific concerns were raised by local communities and agencies. A north slope community was concerned about expanded access and the associated impacts to the community including increased traffic, noise, and congestion. Some agencies had concerns about potential loss of local control and interference with water rights and supply. Concern was also raised about the Big Tujunga Canyon area not being suitable for a national recreation area given its size and the challenges in providing fire protection in this steeply sloped area. Others felt that this alternative did not go far enough in terms of boundary and NPS involvement.

Alternative Concept B: San Gabriel Parks and Open Space Network

Comments on alternative B were primarily divided with support for, and against, the proposed alternative B. Comments supporting alternative B liked protection of rivers and riparian areas, the potential for habitat connection, and the opportunity to provide close to home recreation for urban communities. Concerns about alternative B were primarily regarding fears about a loss of local land use control – particularly from communities in the eastern Puente-Chino Hills. Other concerns included loss of recreational opportunities, more bureaucracy without additional funding for on the ground projects, and increased traffic congestion.

Comments in Support of Alternative B

Alternative B was supported by some commenters for its efforts to protect riparian resources, connect habitat, provide community connections to open space, and provide more open space in general for urban communities. Others valued the partnerships and sharing of responsibilities amongst agencies proposed in alternative B and that it maintains local control.

Suggestions for Strengthening or Improving Alternative B

Some commenters made suggestions to strengthen or improve alternative B. These comments included expanding alternative B to include Antelope and Santa Clarita valley locations and cities southeast of the study area like Huntington Park. Suggestions for the management structure included more NPS involvement and partnerships with the U.S. Forest Service. A number of comments suggested that Alternative B should be a component of one of the national recreation area proposals.

Concerns about Alternative B

Some commenters that did not like alternative B felt that it was weak in terms of management and funding while others felt that this alternative did not have enough NPS involvement. Other commenters did not understand the value of the NPS role (technical assistance and planning) in this alternative. The partnership structure was also not defined well enough for some commenters.

Some commenters expressed a strong dislike for alternative B because of concerns that it would result in a loss of local land use control. These commenters also felt that the resources in Puente-Chino Hills area were not of national significance or suitable for inclusion in the national park system, therefore no proposals for the areas should be made by the national park service. Some agencies also expressed concern over the impact of this alternative on both water rights and local land use control.

Alternative Concept C: San Gabriel Watershed National Recreation Area

Many of the comments submitted on alternative C were supportive of this proposed concept, primarily because of the proposed management structure. Commenters also preferred the potential for increased recreational and educational opportunities in the San Gabriel River Watershed. Concerns about this alternative include potential impacts on local water rights and land use control, and concerns that the management structure would simply be another layer of bureaucracy without bringing funding for facilities, land, etc.

Comments in Support of Alternative C

The primary reason for support of alternative C was the management structure. Many commenters valued a leadership role for the NPS to provide interpretation and educational programs, on-the-ground river rangers, facilities, conservation of habitat and wildlife corridors, and more recreational opportunities. Others valued the watershed focus of this alternative. The education/information centers spread around the watershed were generally seen as a good means for providing education and interpretation about the watershed.

Suggestions for Strengthening or Improving Alternative C

One of the most common suggestions for strengthening alternative C was to expand the area that would be included in the designation. A number of these comments felt that all of the San Gabriel Mountains should be included in alternative C (similar to the area designated in alternative A). Other commenters wanted to see more tributaries of the San Gabriel Watershed, the Puente Chino Hills, and the Coyote Hills included in the national recreation area. While many comments wanted to expand the area, others requested that Mt. Baldy and San Antonio Canyon remain under current management by the U.S. Forest Service. One commenter suggested that this alternative propose more water flow to the San Gabriel River to enhance recreational fishing.

Concerns about Alternative C

Some commenters expressed concerns about alternative C. One concern was that this alternative designates areas that are already highly impacted and that such a designation will cause further damage. Others were concerned that this alternative would bring more bureaucracy rather than the needed resources. Some commenters felt areas such as Mt. Baldy, San Antonio Canyon, and Tujunga Canyon should be left under current management. Some felt that the NPS was not the appropriate agency to manage these areas, rather, the area needed more direct grants and funding through existing conservancies. Similar to B, some communities were concerned about local control.

