

Alternative D: Regional Rim of the Valley Boundary Adjustment with Cooperative Conservation Areas

Concept

Alternative D includes a boundary adjustment to Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA) and authority for NPS to provide technical assistance to surrounding local communities, agencies, and private landowners to maintain habitat connectivity, protect significant resources, and plan for new parks and trails.

The alternative D boundary adjustment would add 313,000 acres to SMMNRA's authorized boundary to connect large natural areas and promote long-term resiliency of the significant natural resources within SMMNRA and the broader study area. The boundary expansion would also provide more recreational opportunities. The SMMNRA boundary addition would include most areas within the Rim of the Valley Corridor with the exception of lands owned and managed by the U.S. Forest Service as part of the Angeles National Forest and San Gabriel Mountains National Monument.

For critical habitat linkages outside of the proposed boundary addition, SMMNRA would be authorized to partner and provide technical assistance to land managers and private landowners to maintain and enhance habitat connections to the national forests (as in alternative B).

Proposed Area

SMMNRA Boundary Adjustment

The boundary adjustment would add 313,000 acres to SMMNRA. Approximately 23% of the new area is protected by existing land management agencies and organizations (Figure 5-5: *Alternative D - Regional Rim of the Valley Boundary Adjustment with Cooperative Conservation*).

The proposed boundary adjustment would add most of the areas within the Rim of the Valley Corridor study area to SMMNRA. Areas that would be included are the Los Angeles River and Arroyo Seco corridors, the Verdugo Mountains-San Rafael Hills, the San Gabriel Mountain foothills, the Upper Santa Clara River, the Santa Susana Mountains, the Simi Hills, and the Conejo Hills-Las Posas Hills. Areas within the Santa Monica Mountains Zone such as Griffith Park and the western escarpment of the Santa Monica Mountains near California State University Channel Islands would also be included. This boundary adjustment includes the Santa Monica-Sierra Madre wildlife linkage within the study area.

Lands within the authorized boundaries of the Angeles National Forest and San Gabriel Mountains National Monument would not be included in the boundary adjustment. The National Park Service (NPS) and U.S. Forest Service would continue to explore partnership opportunities similar to the no action and the cooperative conservation partnerships alternatives.

Cooperative Conservation Areas

Habitat linkages between the study area, the Los Padres and Angeles national forests, and San Gabriel Mountains National Monument would not be part of the expanded SMMNRA. However, the NPS would be authorized to partner with and provide technical assistance to land managers and private land-

owners to maintain and enhance habitat connectivity (as in alternative B).

Management Approach

Management by existing agencies, local governments, organizations, private landowners, and institutions as described under the no action alternative would continue under alternative D. Agencies and local governments would maintain authorities and land management responsibilities. However, the NPS would become another partner in the management of the additional areas with authority to expend funds on land protection, visitor facilities, interpretive and educational programs, and inventorying and monitoring of resources within the area.

NPS Roles

Congress would authorize NPS to manage the new additions in partnership with existing land management agencies, private landowners, and organizations. The NPS would work collaboratively with public and private partners to protect significant resources, expand public enjoyment opportunities, and provide interpretation and education about the area's resources.

The NPS could expend funds on land acquisition, and the planning and development of visitor facilities such as trails, waysides, etc. Land acquisition would be completed in partnership with other agencies and organizations. Any NPS land acquisition would be targeted, with an emphasis on protecting significant resources, maintaining and enhancing habitat connectivity, and providing recreational opportunities. The NPS would only consider purchase of land from willing sellers. The NPS would have no land use regulatory authority for lands that it does not own.

To facilitate habitat connectivity between the expanded boundary, the Los Padres and Angeles national forests, and San Gabriel Mountains National Monument, the NPS would be

authorized to engage in cooperative conservation partnerships and provide technical assistance to public and private landowners, organizations, and institutions north of the study area (similar to alternative B). There would be no NPS land acquisition or management of these areas.

