

WILDLIFE CORRIDOR CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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Agenda Item XV
WCCA
8/14/13

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December 5, 2011

Barbara Butler
National Park Service
San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study
Park Planning
333 Bush Street, Suite 500
San Francisco, California 94104

Comments on San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment

Dear Ms. Butler:

The Wildlife Corridor Conservation Authority (WCCA) was created to provide for the proper planning, conservation, environmental protection and maintenance of the habitat and wildlife corridor between the Whittier-Puente Hills, Chino Hills, and the Cleveland National Forest in the Santa Ana Mountains. We offer the following comments on the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study (Study) and Environmental Assessment. The purpose of the Study is to determine whether any portion of the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains study area is eligible to be designated as a unit of the national park system (Study, p. vi).

WCCA strongly recommends the formation of a San Gabriel Region National Recreation Area (NRA) as outlined in "Alternative D" of the Study. Alternative D would encompass the Angeles National Forest boundary within the San Gabriel Mountains, portions of the San Gabriel and Rio Hondo River Corridors, and portions of the western Puente Hills (Study, p. 193). This larger NRA would include both urban areas, rural undeveloped areas, and large areas of protected open space (Study, p. 193). Under Alternative D, the U.S. Forest Service would continue to own and manage its lands in the San Gabriel Mountains according to its policies (Study, p. 185). However, the NRA designation would reaffirm the original intent of the Angeles National Forest to protect watershed resources, provide the U.S. Forest Service with more authorities to enter into cooperative management agreements with other agencies, and to retain fees and donations (Study, p. 185).

Alternative D is the best option for protecting and conserving the region's ecological and recreational resources, while also enabling the greatest level of cooperation amongst the public agencies that would assist the National Park Service (NPS) in managing the proposed NRA.

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The existing Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area should serve as a model of a successful NRA.

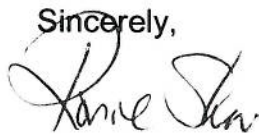
According to the Study, Alternative D would be the environmentally preferable alternative because it would protect resources over a significantly larger area, provide greater opportunities for recreation and visitation, provide greater socioeconomic benefits, and foster a larger framework for cooperative management as compared to alternatives A and C (Study, p. v).

Furthermore, WCCA would welcome an expansion of the NRA proposed in Alternative D (either in the current Study or in the future) eastward to include the eastern Puente Hills. This area is biologically connected to the western Puente Hills included in Alternative D. This potential expansion area supports the sensitive plant communities coastal sage scrub and walnut woodlands, as well as sensitive wildlife species such as coastal California gnatcatcher, a species designated threatened by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. The current boundary only encompasses a portion of the Puente-Chino Hills wildlife corridor. WCCA recommends that NPS include an administrative process so that in the future the Puente-Chino Hills east of Harbor Boulevard within the study area can be included in the NRA in the future (without an act of Congress) if the present or future landowner(s) choose to be included.

WCCA also supports Alternative D because unlike other alternatives, NPS would offer conservation planning assistance to interested public agencies, private landowners, and organizations to create and connect parks, conserve habitat, and provide new recreational experiences (as described in the Study, p. 193). We support the inclusion of the possible agencies in the NRA partnership (including WCCA) (Study, p. 185). WCCA also recommends that the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) be included amongst the list of partner agencies. MRCA provides ranger services for land owned by the Puente Hills Habitat Preservation Authority in the Puente Hills.

We appreciate your consideration of these comments. If you have any questions, please contact Judi Tamasi of our staff by phone at (310) 589-3230, ext. 121, or by email at judi.tamasi@mrca.ca.gov. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



for Glenn Parker
Chairperson