(2) PROPOSALS FOR A NEW ALTERNATIVE

Many commenters expressed a preference for a combination or hybrid of alternative concepts or a new alternative that would broaden the national recreation area proposals presented in the preliminary alternatives. Some commenters supported a combination of all three of the alternatives creating a national recreation area for the entire San Gabriel Mountain range, having a lead role for the NPS, and creating more connections and open space in urban communities. There was also the desire to include additional areas such as the Puente Chino Hills, the San Gabriel River tributaries, and other habitat connections. Other commenters recommended that there should be an alternative that proposes designation of the entire study area as a national recreational area.

Some commenters suggested an alternative that combines Alternatives A and C. Some commenters expressed a preference for a more comprehensive area and a focus on watersheds. Regarding management strategy, commenters expressed the desire for NPS management, involvement, and expertise as proposed in Alternative C. Commenters also believed that additional federal funding for recreation and conservation would come from NPS involvement.

Several commenters wanted a combination of Alternatives B and C to create a system of rivers, mountains, and open spaces, with NPS involvement, and to provide for resource management of the San Gabriel River Watershed. Commenters felt this combination would provide for an interconnected system of parks that would be most accessible to the Los Angeles Basin population.

(3) Partnerships and Roles

NPS Role

A majority of comments supported an NPS role in future management efforts within the study area. Commenters felt that NPS could bring funding, recognition, as well as management expertise for resources, interpretation, education, safety/law enforcement, and recreational opportunities. Specific suggested roles for the NPS included: leading a coordinating partnership: providing technical, planning, interpretive, educational/info sharing, and administrative services; entering into interagency agreements to share management responsibilities with other agencies; and providing rangers along the San Gabriel River and other areas. Other commenters thought that the NPS could help to acquire lands for recreation and conservation.

Some commenters expressed concerns about NPS involvement. These concerns include questions about how NPS involvement would affect existing management and adding another layer of regulatory authority/bureaucracy.

Management and Partnerships

Members of the public provided comments on the partnership management structures proposed in the alternatives. Many expressed their ideas of what management structure would best serve the goals of the study. The management structure proposed in alternative C was favored the most. Others provided new ideas such as forming new recreation/education districts to be managed collaboratively. Other comments suggested specific groups that could work together in a partnership. Suggestions included non-profit organizations, community groups, youth groups, educational organizations, and other agencies that were not specifically mentioned in the

preliminary alternatives. Concerns about partnerships included providing more information about how they would function and concern about duplicative efforts and more bureaucracy.

National Recreation Area (NRA) Concept

The National Recreation Area concept was supported by many of the comments. Commenters felt that the national recreational area designation could bring more resources to the area, help existing agencies to leverage resources, lead to new interpretive and educational programs, help address wildlife corridor protection, and include the NPS as a partner. The Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area was cited as a good model for consideration.

Research /Research Learning Center

There was general interest in the research learning center component of the preliminary alternatives. Some commenters felt that this component should be in all of the alternatives, while others felt that the role of the research learning center and its benefits to education should be clarified.

U.S. Forest Service Management

Many comments expressed opinions about U.S. Forest Service management of the Angeles National Forest. Many commenters expressed a desire to retain U.S. Forest Service management. There were also specific concerns about whether existing recreational opportunities and cabin owners would be impacted by a change in management. Other commenters felt that the U.S. Forest Service could use more assistance in protecting resources, providing recreational opportunities, and maintaining facilities. Some suggested the Angeles National Forest would benefit from working cooperatively with the National Park Service and with its neighbor, the San Bernardino National Forest.

Access/Close to Home Recreation

Providing better access to existing recreation areas and providing new recreational opportunities in urban communities where people live was a common value expressed in the comments.

Concerns about Local Land Use Control and Existing Agency Authority

The NPS received comments from a number of local communities, agencies, and organizations expressing concerns about whether the proposed alternatives would impact their current management efforts or local land use and regulatory authorities. Specific concerns were related to management of landfills, water supply and treatment, and local land use. Some commenters suggested that the alternatives contain specific language ensuring that agencies and local governments would not be affected by the proposed alternatives. Some commenters had fears over the potential use of eminent domain.