As in alternative B, NPS would also expand its capacity to provide technical assistance to agencies and organizations in the Rim of the Valley Corridor area to increase outreach efforts to local communities. NPS technical assistance could also be provided for natural resource protection and restoration, trail and park planning, and to bring agencies, organizations, and landowners together to achieve common goals.

Other Federal, State and Local Land Management Agencies and Organizations

New planning efforts would explore opportunities for agencies to collaborate and set shared goals for resource protection, connecting parklands and trails, restoration objectives, and providing coordinated interpretive and educational opportunities that highlight nationally significant resources in the newly added areas. The NPS would expand the current cooperative management agreement with California State Parks, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, and MRCA to provide coordinated management in the boundary addition. Through the cooperative management agreements, the NPS, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Land Management could explore opportunities for entering into agreements to leverage resources for integrated resource restoration and strategies for maintaining and restoring wildlife corridors. Cooperative management agreements could also allow the NPS and U.S. Forest Service to share staffing for visitor services, streamlining existing efforts and capitalizing on the expertise of each agency.

Implementation of conservation efforts for cooperative conservation areas outside of the SMMNRA boundary adjustment would be executed by state and local governments, private entities, and other federal agencies. The NPS would provide technical assistance to these agencies and organizations where needed.

Local Land Use and Regulatory Authorities

The SMMNRA boundary expansion would not establish additional regulatory or land use authorities over local governments. NPS land management policies and regulations would only apply to lands that the NPS acquires.

Non-Governmental Organizations and Private Land Stewardship

The NPS would work cooperatively with conservation organizations and private landowners upon request to undertake cooperative conservation efforts (easements, grants, technical assistance for best management practices, etc.) that do not

require federal land acquisition. As described in alternative B, this could include easements, developer dedications, targeting federal and state incentive programs for private land conservation, and technical assistance from agencies and organizations for land conservation and habitat restoration.

For the cooperative conservation areas outside of the SMMNRA boundary addition, private land stewardship would be a key component of conservation efforts. An implementation plan would identify a range of private land stewardship strategies that could maintain habitat linkages and protect habitat if implemented.

Local planning and ordinances would continue to determine appropriate uses for private lands. Private land stewardship actions would be voluntary on the part of the landowner.

Rim of the Valley Trail

Because the expanded SMMNRA would encompass the entire Rim of the Valley Trail, this would provide the NPS with opportunities to own or manage new segments of the trail throughout its planned route. Other agencies and organizations would continue to develop proposed segments of the Rim of the Valley Trail. Overall planning and implementation of the Rim of the Valley Trail could be supported by the NPS through technical assistance and partnership development. Planning would include careful coordination with existing agencies, organizations, and private landowners to ensure that trail alignments do not conflict with existing land uses and ownership.

Recreational Opportunities and Access

Inclusion in the SMMNRA boundary would give NPS the authority to expend funds on facilities to support recreation and public enjoyment. Because alternative D would also include larger areas of undeveloped open space, the NPS would evaluate and explore opportunities for acquiring lands to provide new recreational opportunities. The NPS would expend funds on creating new trails and other facilities where appropriate. As requested and contingent on funding, the NPS would provide technical assistance to surrounding communities (the San Fernando Valley and other urban areas) to enhance access to SMMNRA and other open space areas through trail connections and public transportation options and to increase the overall diversity of public parklands.

Providing improved access and alternative transportation opportunities to recreational opportunities and parks would be explored, particularly for communities that lack adequate access to parks and open space. This could occur through expansion of the existing shuttle contracts operated by the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority or through coordination and cooperation with existing transit agencies. For example, the NPS and partner agencies could explore cre-

ating recreational linkages to the Orange Line, a major public transportation corridor which connects downtown Los Angeles with San Fernando Valley communities.

