

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
National Park Service
Interagency Regional Trail Management Plan
Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area
Los Angeles and Ventura Counties, California
Notice of Intent to Prepare a
Joint Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report

SUMMARY: In accordance with Title 42, Chapter 55, USC § 4332, of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the National Park Service intends to prepare a joint environmental impact statement/environmental impact report (EIS/EIR) for an interagency regional trail management plan (TMP) for the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area.

The California Department of Parks and Recreation (CDPR) and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC) will be cooperating agencies in the TMP EIS/EIR effort. Following publication of this Notice, CDPR will issue a Notice of Preparation to initiate a complementary draft environmental impact report (EIR) effort. The official responsible for the EIR is Ruth Coleman, Acting Director, California Department of Parks and Recreation.

The National Park Service, CDPR, and SMMC will jointly prepare an interagency regional TMP that will establish the overall direction of future development and completion of the trail network over the next ten to fifteen years. Based on identified desired conditions for park natural, cultural and recreational resources, the TMP will prescribe policies to streamline interagency management of the trail network throughout the national recreation area. The TMP will also include a trail policy map depicting the planned trail network. The planning and environmental analysis associated with the TMP could potentially result in a program that would modify current trail policies, recreational use patterns and future trail openings and closures.

BACKGROUND: The Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area encompasses 150,050

acres, with approximately 71,300 acres of public parkland and the rest in private or other government ownership. Within the national recreation area, there is a 320-mile public trail network made up of trails and dirt service roads. The greater Santa Monica Mountains trail network adjacent to the national recreation area features over 80 additional miles of public trails, several of which feed into the recreation area. Public lands and the trails in the national recreation area are managed by federal, state and local agencies with varying management policies. Additionally, much of the trail network consists of utility and old ranch roads that were inherited with the land and are not necessarily constructed to public trail management standards. After almost 25 years of continuous land acquisition, the public trail network has grown significantly, and several trails now cross parkland jurisdictional boundaries. There is the need to formulate an interagency regional trail plan to compile trail management policies to facilitate a seamless recreational experience for trail users and to prepare a vision for the final trail network and future development of trail-related facilities, ranging from trail network signs to backcountry trail camps.

ALTERNATIVES: The TMP EIS/EIR will evaluate alternative trail management policies along with alternative trail network designs. At this time, it is anticipated that alternatives will include a “No Action” alternative, a “Preferred” alternative, and at least two other alternatives featuring contrasting recreational use patterns. The TMP EIS/EIR will evaluate the potential environmental impacts of the alternatives. An environmentally preferred alternative will be identified, and any potential impairments to park values will also be disclosed. The alternatives will be based on input from the community, an environmental constraints analysis using current environmental condition information, trail network maintenance costs, and several visitor recreational use surveys conducted in the national recreation area.

ISSUES: The draft TMP EIS/EIR will address environmental and social impacts associated with the national recreation area’s trail network. Environmental issues will include, but not be limited to, trail and/or trailhead adjacency to sensitive plant and animal species’ habitats; adjacency to cultural and archaeological resource sites; trail erosion and impacts on water resources; soils and geology impacts from trail presence and new trail construction; back country camp impacts including fire hazard potential. Social impacts will include, but not be limited to, allowable uses and user conflicts on trails; trail network public access; trail network compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act requirements;

proposed trail and trailhead construction; trail network management and operation guidelines; and trail network signs.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT: The National Park Service will conduct a conservation planning and environmental impact analysis for the proposed *Interagency Regional Trail Management Plan*. For initial scoping and alternative development, written comments will be accepted. The most useful comments are those that identify concerns and issues, provide essential environmental information, and suggest reasonable design alternatives the park should consider in initiating the TMP EIS/EIR process. All respondents will later have an opportunity to review the draft TMP EIS/EIR and submit additional comments.

Public scoping for a interagency trail plan began with the Santa Monica Mountains Area Recreational Trails (SMMART) project that culminated in the 1997 *SMMART Report*. The *SMMART Report* is available for review at www.nps.gov/samo/trails. The *SMMART Report* contains the public's recommendations regarding missing links in the trail network, back country camps along the regional Backbone Trail, trail network sign guidelines, multiple use trail guidelines, and trail system design. The report also put forth a list of priority coordination issues not addressed in the SMMART project, including interagency cooperation, volunteer commitment, and multi-agency trail crew and equipment sharing. Numerous comments on trail network-related issues were received during public scoping and draft EIS review periods for the recently approved *Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area General Management Plan*. The comments will be considered while preparing the draft TMP EIS/EIR.

All written comments must be **postmarked or transmitted not later than 45 days following the publication of the Notice of Intent** in the Federal Register. Comments should be addressed to the Superintendent, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, Attn: *Interagency Regional Trail Management Plan*, 401 W. Hillcrest Drive, Thousand Oaks, CA 91360. Comments may be faxed to (805)370-1850, or e-mailed to samo_trails@nps.gov.

If individuals submitting comments request that their name or address be withheld from public disclosure, it will be honored to the extent allowable by law. Such requests must be stated prominently in the beginning of the comments. There also may be circumstances wherein the NPS will withhold a respondent's identity as allowable by law. As always: NPS will make available to public inspection all submissions from organizations or businesses and from persons identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations and businesses; and, anonymous comments may not be considered.

FUTURE INFORMATION: Updated information about this conservation planning and environmental impact analysis process will be distributed via mailings, regional and local news media, and the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area webpage (<http://www.nps.gov/samo/trails>).

Responses to this Notice will be used to update the mailing list of people interested in receiving future information as the environmental documents are developed. Please notify the National Park Service by mail, e-mail, or fax at the appropriate number to request placement on the mailing list. For all types of requests please be sure to include your mailing address.

DECISION PROCESS: Availability of the draft TMP EIS/EIR for review and written comment will be officially announced by Notice of Availability in the Federal Register, through local and regional news media, the above listed website, and direct mailing. At this time the draft TMP EIS/EIR is anticipated to be available for public review and comment in fall, 2003. Comments on the draft TMP EIS/EIR will be fully considered and incorporated into the final TMP EIS/EIR as appropriate. At this time it is anticipated that the Final TMP EIS/EIR will be completed by July, 2004. As a delegated EIS, the official responsible for the decision of record is the Regional Director, Pacific West Region, National Park Service; subsequently the official responsible for implementation would be the Superintendent, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area.

Dated: _____

Jon Jarvis, Regional Director, Pacific West Region