(4) Geographic Areas to Include or Exclude in the Study Alternatives

The following locations were suggested for inclusion in an NRA or other management:

Specific locations:

- Alhambra Wash
- Antelope Valley
- Big Rock Creek
- Cajon Pass and eastern San Gabriels
- Castaic Mountains
- Chino Hills State Park
- Claremont Wilderness
- Coyote Hills/West Coyote Hills to Ocean
- Coyote Creek Watershed
- Cucamonga Creek
- Cucamonga Wilderness
- Devil's Punchbowl
- Emerald Necklace
- Farmer's Market

- Ice House Canyon
- Los Angeles River & headwaters
- Little Rock
- Little Rock Creek
- Lytle Creek
- Montebello Hills
- Mount Baldy Area
- Pear Blossom
- Placerita Canyon
- Pleasant View Ridge
- Puente Chino Hills, including Diamond Bar and Puddingstone
- Rio Hondo River
- RMC territory
- Robert Ward Nature Preserve
- San Antonio Creek
- San Bernardino National Forest
- San Gabriel River and tributaries, entire watershed
- San Jose Hills
- Santa Clarita
- Simi Hills and around San Fernando Valley
- St. Andrew's Abby
- Tejon Ranch
- Tujunga watershed
- Verdugo Mountains and San Rafael Hills
- West Placentia
- Whittier Hills
- Wrightwood

Other boundaries, resources, ideas about connections and rationales:

- A National Recreation Area (NRA) study should include all of the area historically considered to be part of the San Gabriel Mountains and all of the watershed study area outside of the national forests.
- The NRA designation should include the entire study area to provide recreational opportunities and protection of wildlife corridors.
- Include the wildlife corridor between the two portions of the ANF.
- Include areas on the north slope of the San Gabriel Mountains including Wrightwood, Devil's Punchbowl, Farmer's Market, Little Rock, Pear Blossom, St. Andrew's Abby.
- Connecting the San Gabriel River and the Rio Hondo and their tributaries with the San Gabriel Mountains will provide an integrated system of parks and natural areas that would protect both natural and cultural/historical resources. It would also allow for integration of the Emerald Necklace projects into a larger environmental system of connected habitats that would provide expanded wildlife corridors.
- Including all of the San Gabriel Mountains in a NRA designation would bring in the upper watershed of the Los Angeles River which is also managed by the Forest Service.
- Include communities adjacent to San Gabriels outside of the watershed study area, such as Los Angeles (Tujunga Canyon), Santa Clarita (the Placerita Canyon Nature Center), and Antelope Valley cities such as Palmdale.
- The vision for an NRA is incomplete without including the entire San Gabriel River Watershed; include the lower watershed. Ignoring the lower river gives the impression that the San Gabriel River system just becomes a drainage ditch after it leaves La Habra. This arbitrary cut off line leaves out the Coyote Creek Watershed, the San Gabriel River's largest tributary, as well as the protected Cerritos Wetlands and the 600 acres of coastal sage scrub at West Coyote Hills.
- Extend the study area further south to include the 510 acres of Chevron property in northwest Fullerton of the Coyote Hills, plus the 72.5 acres of the Robert Ward Nature Preserve, tangent to the Chevron property and owned by the City of Fullerton, California. It is all part of the Coyote Creek watershed that drains into the San Gabriel River.
- Tujunga watershed should have its own NRA designation and identity. Concerned that all of the resources will be concentrated on the San Gabriel Valley areas leaving out the Tujunga area.
- Include FWY 14 all the way to FWY 15
- Connection from State Route 57
- Connect the San Gabriel River / Mountains to the sea.
- Add eastern edge foothills.
- Connect by trails and transportation.
- Provide connections to the urban communities along the San Gabriel River.

- Include Los Angeles County Significant Ecological Areas.
- Link urban neighborhoods to natural spaces and the historical richness of the area.
- Connect to Chino Hills State Park.
- Connect to San Bernardino NF.
- Include historic sites (original site of San Gabriel Mission, Pio Pico, etc) and cultural values
- Include communities south of the San Gabriel Mountains in the watershed study to address the park inequities.
- The area should have a sufficient size for management.

Areas to leave out of the study alternatives:

- Allow industrial cities to opt out.
- Protect Baldy Village as a private inholding – no designation.
- San Antonio Watershed – it is a stream (not a river) that flows in the San Antonio Canyon; Baldy Village is private property (not leased land) with their own services.
- The cities of Chino Hills and Diamond Bar requests that their cities be removed from the study area.
- Puente Hills Landfill
- Too much private property on the north of all of the alternatives. Limit the scope on the north side of the Angeles National Forest.

