



Draft

San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains

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Top, left to right: Frank G. Bonelli Regional Park, NPS photo; Inspiration Point, Angeles National Forest, NPS photo.
Bottom: Eaton Canyon Natural Area, NPS photo.

Recreation Needs and Opportunities

INTRODUCTION

The Los Angeles metropolitan region has struggled to provide adequate recreation opportunities for its growing urban areas since its first population boom at the end of the 19th century. Throughout the 20th century, population growth and development in the region has far outpaced the creation of recreational facilities. This has occurred despite the completion of previous comprehensive recreation studies that called for investment in more recreational facilities.

Deficiencies in recreation and open space remain for much of the Los Angeles Region. Over 15 million people live in the larger metropolitan region and the California Department of Finance projects another 13 million residents by 2050 (California Department of Finance 2007a). With existing recreation and park areas in most cases already taxed beyond capacity, it is safe to assume that significant efforts will need to take place to ensure sufficient opportunities for diverse recreational experiences in the future. In addition, communities of color and children have disproportionately low access to parks and open space in Los Angeles County. See also Chapter 7, *Environmental Consequences*, for a more discussion on current recreation trends.

NEEDS

Recreation Demand in Urban Areas

In addressing present and future open space concerns for the study area, disparities must be addressed regarding the disproportional access to park and recreational space. **As recent reports from The Trust for Public Land (TPL) and the City Project indicate, public access, predominantly of minority populations, to parks and recreation facilities is a serious concern.** According to TPL, Los Angeles County ranks at the bottom in comparison to the nation's seven major cities (Boston, New York, San Francisco, Seattle, San Diego, and Dallas) in terms of providing access to parks for children. In fact, the report, based on 2000 census data, indicates

that “more than 1.5 million children in Los Angeles County do not live within walking distance of a public park.” In most cases, parks in the Los Angeles region are not located near those areas with high concentrations of young children (Trust for Public Land 2004).

The issue of accessibility is of particular concern when measuring existing open and park space in comparison to population densities.

As demonstrated in the City Project's work in Los Angeles, many families in the low income neighborhoods of the region often do not have cars nor are near public transportation systems that allow for access to regional parks. This is particularly true in the case of the 651,874-acre Angeles

National Forest which, in making a simple per capita measurement (open space divided by population size), appears to indicate a sizeable measurement of potential recreation space in comparison to a local urban population. However, the aforementioned barriers to access and the inaccessibility of much of the forest's terrain, skews this measurement significantly.

Public interest in open space and recreation in the region is significant and concerted efforts are underway by a myriad of non-profit organizations, local and municipalities, community groups, and private and public groups to procure and maintain open space in various areas throughout the Los Angeles region. Furthermore, the \$2.6 billion Proposition 40 has further sparked this interest in public space allowing for funds to be allocated for environmental and park projects throughout the state of California (Trust for Public Land 2004).

Regional stakeholders such as the state land conservancies, land trusts, and other non-profits have worked diligently in their respective efforts to maintain and acquire park and open space in the region. The Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC), one of eight conservancies in the California Resources Agency, is working to “preserve open space and habitat in order to provide for low-impact recreation and educational uses, wildlife habitat restoration and protection and watershed



Photo caption: The Santa Clara River. 2007. NPS photo.

Job training and conservation stewardship programs for youth and nearby community members would be offered. In addition to the positions listed above, area youth would be encouraged to be involved with service organizations by applying for positions through existing programs such as the Student Conservation Association, Youth Conservation Corps, AmeriCorps and other organizations which expose youth to the conservation and stewardship of our public lands.

LAND ACQUISITION

Lands within the NRA would remain under their current jurisdictions, with each land management agency continuing to fund its own operations. As almost 90% of the land in the proposed NRA is already protected for recreation and conservation by partner agencies (158,000 of approximately 178,000 acres), land acquisition needs would be small. Much of the remaining 20,000 acres are comprised of urbanized lands in commercial and residential use that would not be appropriate or feasible for NPS land acquisition. The NRA partnership would be eligible to request NPS funding for land acquisition within the NRA for acquisition of small areas with resource significance such as a historic site or open space with native habitat. However, it should be noted that such funding is extremely limited. Funding for land acquisition would also be available from partner agencies and through local fundraising efforts.

OPERATIONAL AND VISITOR FACILITIES

Construction of new administrative facilities for NPS operations and management would not necessarily be required to support the proposed NRA. Given the existing amount of office space available in and near the proposed NRA, it is likely that the NPS could lease administrative and operational facilities from partner agencies or through existing office space available in the area. There may also be opportunities to adaptively reuse a historic building or property through leasing if the NPS acquired land that contained such facilities. The NPS could also use partner facilities or adaptively reuse buildings to provide visitor facilities. If established, the NRA partnership would identify specific operational and visitor facilities needs through a general management plan.