As in alternative C, expanding SMMNRA into urban areas northward and eastward would provide new close-to-home opportunities for those communities that currently do not have adequate parks and recreation areas. The NPS would conduct outreach to local communities, organizations, and schools to promote opportunities for healthy recreation. The NPS could also coordinate and collaborate with the U.S. Forest Service's Southern California Consortium to conduct outreach on recreational and learning opportunities with local schools and youth.

Education and Interpretation

Educational and interpretive opportunities within the expanded SMMNRA would be similar to alternative C. The NPS would seek opportunities to coordinate interpretive and educational messaging and programs in partnership with existing agencies and organizations. Interpretive themes related to nationally significant resources throughout the Rim of the Valley Corridor area would be emphasized (e.g. biodiversity, geology, paleontology, technology, economic development, and the interaction between human culture and the environment). Cultural resources in downtown Los Angeles and other areas in the Rim of the Valley Corridor area provide new opportunities to interpret the rich cultural heritage of the region.

Topics currently interpreted at SMMNRA such as film production, Native American history and pre-history, and the significance of Mediterranean ecosystems would be expanded by the inclusion of new sites and resources. New cultural themes would include architecture, resource extraction and production, space exploration, astronomy, and the Cold War.

Resource Protection

Significant cultural and natural resources described in the alternative C boundary adjustment would be included in alternative D. In addition to these resources, alternative D would include rare endemic plant and fossil resources associated with Conejo volcanic geologic features in the Conejo Mountain-Las Posas Hills area. This area also includes a western wildlife corridor connection to the Santa Susana Mountains. Alternative D would also include the Upper Santa Clara River area which is home to more sensitive plant community types than any other portion of the study area.

Within the boundary adjustment area, the NPS would partner with stakeholders to develop a collaborative land protection program that includes both cooperative conservation planning tools and strategic land acquisition. The current inventory and monitoring program of SMMNRA would be expanded to the new areas and would inform decision-making for resource

management. The NPS could provide technical assistance in scientific study, restoration opportunities, and documentation of cultural and natural resources. Universities and other partners would be engaged to assist in building scientific knowledge to support decision-making.

Priorities for Land Conservation

The larger scope of alternative D provides the most opportunities for the NPS to play a direct role in long-term conservation of regional wildlife corridors through land acquisition and other means of land protection such as private land stewardship. Agencies and organizations within the added areas would continue to acquire lands for conservation and open space as permitted under existing authorities. The NPS would focus land acquisition on protection of core habitat areas in SMMNRA and in protecting critical wildlife corridors within the newly added areas.

The NPS would also share research and participate in strategies to protect important wildlife corridors beyond the national recreation area boundaries. As in alternatives B and C, emphasis would be placed on private land stewardship and providing technical assistance to public and private landowners, as requested and contingent on funding, to conserve these resources.

Restoration Opportunities

In more developed areas, the NPS would contribute to restoration efforts that could enhance biodiversity and create more resilient biological systems. The NPS could actively support current restoration efforts on the Los Angeles River, Arroyo Seco, and Tujunga Wash. Opportunities could also be explored, in cooperation with other agencies and landowners, for the Arroyo Simi and Calleguas Creek. Such efforts provide excellent opportunities to restore riparian areas and enhance regional habitat connectivity. Restoration objectives could be explored that create new habitat linkages between the Santa Monica and San Gabriel mountains. As in alternatives B and C, existing federal and state programs that provide financial incentives for private landowners to restore habitat could be leveraged to achieve restoration objectives.

Cultural Resources Documentation and Protection

The NPS would work collaboratively to document cultural resources within the newly added areas. Additional inventories, documentation and mapping of cultural sites could be undertaken. Information about sensitive sites need not be released to the public; details and locations may need to be withheld in order to protect the resources.

Significant sites could be evaluated for listing on the National Register of Historic Places or designation as a national historic landmark. Such designations would help to document the historical and archeological significance of the area and could enhance funding and technical assistance opportunities.