(5) Funding

A number of commenters expressed the importance of new sources of funding. Some commenters felt that the national recreation area designation and involvement from the NPS were the primary means to bring new funding to the region. Many commented on the need for increased funding in the Angeles National Forest in particular. Some commenters were concerned that the proposals would result in unfunded partnerships, something already common in the region.

Many commenters suggested specific areas for which funding is needed including: maintenance, trails, staffing, facilities in the Angeles National Forest, better signage and interpretation, new recreational opportunities, educational programs, transportation, and law enforcement/safety efforts. Some expressed that more funding was necessary for the entire Angeles National Forest, not just the San Gabriel River watershed, which is proposed in alternative C. Some commenters also suggested changes in national forest fee collection programs to retain more money for the Angeles National Forest. Others suggested that the Land and Water Conservation Program was a potential funding source. It was also suggested that a funding analysis be included in the study report.

Additional staffing for recreation areas was seen as a funding priority by many commenters, particularly in existing recreational areas such as the Angeles National Forest. Many commenters recommended that any new positions should be offered to local people. Job training programs for local community members were also advocated.

(6) SIGNIFICANCE AND SUITABILITY

The following question about the draft study findings was asked in the newsletter comment form and at the public meetings:

- What are your thoughts or comments on the study findings (significance, suitability or feasibility)?

Most comments on national significance and suitability concentrated on the Puente Chino Hills. The NPS received comments both in support of and disagreement with the findings of national significance and suitability for the

Puente Chino Hills area. Communities and individuals in the Puente Chino Hills area were generally divided about the significance. One commenter requested further analysis on suitability to clarify why the area is unique and different from other national park units like Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area.

Comments in support of Puente-Chino Hills Significance

Those who supported the significance emphasized that this area is a significant ecological area, contains rare native plant communities - including coastal sage scrub and walnut woodlands, and is a global hotspot for biodiversity. It was also suggested that the cultural history of the Puente-Chino Hills, specifically its geologic origins, use by Native Americans, and the development of oil drilling technology, is significant and should be interpreted. Others commented that this finding brings prestige and recognition to the area which could increase tourism and improve the local economy.

Comments Disagreeing with Puente-Chino Hills Significance and Suitability

Those who disagreed with the significance and suitability of the Puente-Chino Hills believed that the Puente-Hills do not contain resources with a high degree of integrity. These areas have been grazed and burned in recent fires and contain smaller, more isolated populations. In addition, it was stated that since Chino Hills State Park protects similar vegetation, these areas are not suitable for inclusion in the national park system.

Other Areas that Should be Considered in the Significance Analysis

Some commenters suggested additional areas with national significance such as the Coyote Hills, the river infrastructure and conservation (flood protection systems), Native American history and use of the San Gabriel Mountains, and significant cultural/historical resources such as watershed history, the citrus industry, the Pacific Electric Railway, La Casa Nueva, and the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historical Trail. One comment suggested that other designations, such as Los Angeles County significant ecological areas and California Department of Fish and Game significant areas should be considered. One commenter felt that the entire study area was nationally significant.

San Gabriel Mountains Significance

Most comments agreed with the significance of the San Gabriel Mountains. However, one commenter felt strongly that national significance of these mountains should be reassessed given the devastation of the station fire. Another commenter thought that the significance of the mountains was exaggerated given that the area was predominantly chaparral habitat.

(7) RESOURCES, RECREATION, EDUCATION, AND OTHER ISSUES

Cultural Resources

Comments directly related to cultural resources were sparse and were primarily focused on opportunities for Native Americans to engage in traditional use practices, particularly the establishment of a Native Forest Restoration Area around the Haramokngna American Indian Cultural Center. Commenters desired that Native Americans have opportunities to learn and practice traditional land management and activities such as plant gathering and basketweaving. Several commenters also requested inclusion of local tribes and the Haramokngna center in the planning process.

Some commenters expressed a desire for more identification and documentation of artifacts and cultural sites, especially after the Station Fire cleared much of the underbrush. One commenter remarked that fire management plays a role in cultural resource management as sites are lost to large fires.

