

## NEWS RELEASE



### MOUNTAINS RECREATION AND CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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#### **588-Acre Soka University Campus in Calabasas Becomes Public Park**

*King Gillette Ranch opens to the public at 8:00 am tomorrow*

Calabasas—The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) has announced that after 30 years of effort by public park agencies and conservationists, the property known variously in the last 75 years as King Gillette Ranch, Claretville, and Camelot—but most recently as Soka University of America, Calabasas Campus—will open as public parkland tomorrow.

One of the most stunning locales in the Santa Monica Mountains, the new 588-acre park--King Gillette Ranch--is situated in the heart of the Malibu Creek Watershed, by the confluence of five major tributaries, and adjacent to Malibu Creek State Park. It offers a rare unspoiled view of California's rich archeological, cultural, and historic resources, including a Chumash settlement, and nationally significant structures designed for the razor magnate in the 1920's by Wallace Neff, architect of California's Golden Age.

"King Gillette Ranch is at the geographic center of the Santa Monica Mountains," said Joseph T. Edmiston, Executive Director of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. "It brings together all the rugged beauty and ecological diversity of the range. We want this park to serve all the people of the region in the same way—to bring them together into the heart of the mountains, so that they can experience the richness that resides here."

(-More-)

The property was acquired by the MRCA, California State Parks, and the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area unit of the National Park Service in 2005. The MRCA orchestrated the \$35 million purchase with funds from eleven different funding sources from an almost unprecedented partnership of federal, State, and local government, and private donors. The majority of the funds came from State bond funds approved by the voters. Soka University occupied the property under a leaseback arrangement with the MRCA for the last two years. Soka terminated its lease and vacated the property today.

The MRCA will manage the new park in cooperation with the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, California State Parks, and National Park Service. A cooperative public planning process was instigated by the agencies in 2005 and will continue until the park is fully operational. A public dedication ceremony will be held in the Fall.

King Gillette Ranch is a haven for larger mammals of the Santa Monica Mountains. Its broad meadows and low ridgelines serve as a wildlife movement corridor or hub in the geographic center of the range. Nine sensitive species are present. Raptors and other birds forage and nest among the plant communities of valley and coast live oak savannah, grassland, coastal sage scrub, chaparral, riparian woodland, and southern willow riparian vegetation. Park features include Gillette's historic Spanish Colonial Revival style mansion and other structures that were part of the original landscape plan. These include a long eucalyptus alleé and grand entry, a large constructed pond, a formal courtyard and terrace, bridges, and lawns.

A short, somewhat steep hike from the parking area leads to a knoll with 360-degree views—including the famous rock formations of Malibu Creek State Park.

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Other activities include strolling, bicycling, photography, and picnicking. The Parklink Shuttle operated by the National Park Service will have a stop at the park.

Dogs are not permitted on the property.

Starting this weekend, Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority Naturalists will lead interpretive programs and family activities throughout the summer. The first program will be an early morning bird hike at 8:00 am this Sunday July 1, 2007. Family programs will be conducted every Tuesday evening at 7:00 P.M. Walking tours of the Ranch will be the second and fourth Saturday of every month, at 9:00 am.

King Gillette Ranch is located at 26800 West Mulholland Highway Calabasas, CA 91302, near the intersection of Mulholland Highway and Las Virgenes Road.

The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy was established by the California State Legislature in 1980. Since that time, it has helped to preserve over 60,000 acres of parkland in both wilderness and urban settings, and has improved more than 114 public recreational facilities throughout Southern California.

The MRCA is a local government public entity established in 1985 pursuant to the Joint Powers Act between the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, the Conejo Recreation and Park District, and the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District. The MRCA works in cooperation with the Conservancy and other local government partners to acquire parkland, participate in vital planning processes, and complete major park improvement projects.

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