Many sites within the study area are important to Native American tribes and organizations with ties to the area. These organizations and others could continue to work with land-owners and managers to protect sacred sites and archeological resources, and to obtain access or ownership of important sites for ceremonial, interpretive, and educational purposes.

Operations and Maintenance

NPS would be responsible for operations and maintenance of lands that it acquires. Existing land managers would continue to operate and manage their land and facilities. Through cooperative management agreements, the NPS would have the opportunity to share staff, facilities and funding with partner agencies, streamlining operational efficiencies.

Existing staff at SMMNRA would contribute towards operation of the expanded park area. However, additional staffing and expertise needed for the expanded area would be similar to alternative C and would include:

- **Natural resource management staff (~3-6 FTE)** - to conduct inventory and monitoring of resources and to provide technical expertise on conservation of wildlife corridors and habitat restoration in urban areas.
- **Staff with expertise in cultural resources management (~1-2 FTE)** - to document and manage the expanded scope of cultural resources within the newly added area.
- **Outreach coordinator and interpretive rangers (~3-5 FTE)** - to create and develop visitor programs.
- **Law enforcement rangers (~2-5 FTE)** - to protect resources and ensure a safe visitor experience.
- **Maintenance and facilities management staff (~2-5 FTE)** - would be required to care for any additional lands that the NPS would acquire and for any new facilities that the NPS would construct (trails, roads, etc.).
- **Planning staff (~2-4 FTE)** - to provide expertise in land conservation tools and strategies, park and trail development, and community partnerships.

SMMNRA would also work to expand its network of volunteers to assist in park operations and resource management activities in the newly added park areas. As described in the no action alternative, volunteers for SMMNRA contribute many thousands of hours to all aspects of park management. SMMNRA and agency partners would also continue to rely on private fundraising through "friends" and partner groups such as the Santa Monica Mountains Fund.

Funding and Costs

Operational Costs

Initially, existing SMMNRA staff and operations would support the newly added areas. Initial staffing needs would primarily be for park planning, outreach, and coordination with other agencies and organizations. Increased staffing for the expanded SMMNRA would happen incrementally over time as implementation planning specifies objectives and as the NPS acquires land in the area. Following completion of a management plan that would identify more specific goals for land protection, resource management, facilities, education, and outreach, more specific operational costs and staffing needs would be identified. The annual operating cost for SMMNRA was \$8.6 million in fiscal year 2012. These operational costs primarily support staffing. SMMNRA would also leverage NPS sources of funding beyond the annual operating costs for planning efforts, specific resource management efforts, and for the construction of visitor facilities. The annual NPS operating budget for the expanded SMMNRA could range from \$10-\$12 million, an increase of \$1.4-3.4 million above SMMNRA's 2012 operating budget. The level of staffing needs would reflect the emphasis of future management (e.g. the amount and type of land acquired by NPS, ability to accomplish objectives through partnerships).

Land Acquisition Costs

NPS funding for land acquisition would continue to be competitive. From 2001-2011, SMMNRA received approximately \$14 million for land acquisition, acquiring nearly 1,800 acres of land. Additional funding would be required to continue implementation of current land acquisition priorities in the Santa Monica Mountains and to pursue targeted land acquisition in the newly added Rim of the Valley areas. The NPS and partner agencies could also explore new opportunities to leverage funding for land acquisition.

Planning and Implementation Projects

Planning and implementation projects are not reflected in the projected operational budget. If the boundary adjustment were authorized by Congress, SMMNRA would be eligible to receive funding for planning and projects through the NPS. For example, the NPS could provide initial planning funds for a management plan which would define management priorities, more specific actions, and funding needs for the new areas. The management plan would be completed in collaboration with the partnership agencies. Management for a partnership park the size and scale of which is proposed in alternative D would likely take 4 to 5 years to complete and could cost between \$500,000 and \$700,000. Additional NPS funding may also be available for specific projects such as trail planning and development and interpretive materials.