Natural Resources

Vegetation

Many commenters hoped that the study would raise awareness, understanding, and protection of native plants throughout the study area, including coastal sage scrub and walnut woodlands. Commenters wanted the NPS to focus on removal and research of invasive and exotic species. Some commenters questioned the national significance of habitats such as walnut woodlands, but many commenters agreed with the study's findings and wanted consideration of native habitats to extend beyond the boundaries to places such as West Coyote Hills and Big Tujunga Wash. Fire management was also mentioned as a primary objective of vegetation management in the area.

Wildlife

Commenters called for a greater emphasis on wildlife corridor protection, particularly in Alternative C, which they felt was too limited geographically to adequately address the issue. Some commenters recommended making wildlife corridor protection the theme of Alternative C rather than watershed protection. The use of federal funds to protect wildlife corridors, including acquisition of lands for wildlife corridors and the use of fire management to provide habitat for migrating species, was recommended. Some concern was expressed that increased visitation would disrupt wildlife and would, in particular, affect the abundance of game species. A local agency was also concerned that greater protection of corridors could increase human-wildlife interactions and requested collaboration. Specific corridors mentioned by the commenters included connections between the two parts of the Angeles National Forest, and connections to the Castaic Mountains, the Puente-Chino Hills, Big Rock Creek, Hansen Dam, the Verdugo Mountains, Cajon Pass, and the West Coyote Hills.

Research

Commenters supported research on biodiversity, climate change, the urban wildland interface, and suburban sprawl. One agency cautioned that NPS restrictions could impact their ability to conduct research by motor vehicle and asked to be included in planning.

Fire Management

Commenters expressed a variety of concerns about fire, including a need for more controlled small burns, more fire prevention, and making the most of the regenerative effects of the recent Station Fire. Several commenters cited a need for fire education for the public and recommended building a fire education center, providing interpretive displays, or instituting a fire education program. Commenters requested that an NRA preserve as much open space as possible for regeneration capabilities, include additional resources for prevention and recovery, and engage in proactive fire management informed by an understanding of the relationships of altered fire regimes, wildlife habitat, climate change, flood control, and the wildland-urban interface.

Water / Hydrology

Commenters supported watershed protection, citing water scarcity, flood control, and water quality. Public education and awareness of watersheds and watershed issues were identified as important needs. Several commenters encouraged providing additional recreational opportunities along waterways, especially through the urban portions of the study area. Some were concerned that any new federal designation or overlay would affect private water rights or the ability of state and local agencies to make decisions regarding water supply and quality. Several agencies expressed concern that additional recreation along waterways could result in contamination. Other comments included increasing the water flow in late spring and summer, establishing a minimum flow below Morris Dam to protect riparian habitat year-round, including as much of the watershed as possible in an NRA, including Walnut, San Jose, and Coyote Creeks, and the Los Angeles River.

Other Natural Resource Comments

Generally, commenters called for greater protection of natural resources throughout the study area. Some felt that designation of the area as an NRA would itself bring additional attention, funding, and protection to natural resource concerns. Others felt that it might be difficult to balance increased recreation with natural resource protection and advocated focused planning, best management practices, science, and partnership efforts. Many commenters wanted to see the study address as large an area as possible, extending even beyond the boundaries and leveraging the resources and expertise of organizations within large ecosystem scales. Some

hoped the study process could lead to halting specific projects on the basis of resource protection, specifically a new NFL stadium and the West Coyote Hills development.

Private Lands

Commenters voiced concerns about the use of eminent domain and the possibility of regulatory authority over surrounding landowners in Alternatives B and C. Several civic institutions requested explicit assurances that eminent domain would not be used, that land development restrictions would not be promulgated, and that existing water rights would be protected in each alternative. Some expressed concern that any assurances given today would eventually be forgotten once a designation was in place. Owners of ANF inholdings, particularly at Mt. Baldy, were especially concerned that their property rights could be affected.

Recreation Residences

All commenters who addressed recreation residences wanted to ensure that administration of the cabins remains in the hands of the USFS.

