

Dear Friends,

The National Park Service is pleased to announce the completion of the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study. The Secretary of the Interior transmitted the final study to Congress on April 10, 2013. This document summarizes the final study report which includes the NPS determinations about the eligibility of the study area as a unit of the national park system (pp. 6-8), as well as the selected alternative recommended to Congress by the Secretary of the Interior (pp. 10-18).

National Park Service Selected Alternative

The alternative recommended to Congress is the National Park Service Director's most effective and efficient alternative for the long-term protection and public enjoyment of nationally significant resources in the San Gabriel watershed and mountains. The selected alternative is primarily a combination of management concepts from alternative A (San Gabriel Mountains National Recreation Area) and alternative D (San Gabriel Region National Recreation Area), as presented in the draft special resource study. The selected alternative offers what the NPS believes is the most effective and efficient means to provide the resource protection and public enjoyment opportunities that have been central to this study.

The selected alternative takes advantage of the existing National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service presence in the Los Angeles area, while directing the two agencies to expand their scope to the San Gabriel Valley, the San Gabriel Mountains and foothills, and the Puente Hills. It encourages collaborative programs and shared staffing while reducing overlap and redundancy. It also takes advantage of the newly established Service First authority, which allows the NPS and US Forest Service to work together in new ways.

Implementation of the selected alternative would require Congressional legislation. If Congress does not pass legislation to implement the study's recommendations, then the study would simply remain as a recommendation.

The selected alternative includes four primary recommendations for the long-term protection and public enjoyment of nationally significant resources in the San Gabriel watershed and mountains, including:

- 1. Designation of a San Gabriel Unit of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area** (p. 10) The new unit would include areas of the San Gabriel Mountain foothills, portions of the San Gabriel and Rio Hondo river corridors, and the western Puente Hills. The NPS would work primarily through partnerships with existing landowners in areas of mutual interest such as resource protection, ecological restoration, and education programs. NPS land management policies and regulations would only apply to lands that the NPS acquires. The NPS would only acquire land on a limited basis from willing sellers. The designation would not transfer any land to the NPS.
- 2. Additional federal recognition, tools, and support to the Angeles National Forest** to steward watershed resources and ecosystems and improve recreational opportunities (pp. 10-18).
- 3. Direction for the U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service to collaborate** through the Service First authority (p. 13) and other mechanisms to protect the significant resources of the San Gabriel watershed and mountains and provide high quality recreation and educational opportunities.
- 4. NPS technical assistance** to interested communities, agencies, and organizations to protect the region's wildlife corridors; provide close-to-home recreational opportunities; educational opportunities; and to provide an array of seamless outdoor experiences in the San Gabriel watershed and mountains (p. 12).

Thank you for your involvement in the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study.

Sincerely,
NPS Study Team

HOW TO OBTAIN A COPY OF THE FINAL STUDY REPORT AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

The NPS published the Draft San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment in September 2011. The final report, available now, is comprised of the previously published draft report, a list of errata, and a Finding of No Significant Impact, containing the selected alternative. These documents are posted on the project web site at:

<http://www.nps.gov/pwro/sangabriel>

A public comment summary and NPS responses to comments received on the draft report are also available on the web site.

Limited printed and CD-ROM copies of the full draft report and errata are available. If you have not received a copy of the draft report and would like one, please contact us by mail or e-mail and provide your name and mailing address.

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The Four Components of the Selected Alternative



Introduction

The San Gabriel River Watershed Study Act (P.L. 108-042, July 2003) authorized the National Park Service (NPS) to conduct a special resource study of (1) the San Gabriel River and its tributaries north of and including the city of Santa Fe Springs, and (2) the San Gabriel Mountains within the territory of the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy.

The purpose of the special resource study was 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. By reaching out to the public, stakeholders, and resource experts, the NPS determined eligibility and identified alternative strategies to manage, protect, or restore the study area's resources, and to provide or enhance recreational opportunities. The study conveys this information to the U.S. Department of the Interior and Congress to aid in determining whether designation of a unit of the national park system is desirable and appropriate.

The NPS found that many of the resources evaluated through the study are nationally significant, suitable, feasible and appropriate for NPS management. These findings are described on the following pages. This document identifies the most effective and efficient alternative for management selected by the NPS ("the selected alternative").