CASE STUDY: TRANSIT TO TRAILS PROGRAM

Background

Transit to Trails is a pilot project created by a partnership between the NPS, the Anahuak Youth Association, The City Project, Mountains and Recreation Conservation Authority, and an anonymous donor. Transit to Trails takes inner city youth and their families on different mountain, beach, and river trips.

Program Description

- Santa Monica Mountains NRA partners with Transit to Trails to provide buses that allow school and community groups to visit the national recreation area.
- By bridging the gap between urban youth and the outdoors, Transit to Trails is not only encouraging physical activity, but also a healthy and better mental lifestyle.
- Currently, the City Project is hoping to expand the Transit to Trails pilot project to throughout Southern California and beyond. It is encouraging other park agencies to join the Mountains Recreation Conservation Authority and the NPS in providing buses, rangers, and programs for Transit to Trails.

Accomplishments

- Transit to Trails provides more opportunities for area youth and their families to learn about water, land, wildlife, cultural history, and engage in physical activity through recreational opportunities.
- It also helps reduce traffic congestion and parking problems, improve air quality, and reduce run-off of polluted water into rivers and the ocean by providing a more accessible, public transportation.

Sources:

<http://www.cityprojectca.org/ourwork/forests.html>,
Public Transportation to Local National Forests Study
by USC Dept. of Geography

in the study. Some commenters suggested that federal recognition would bring positive attention to the area and would help the local economy and tourism. Others worried that designation could bring about increased traffic, noise, waste, and congestion associated with increased tourism. This was particularly a concern in the Antelope Valley area, where residents worried that increased recreation would require commercial development which could negatively impact rural communities.

The impact of special designations on visitation at existing parks or recreation areas was studied to provide context for the impact analysis. Recent research conducted on eight changes in national park unit designation between 1979 and 2000 shows that conversions have “substantial and persistent” effects on annual visitation. These changes appear to be more important to national visitors than to local or regional users. This particular research is limited to conversions of units already in the national park system, and its results are applicable in times of economic well-being. For the units studied, an immediate annual visitation increase of about 6 percent was experienced and then maintained over time (Weiler 2005).

Adequacy of Park and Recreation Areas in the Study Area

The process of prescribing a standard for the level of service for park and recreation facilities has long been problematic. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) recommends 2.5 acres of parkland for every 1,000 residents, although many consider this ratio to be low. The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) gave acreage recommendations in *Recreation, Park and Open Space Standards and Guidelines* (1983) and *Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines* (1996). The NRPA acknowledged that local condition and community desires should be considered in adopting local standards and stated a standard of 6-10 acres for every 1000 residents.

As described in Chapter 2, *Resource Description*, current studies on the adequacy of recreational areas in the Los Angeles Region show approximately 9.1 of recreation acres per 1,000 residents (Trust for Public Land 2004). However, county averages can mask dramatic disparities in access to green space within the county (The City Project 2007). In 2004, the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation completed the Strategic Asset Management Plan for 2020. Based on the projected population growth, the county estimated

Table 14: Visitation to Major Recreation Destinations within the Study Area

Facility	Total
Frank G. Bonelli Regional Park	463,743
Santa Fe Dam Recreation Area	753,993
Whittier Narrows Recreation Area	1,727,841
Whittier Narrows Natural Area	44,520
Devils Punchbowl County Park	99,421
Pio Pico State Historic Park	7,500 (FY 2007/2008)
Angeles National Forest	3.5M (2010)
Sources: (Los Angeles County, Rupert, pers. comm, 2010; USFS 2009; Friends of Pio Pico State Historic Park, Schoff, pers. comm. 2011)	
Note: Annual visitation data was not available for the Puente Hills Landfill Native Habitat Preserve.	

that it would not meet its standard of four acres of parkland per 1,000 residents by 2020 for four of its five supervisorial districts. Only the rural north county area, which includes the Antelope Valley portion of the study area, would meet this goal (Los Angeles County 2008).

Quantity and density, however, are not the only measures. If park, open space, and recreation amenities are not accessible to all residents, their benefits cannot be fully realized. Factors such as proximity to open space, safe and accessible transportation and walking routes, the presence of obstacles such as freeways, railroads and other physical barriers also affect access. Open space is also not often equitably distributed. Areas that fall well below meeting the standards for parks and recreation facilities are described as being “park-poor.”