Study Process

Comments on the study process included suggestions for improving the draft study, recommendations for outreach, and concerns about areas included in the study process. Commenters suggested topics that should be further analyzed and evaluated in the draft study report including wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, restoration plans, recreational use and opportunities, ethnic sites, and the impacts of the Station Fire. Some commenters provided citations for specific studies and analysis to be considered in the draft study report. Other commenters requested more detailed analysis for significance, suitability, feasibility, and in the description of the alternatives. One commenter suggested that study area maps should be revised to depict all protected lands. Suggestions for additional outreach included meetings with recreational groups, more public meetings in general, and collaboration with cities, resource management agencies, and landowners.

There were also concerns raised by communities, landowners, and elected officials in the eastern Puente Chino Hills area. These commenters felt strongly that this area should not have been included in the NPS study. The primary rationale was that Coyote Creek, as the only tributary located south of the City of Santa Fe Springs, should be considered outside the Congressionally-authorized study area.

Recreation, Use, and Access

Hiking

Commenters wanted more trails, better trail planning, diverse use of trails, more trail connections, improved trail maintenance, and the retention of existing hiking opportunities. There was both support and concern for allowing mountain bikes and dog-walking on trails.

Bicycling

Most comments focused on the ANF, although a few people did voice support for increased or improved bicycle opportunities in the southern portion of the study area. Some commenters wanted more bicycle access, including more trails (new and existing) to wilderness areas and to “habitat areas.” Some were concerned that an NRA designation would lead to closures of existing mountain bike trails. Other commenters worried about the potential impacts from mountain biking, including physical impacts (erosion, etc) and social impacts (user conflicts, etc). While some believed mountain biking should be curtailed, others felt separation of trail uses, including new dedicated trails, was an appropriate solution. Some believed that a designation, with its emphasis on recreation, might bring bicycle access to more places in the forest.

Equestrian

Equestrian users wanted more trails, wider trails, staging areas and facilities, better access roads, better trail planning (trails with meaningful connections, features, and destinations). Some expressed dissatisfaction with

current USFS management and felt they were losing opportunities due to increasing incompatible uses or closures.

Diverse Community Participation

Several commenters expressed the need for more recreation opportunities for urban communities and noted the disparities in access to parks and open space for ethnic groups. Other commenters noted a need for multilingual information and outreach as well as training for staff to be able to communicate with diverse groups.

Off-road

While some commenters felt that OHV use should be banned from an NRA, many felt continued use was compatible as long as riparian areas were avoided and social impacts (noise, user conflicts, etc.) did not increase over current levels.

Hang-gliding

Commenters were concerned that an NPS designation would mean that CFR regulations prohibiting hang-gliding in National Parks would also be applied in the ANF. The hang-gliding community feels that they lost an important site in the Santa Monica Mountains that they thought was protected, because the CFR regulations trumped the park's original intentions to preserve the activity. Several conservation organizations advocated explicit reassurances to hang-gliders, along with other user groups, to preserve the political viability of an NRA.

Overuse, Crowding, Dispersal

Some commenters were concerned about the impacts of increased visitation, particularly to the mountains, resulting from a new designation. These potential impacts included increased pollution, waste, traffic, noise, and other unknown impacts. Many commenters felt that the USFS is currently overwhelmed by overuse in the ANF. While a few felt that a new designation would not help and perhaps would only exacerbate the problems, most commenters expressed a desire for the alternatives to provide strategies for addressing overuse, including:

- Educational programming and facilities, including visitor centers and multilingual services
- Adequate facilities to handle the level of current use, including picnic tables, trash cans, restrooms, etc.
- Dispersal from hard-hit areas like San Gabriel Canyon by provision of more opportunities elsewhere
- Use quotas
- Closures of areas where funding does not allow for adequate facilities, presence, etc
- Greater staff presence, including "river rangers", and enforcement
- Higher level of maintenance and trash collection

Other Recreational Uses

Some commenters were concerned that new designations, especially NRA and/or wilderness designations would restrict recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, OHV use, gold mining, hang-gliding, mountain biking, camping, etc. Several organizations advocated that the study provide explicit assurances that current activities would not be curtailed, and recommended adherence to the recreational decisions already made through the forest planning process.

Some commenters were concerned about impacts from certain existing activities and requested mitigation measures including the restriction or elimination of those opportunities. Most of these comments emphasized low-impact over motorized recreation. Some expressed specific concerns about hunting, bicycles, and bungee jumping. At least one commenter thought that recreation as a whole should be de-emphasized until the ANF recovers from the Station Fire.