Study Area

The study legislation directed the NPS to conduct a Special Resource Study of the following areas: (1) the San Gabriel River and its tributaries north of, and including, the city of Santa Fe Springs; and (2) the San Gabriel Mountains within the territory of the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy.

The study area covers more than 1,000 square miles (over 700,000 acres) in the greater Los Angeles metropolitan region. It includes some of the most densely populated and diverse areas of the United States. Most of the study area is located in Los Angeles County and the remainder lies in Orange and San Bernardino counties. In addition to most of the San Gabriel River watershed, the study area also includes portions of the Los Angeles River, the Santa Clara River, and the Antelope Valley watersheds, as well as very small portions of the Santa Ana River and Mojave watersheds.

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) manages approximately two thirds of the study area (415,000 acres in the San Gabriel Mountains) as part of the Angeles National Forest (Angeles NF). With the exception of private inholdings, permitted cabins, ski areas, roads, and flood protection structures and other utilities, the forest remains primarily undeveloped, with four designated wilderness areas. In close proximity to highly urban areas, the forest provides a refuge for wildlife and recreational opportunities for the greater Los Angeles metropolitan region.

Over fifty communities are located in the study area, with approximately 1.5 million residents. The Los Angeles metropolitan region is home to over 16 million residents. The largest communities in the study area include Pomona and Santa Clarita, with populations near 150,000. The City of Palmdale is the largest community at the northern end of the study area with approximately 115,000 residents.



Findings

Four Criteria for Evaluating Potential Additions to the National Park System

The National Park System New Area Studies Act and NPS management policies establish the basic process for evaluating potential new additions to the national park system. According to NPS management policies, a proposed addition to the national park system will receive a favorable recommendation from the NPS only if it meets all of the following four criteria for inclusion:

- 1 It possesses **nationally significant natural or cultural resources**.
- 2 It is a **suitable** addition to the system.
- 3 It is a **feasible** addition to the system.
- 4 There is a **need for direct NPS management**, instead of alternative protection by other public agencies or the private sector.

National Park Service management alternatives are developed for study areas that meet all four of the criteria for inclusion, as listed above. The following section explains how the NPS, in consultation with scientists, scholars, and other experts, found that all four criteria were satisfied in the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study.

1 Evaluation of Nationally Significant Resources

Within the large and diverse landscape of the study area, two regions were found to be nationally significant: the San Gabriel Mountains and the Puente-Chino Hills. Because these regions have not been as heavily urbanized as the lowland valleys and floodplains of the study area, they are outstanding examples of the native southern California landscape. The San Gabriel Mountains are also culturally rich, with a long history of human use.

There are significant resources in other portions of the study area. However, these resources are highly fragmented and surrounding development has, in many cases, negatively impacted their integrity.

San Gabriel Mountains

The San Gabriel Mountains and foothills are nationally significant for their geologic resources, high biodiversity, dynamic river systems, and the long history of scientific study and discovery. Early conservation of the San Gabriel Mountains ensured that these areas were protected from rapid urbanization, which began in the late 19th century. Within a short distance, the mountains and foothills feature coastal, desert, montane, and sub-alpine ecological communities.

MOUNTAIN BUILDING AND DIVERSE GEOLOGY

- The San Gabriel Mountains are among the fastest growing mountains in the world. Forces from the San Andreas Fault to the north and a series of thrust faults on their south face are causing the San Gabriel Mountains to rise as much as 2 inches a year. This distinction makes the San Gabriel



San Gabriel Mountains, NPS Photo

Mountains an excellent location to research or study mountain-building.

- Among the most geologically diverse ranges in Southern California, the San Gabriel Mountains are comprised of rock units from all the major geologic eras. The San Gabriel Mountains contain the most extensive, best-exposed, and most completely studied exposures of several geologic formations including the San Gabriel Mountains anorthosite massif, the Mount Lowe plutonic suite, and Pelona schist. Some of the oldest rocks (over one billion years old) on the west coast of the United States are located in the San Gabriel Mountains.
- There is a long history of scientific study of the San Andreas Fault in southern California. Several

Alternatives Analyzed

Four alternatives were analyzed in the *San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Draft Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment*. The alternatives are based on the purpose and need for the project and are consistent with existing laws, NPS policy and the special resource study legislation.