In many park and recreation assessments, a ¼ mile to ½ mile radius is used to measure access to local parks. These distances are used because they represent areas that can be accessed by a 5 to 10 minute walk. Three separate analysis of the adequacy and distribution of recreational areas in the Los Angeles Region have concluded that while some communities have ample parks and recreational areas, many are severely lacking. Those communities with adequate accessibility to parks and recreational areas tend to be more affluent with a majority of non-Hispanic whites.

Visiting regional areas such as the ANF and the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area pose transportation challenges for many residents (Los Angeles County 2008). **Recent studies have found that statewide, Los Angeles County is one of the most disadvantaged counties in terms of access to parks and open space for children and people of color (The City Project 2007, Trust for Public Land 2004).** A study by the Trust for Public Lands found that with its high concentration of open space in areas far from its most densely populated communities, the Los Angeles area offers its children the worst access to parks among the cities evaluated nationally (see Table 16). A study on access to parks and park facilities conducted as part of the Green Visions Plan found that one third or less of parks in the San Gabriel Valley area appear to have transit (Sister, C., Wilson, J.P., and Wolch, J. 2008).

The communities with the least amount of access to parks and open space tend to have higher rates of childhood diseases related to obesity such as diabetes. According to the Centers for Disease Control, Americans living closer to parks

are more likely to exercise regularly, leading to weight loss, increased energy, and better overall health (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2001). The California Center for Public Health Advocacy analyzed the 2004 California Physical Fitness Test of 5th, 7th, and 9th graders. The analysis shows that among students in Los Angeles County, 31.3% are overweight. Overweight children face a greater risk of developing many health problems during childhood, including Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, orthopedic problems and gallstones, as well as low self-esteem, poor body image, and depression. Overweight children are more likely to be obese as adults, putting them at a much higher risk for heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes later in life (California Center for Public Health and Advocacy 2006).

People of color are less likely to have adequate access to parks in the Los Angeles area. **Studies by the Green Visions Plan for a 21st Century Southern California and the City Project both found that Whites currently have disproportionately greater access to parks and open space, compared to Latinos and African-Americans. These ethnic groups are 12-15 times more likely to have less park acreage per capita when compared to Whites (Sister, C., Wilson, J.P., and Wolch, J. 2008, The City Project 2007).**

Los Angeles County trends for access to parks, as described previously, correlate with trends within the study area. Access to parks and open space is readily available to communities in the Antelope Valley, Soledad Basin, and wealthier communities in the San Gabriel Mountains foothills. The map “Park Acres Per 1,000 Residents,” on the following page, includes park and recreation acreages for study area cities and communities. The map conveys that foothill communities and communities in the northern portions of the study area have the largest amounts of parks and recreation space per 1,000 residents. Many of the more urban communities in the San Gabriel Valley have smaller park acreages per 1,000 residents and fall well below the Los Angeles County standard of 4 acres per 1,000 residents. Given the limited availability

Standard	Acres/1,000 Population
HUD	2.5
National Recreation and Parks Association Park Acreage/ Population Standard	6.25-10.5
Los Angeles County	4

effects of each alternative, however, could result in a small, net beneficial condition to some local communities as a result of improved urban quality, land protection, and economic benefits from recreation and conservation. However, the total cumulative effect is expected to be more dependent upon regional economic conditions and population increases (and distribution) over time than on the actions taken as a result of this study.

Conclusions

The action alternatives positively address current and future recreation needs. In terms of economic benefit associated with these objectives, the no action alternative would have the least benefit and alternatives A, C, and D would have beneficial effects to varying degrees. Alternative D, due to its geographic scope, particularly in urban areas, has the greatest potential for beneficial impacts to quality of life and other socioeconomic indicators.

Increased visitation would represent an adverse impact on infrastructure and social systems. Since visitation might be expected to increase in each of the action alternatives, infrastructure impacts would likely increase proportionally. The adverse impact in alternative A would likely be negligible, increasing to minor in both C and D. With congressional action approving the implementation of any of the action alternatives, or variants thereof, further planning would be undertaken. Additional environmental analysis would be prepared to look at site and area-specific activities and alternatives. Through that analysis, more specific conclusions can be drawn regarding direct, indirect and cumulative impacts. Joint planning efforts among stakeholders, and subsequent agreements, would be designed to optimize between the economic benefits and social costs so that the former is maximized and the latter is mitigated.