New recreational opportunities requested by commenters included:

- field trip campsites
- increasing water flow on the San Gabriel River to support fishing
- fishing along the San Andreas Fault
- better maintained campgrounds
- personal contacts with rangers
- California condor viewing area
- seamless connections of trails and experiences across jurisdictional borders

- new low-impact opportunities at Little Rock Creek
- long distance trail connections, including commuting
- kayaking in the river
- more nature centers and opportunities on the fringes of the ANF
- more RV opportunities
- more wilderness and wild and scenic river designations

Access

There were many comments related to access. Commenters generally wanted to see a greater emphasis on inclusion of traditionally underserved urban and park poor communities through more access points to recreation areas in urban settings, multi-lingual services, and improved or new transportation solutions. “Transit to trails” was mentioned often, along with shuttles, bus connections, railways, and organized field trips from urban areas to the mountains. The ANF road system was deemed by several to be too small, narrow, and vulnerable to handle extra traffic, supplying additional justification for a comprehensive transit program. While many commenters wanted to provide access opportunities to a wider, more diverse group of users, they also cautioned that existing uses/users should not be turned away, including hang-gliders, hunters, and dogwalkers. Some commenters from the northern portion of the study area were concerned that increased public access in that area would create impacts in their communities and affect existing uses. In other areas, commenters focused on getting people to the mountains and providing basic services along the river within the ANF. Many commenters were in favor of the type of urban access points illustrated in alternatives B and C.

Interpretation and Education

Many commenters valued education and wanted more learning opportunities focused on conservation, science, and history, including the significant resources of the area and watershed protection. Commenters expressed support for the benefits of education, including awareness of resource issues and recreational etiquette in natural areas. Some commenters stated that consistent and coordinated information for visitors is lacking in the study area. There were several commenters who suggested that the National Park Service could assist in providing coordinated and consistent education and interpretation opportunities. Others suggested that the NPS and the Forest Service could collaborate on education efforts, or the NPS could be involved in partnerships to help other organizations with outreach, education, and to develop interpretive materials.

Specific ideas included:

- Providing a range of facilities such as visitor centers, education/information centers, and small kiosks. Others disagreed with programs and facilities; one commenter stated that nature does the job.
- San Dimas Experimental Forest should be a resource for education/research for the public
- Using electronic media such as a coordinated web site portal or social media
- Bilingual signage and information, pamphlets
- Provide education programs to urban communities, especially youth
- Providing green jobs and volunteer programs.

Opportunities for Youth

Many commenters wanted increased environmental education programming (curriculum, service learning, field trips, etc.) and/or educational facilities (camps, centers, etc.) directed at youth. Some felt that this was a specific strength that NPS involvement could bring to the study area. It was often expressed that the NPS or USFS should work closely with schools to accomplish these objectives. Green jobs training was mentioned frequently as a way to introduce youth to outdoor-related careers and provide economic opportunities to poor communities. Educational and recreational services were both seen as ways to combat childhood obesity, introduce youth to healthy recreation, and connect them emotionally and spiritually with the natural world.

Natural Environment Values

Commenters expressed a desire for protecting natural areas, including wilderness, open space, wildlife corridors, the mountains, and wild and scenic rivers for both their natural and social values. They valued natural areas (especially the mountains) which provide opportunities for recreation, solitude, tranquility, and spirituality while also providing benefits to quality of life and health (clean air and water). Commenters valued these areas especially in park-poor communities. One commenter expressed the need for more sport-type parks. Concern was expressed about impacts on rural communities from expanding recreational opportunities in the Angeles National Forest.

Economic Impacts and Tourism

Several commenters felt that federal recognition would bring positive attention to the area and would help the local economy and tourism. They recommend that the study report analyze the economic value of an NRA to local communities, including job creation, tourism spending, and improved property values for adjacent communities. Concern was expressed that increased recreation would require commercial development which could negatively impact rural communities.

Enforcement and Illegal Activity

Commenters expressed hope that NPS involvement and/or additional funding would lead to better enforcement of laws and regulations in and near the ANF. People were particularly concerned with illegal dumping, illegal mining, drunk driving, drug use, fires, graffiti, homelessness, vandalism, car break-ins, user-created dams, poaching, and littering. Additional enforcement rangers and patrols were the most frequently identified solutions, along with education and volunteer involvement.