No Action Alternative: Continuation of Current Management

Public land management agencies and local governments would continue their land management, visitor services, public education, recreation and interpretive programs at approximately the current levels of activity and funding, according to current plans. Existing cooperative management efforts would continue. The NPS would have no role in the study area beyond the existing segments of two national historic trails, some ongoing technical assistance from the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, and limited financial assistance through the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Alternative A: San Gabriel Mountains National Recreation Area

Congress would designate the San Gabriel Mountains as a National Recreation Area (NRA) that would continue to be managed by the Angeles National Forest (Angeles NF). The designation would bring additional recognition, tools, and support to the Angeles NF in order to steward watershed resources and ecosystems, and improve recreational opportunities. The NPS would have no role in the NRA beyond a continuation of the informal partnership between the U.S. Forest Service and Santa Monica Mountains NRA.

Alternative C: San Gabriel Watershed National Recreation Area

Congress would designate a National Recreation Area comprised of the upper San Gabriel River watershed within the Angeles NF and a half-mile corridor around the San Gabriel and Rio Hondo rivers within the study area to be managed by a voluntary partnership of agencies and organizations with land and interests in the designated area. The primary roles of the NPS would be coordination of the partnership and taking a lead role in coordinating interpretative and educational messages about significant resources. Each partner and other jurisdictional authorities would retain land ownership, management, and decision-making authority for lands that they own. The partnership would work to create new recreational and open space opportunities that are compatible with maintaining watershed values, water supply, flood protection, and habitat values.

Alternative D: San Gabriel Region National Recreation Area

Congress would designate Angeles NF lands within the San Gabriel Mountains, adjacent foothill areas with ecological resource values, areas near the San Andreas Fault, portions of the western Puente Hills, and half-mile corridors along the San Gabriel and Rio Hondo rivers as a National Recreation Area. The NRA would be managed much the same as described under alternative C, under a partnership comprised of agencies and organizations with interests in the area. The NPS role would be essentially the same as in alternative C, but with the addition of a technical assistance program to provide conservation and recreation planning assistance to interested public agencies, private landowners, and organizations beyond the NRA boundaries to create and connect parks, conserve habitat and provide new recreational experiences throughout the region.

Alternatives Considered But Dismissed

Alternative B, the San Gabriel Parks and Open Space Network, was initially presented to the public as an alternative management concept. Public review revealed a high level of dissatisfaction for this concept. Alternative B envisioned a network of public and private partners engaged in collaborative planning and information sharing, focused on open space, recreation, wildlife corridor, and interpretive opportunities. It did not include designation of a National Recreation Area. This alternative was dismissed for its inability to meet project objectives, as determined through agency and public input.



Children playing in the North Fork of the San Gabriel River, NPS Photo

The Selected Alternative

Concept

The selected alternative is primarily a combination of management concepts from alternative A (San Gabriel Mountains National Recreation Area) and alternative D (San Gabriel Region National Recreation Area), as presented in the *Draft San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study*. Some additional refinements have been made to reflect public concerns, provide for efficient management, and to take advantage of new authorities provided to the National Park Service (NPS) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) through the Service First authority.

The selected alternative would establish a San Gabriel unit of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area which would provide the NPS, and other land management agencies and organizations with guidance and direction to work together in new ways. Partnership arrangements among federal and state agencies, local governments, non-profit organizations, and area landowners would be the primary means to achieve the conservation, recreational, and educational goals of the San Gabriel unit. Although the Angeles National Forest (Angeles NF) would not be included in the San Gabriel unit, the NPS and USFS would be directed to work in partnership. In addition, legislative guidance would provide additional support and authorities for the Angeles NF to steward resources and improve recreational opportunities.

Specifically, components of the selected alternative would include:

San Gabriel unit of the Santa Monica Mountains NRA (San Gabriel unit). The San Gabriel Mountains foothills, San Gabriel and Rio Hondo river corridors and the western Puente Hills (alternative D south of the Angeles NF) would be established as an additional unit of the Santa Monica Mountains NRA. The NPS and numerous other agencies and organizations with land and interests in the area would: 1) work collaboratively to protect significant resources, restore ecological communities, and improve recreational opportunities; 2) provide technical assistance to willing communities for conservation planning to extend open space connections and form a network of parks, habitats, and open spaces; and 3) offer new educational and interpretive opportunities.