Impact Analysis - Socially or Economically Disadvantaged Populations Socioeconomic Impacts (Environmental Justice)

As the analysis in the *Recreation Use and Visitor Experience; Affected Environment* describes, economically disadvantaged populations in the study area lack access and the ability to partake of existing opportunities due to lack of close-to-home open space, lack of effective transportation, lack of culturally advantageous facilities or opportunities, and lack of knowledge about recreation and natural resources. Under current conditions, all contribute to an impact on these populations. As stated, each action alternative attempts to remedy these current conditions to provide a net beneficial result.

BACKGROUND ON ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Environmental justice must be considered in every major federal action by assessing environmental factors that negatively or disproportionately affect minority populations. Pursuant to Executive Order 12898, promulgated by President Clinton in 1994, federal agencies "shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations in the United States."

The NPS has numerous partnerships programs with youth corps and conservation organizations that serve as a means to introduce minority and low income children and young adults to environmental and conservation issues.

Youth corps and job corps partnerships provide a solid environmental learning experience for the youth involved, while at the same time leaving a legacy of work which significantly benefits the parks and community.

The NPS also seeks to identify opportunities to develop partnerships with Tribal governments, consistent with mission needs to provide necessary technical assistance to enhance tribal capacity to address environmental, health, and welfare concerns.

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

A portion of the local population can be categorized as socially or economically disadvantaged and potentially affected by each of the alternatives. Population growth trends over time will likely exacerbate the amount and intensity of

this condition. This equates directly to socially and economically disadvantaged populations who lack the means of access, and the ability to partake of existing opportunities due to physical barriers (e.g. adult and childhood obesity or other ailments). The existing deficiencies in open space, lack of effective transportation connecting communities to recreation opportunities, lack of culturally advantageous facilities or opportunities, and lack of knowledge about recreation and natural resources, under current conditions, all contribute to moderate adverse impacts on these populations.

ALTERNATIVE A

Alternative A would have a generally beneficial impact on socially and economically disadvantaged populations by providing an improved recreational experience at the ANF. However, it would likely represent only a minor improvement for communities that are currently underserved for recreation. Of all the alternatives, this one places the least emphasis on developing new effective partnerships and cooperative management efforts that have the best chance of providing a remedy for these populations. Also, it would do little to increase access to recreation from underserved populations or provide close-to-home opportunities in urban communities.

ALTERNATIVE C

Alternative C would have a greater beneficial impact on these populations, with efforts applied specifically in urban areas close to the San Gabriel River where some communities are underserved and economically disadvantaged. The alternative potentially provides job training and opportunities within these communities that have the potential both to improve economic access for recreation, but also to build programs and provide awareness regarding opportunities. To the extent that recreation opportunities can be designed to fit cultural preferences (for example, large group picnic and camping areas) for local disadvantaged populations, the greater will be the beneficial results. The development of effective and diverse partnerships in this alternative would also serve to build programs and cooperative agreements with entities that represent disadvantaged groups so that the necessary results can be obtained.

ALTERNATIVE D

Again, due its expanded geographic and programmatic scope, alternative D holds the greatest potential benefit for socially and economically disadvantaged populations. Also, it presents the most opportunities for new close-to-home recreation opportunities for areas that are

currently underserved. In short, this alternative provides the best framework for implementing NPS' environmental justice policy as outlined above.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Population growth trends in the study area and the surrounding region are likely to put additional pressure on available open space. Considering that public lands in this area are currently among the most heavily visited within the system, recreation opportunities and qualities are likely to diminish if nothing is done. The study area alternatives seek to ameliorate the condition to a greater or lesser degree. Therefore, the cumulative effect of growth and development trends, plus the effects of each alternative, would likely result in a net beneficial condition in regard to recreational opportunities for disadvantaged populations within the study area. The overall level of cumulative impact, considering factors that exacerbate issues for the socially and economically disadvantaged, would decline as compared to the no action alternative.

Conclusions

In general, it is anticipated that each of the action alternatives is likely to improve conditions regarding health and well-being of disadvantaged populations. Clearly, it is the stated intent of this congressionally-mandated study to do so. To do nothing would leave these populations to current trends in development. The creation of new public land open spaces would be advantageous. At the same time, the proposed changes in land use on existing public lands is not likely to affect commercial or non-commercial resources and values that economically disadvantaged populations might be dependent upon under current conditions.

The partnership program and stakeholder agreements set forth particularly in alternatives C and D would meet the intent of the U.S. Department of the Interior and NPS Environmental Justice strategy as outlined above. Nevertheless, it is important to seek effective involvement of potentially affected social and economically disadvantaged populations when a congressionally mandated plan goes forward.