Angeles National Forest. The selected alternative would also bring additional recognition, tools, and support to the Angeles NF in order to steward watershed resources and ecosystems and improve recreational opportunities. In lieu of a new designation for the Angeles NF, this guidance would: 1) reaffirm the primary importance of the Angeles

NF in preserving watershed and natural resources, while continuing to provide for multiple use management; and 2) prioritize funding for resource protection, recreation, and education, and establish mechanisms to increase funding for facilities, maintenance, ecological restoration, visitor management; and offer new educational programming, and stewardship activities. This would be accomplished without a national recreation area designation on the Angeles NF.

Collaborative Federal Management. The NPS and USFS would collaborate through the Service First authority and other mechanisms to protect the significant resources of the San Gabriel watershed and mountains, provide high quality recreation and education opportunities, and assist the surrounding communities in providing community-based recreation and conservation opportunities. The NPS and the USFS would work together:

- To explore opportunities to protect and enhance interconnected ecosystems essential for long-term viability of significant natural resources.
- To help communities provide close-to-home outdoor recreation, conservation and education opportunities for their residents, as well as to better connect to the nearby national park and national forest areas.
- To provide an array of seamless outdoor experiences in the San Gabriel watershed and mountains.

Proposed Area

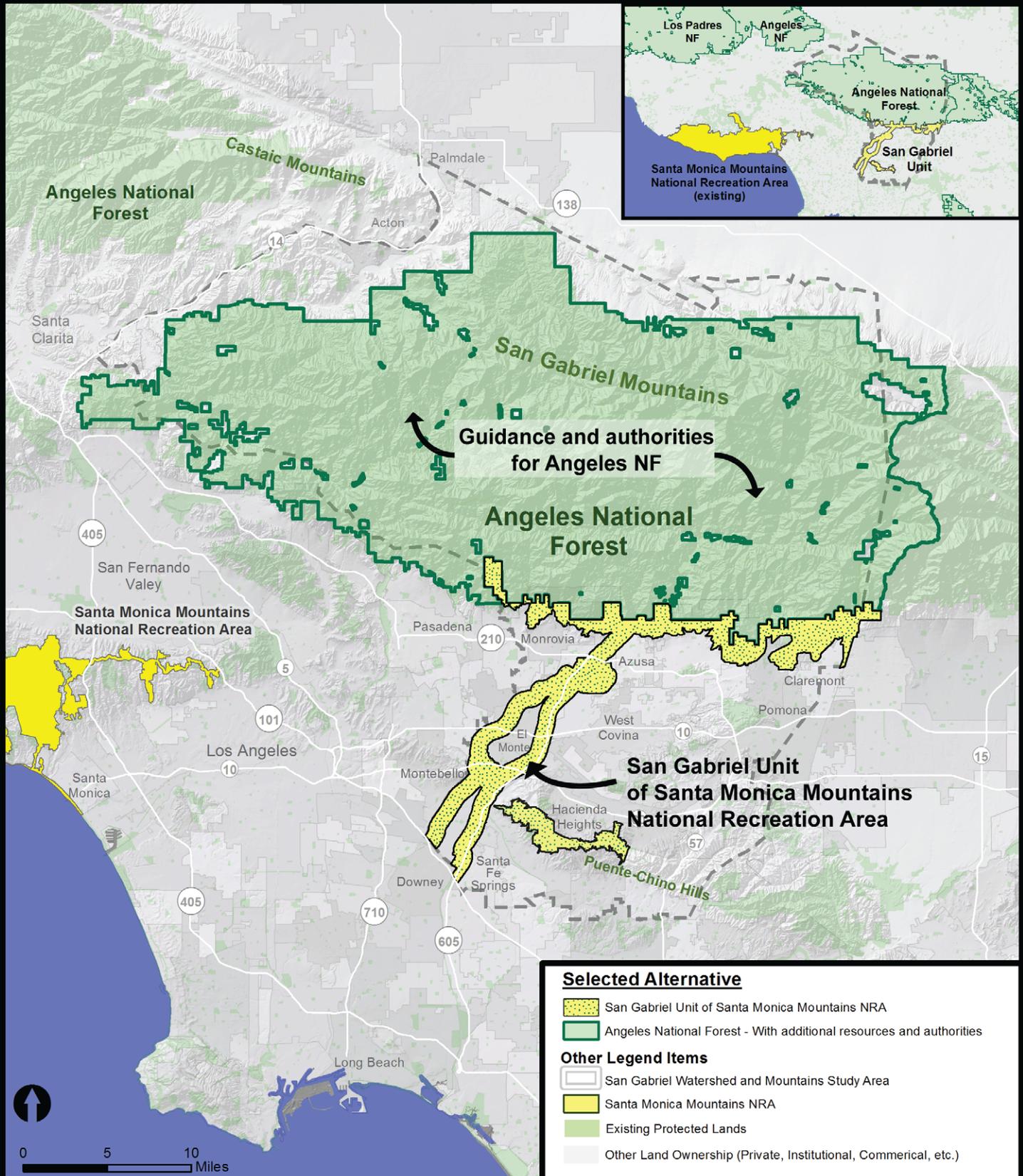
The San Gabriel unit of the Santa Monica Mountains NRA would include:

- The San Gabriel Mountains foothill areas in the San Gabriel Valley (but outside of the Angeles National Forest) with ecological resource values. Areas with ecological resource values include designated critical habitat for federally listed threatened or endangered species, and areas within one of the Los Angeles County proposed significant ecological areas;
- A half-mile corridor around the San Gabriel and Rio Hondo rivers from the Angeles NF boundary south to Santa Fe Springs; and
- Portions of the western Puente Hills with ecological resource value and recreational potential (areas west of Harbor Boulevard). This primarily includes lands owned/or and managed by the Puente Hills Habitat Preservation Authority and lands proposed by Los Angeles County to be included in the Puente Hills Significant Ecological

Selected Alternative



San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study



Area. The Puente Hills Landfill would not be included in the boundary. However, at some time in the future, the NPS and the Puente Hills Habitat Preservation Authority could enter into management agreements with the Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County to provide recreational opportunities in this area.

The San Gabriel unit would include approximately 49,000 acres of land; approximately 37% of this area is already protected for conservation or recreation by existing agencies and organizations.

The San Gabriel Mountains within the Angeles NF are also addressed in the selected alternative. However, no new designation would be applied to this area.



Clockwise, from top left: Santa Fe Dam Recreation Area, NPS Photo; Eaton Canyon, NPS Photo; San Gabriel River Trail, NPS Photo

The San Gabriel unit partners could include, but would not be limited to, the following agencies: the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, the Lower Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, the Puente Hills Habitat Preservation Authority, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the California Department of Parks and Recreation, the California Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, Los Angeles County, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, the Wildlife Corridor Conservation Authority, the Mountains and Recreation Conservation Authority, and the Watershed Conservation Authority. Local communities/cities could also participate in the partnership. Through cooperative management agreements, partners would be able to provide coordinated educational and recreational programming, and share funding, staff, and facilities. In existing public land areas, interagency agreements could augment agency staffing to manage heavily used areas providing higher levels of visitor services, education, and safety. Other partnerships could also be established, such as with community-based organizations and tribal groups.

NPS Role. The NPS would take a lead role in coordinating partnership-based activities within the San Gabriel unit. Through cooperative management agreements, the NPS could also provide educational, interpretive, law enforcement and other services to partner agencies. The NPS would also take a lead role in providing coordinated interpretative and educational messages about the significance of the San Gabriel watershed and mountains for existing nature centers, museums, park programs, etc.

The NPS would have no land use regulatory authority for lands that it does not own. As funding permits, the NPS would be authorized to acquire lands from willing sellers within the San Gabriel unit to protect significant resources or for operational purposes.

The NPS would offer technical assistance to interested public agencies, private landowners, and organizations to create and connect parks, conserve habitat, provide new recreational experiences, and foster a sense of regional identity. The NPS could also assist in organizing volunteer programs within the San Gabriel unit and on the Angeles NF.

Angeles National Forest

The Angeles NF would continue to be managed by the USFS according to existing guiding policies. Additional guidance would authorize the USFS to enter into cooperative management agreements with local agencies and conservancies to protect biodiversity and watershed resources, interpret significant resources, enhance recreational opportunities, and provide more educational and interpretive opportunities within San Gabriel Mountains. In addition, the Angeles NF would have the

Management

San Gabriel Unit

The San Gabriel unit of the Santa Monica Mountains NRA would be managed in partnership with agencies and organizations with land and interests in the area. Agencies and organizations that own and manage land within the San Gabriel unit would continue to manage their lands according to their own policies and regulations. NPS policies would only apply to lands that the NPS acquires. As much of the land within the NRA is currently in public ownership and much of the remaining land is comprised of commercial and residential uses inappropriate for NPS management, land acquisition by the NPS would be limited.