



January 9, 2012

Ms. Martha Crusius, Project Manager
National Park Service
San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains SRS
333 Bush Street, Suite 500
San Francisco, CA 94104

Dear Ms. Crusius:

The San Gabriel Mountains Forever Campaign--a diverse partnership of conservation, faith, health and community groups--appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft alternatives presented in the *San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study*. San Gabriel Mountains Forever encourages the National Park Service (NPS) to recommend to Congress the creation of a robust San Gabriel Region National Recreation Area as outlined in Alternative D, but with some suggested improvements as outlined here.

The San Gabriel Mountains benefit our quality of life by providing us with clean air and water and incredible natural beauty. Over three million of us visit these mountains each year to escape the pace of city life and to hike, ride horses or mountain bikes, watch wildlife, fish, or picnic with friends and family.

The Angeles National Forest is one of the top three most heavily visited recreational forests in the United States and it is located next to the nation's second largest urban population. Despite growing recreational needs, the ability of the U.S. Forest Service to support forest visitors is actually declining. The Angeles National Forest spends only about \$1 per visitor on law enforcement, educational materials, interpretive services, and visitor center management. The Station Fire, the largest in the history of the Angeles National Forest, has exacerbated this shortage of recreational opportunities and funds for public services. Outside of the forest our region's youth obesity and diabetes crisis is growing, bringing new urgency to connecting our youth and communities back to our mountains and rivers.

The *San Gabriel Mountains and Watershed Special Resource Study* does a good job in assessing resource protection and San Gabriel Mountains Forever agrees that Alternative D is the "Environmentally Preferred" Alternative. However, the study falls short in its assessment of benefits that the designation would bring in three areas; health, equity and economics. We encourage including an assessment that highlights the importance of open space in addressing community needs related to diabetes and obesity and the need for equitable access to open space.¹ We would also like to see information in the final report that shows the economic benefits of recreation in increasing local spending, property values as well as the high value of supporting green jobs.²

¹ Please see the comments submitted on January 9, 2012 by our campaign partners, The City Project for more information on the [health benefits of open space](#).

² Please see the comments and study on the [economic benefits of open space](#) provided on January 9, 2012 by The Wilderness Society.

Our recommendations for the NPS study team are to improve Alternative D which calls for the creation of a San Gabriel Region National Recreation Area. Our support for Alternative D and our recommendations for improving it are outlined in this letter.

We Support Alternative D

San Gabriel Mountains Forever supports a National Recreation Area “from the Mountains to the Sea.” This new designations could help provide increased recreational and educational opportunities for local residents and more protection for wild areas and rivers within the forest. Below are additional reasons why we support Alternative D.

Why We Support Alternative D:

- It would create a San Gabriel Region National Recreation Area that includes the San Gabriel Mountains, Puente-Chino Hills and the San Gabriel River.
- The National Park Service would have a lead role in helping to manage the area and the forest would benefit from NPS expertise in open space connections, educational, technical and interpretative services.
- The US Forest Service would continue to be the lead managing agency for the National Forest lands, but would work closely with the National Park Service on all aspects.
- The NPS would bring in additional resources, rangers and staff to help the Forest Service.

A National Recreation Area Should Include:

- Support for urban green space beyond the core boundary. Including technical assistance to surrounding communities for recreation and conservation planning, as well as a stewardship program to protect both water quality and habitat resources.
- A robust transit-to-trails program that would enable people from park-poor communities improved access to San Gabriel Mountain recreational opportunities. It should seek to support linkages to existing public transportation lines for example the expanding Metro Gold Line. And work with partners to establish bus routes on weekends and holidays to enhance access, air quality, and the visitor experience.
- Jobs for young people and military veterans that should be supported through a dedicated conservation corps, an outreach program to schools, and education about available green jobs.

Alternative D Should Be Improved By:

- A creation of a network of parks and trails along the urban river corridors that would connect to the San Gabriel Mountains. This network is also known by many in the community as the Emerald Necklace Vision.
- Expanding the urban portion of the National Recreation Area to include more opportunities for San Gabriel River Valley communities to provide open space and healthy recreation for their residents.
- Including the entire San Gabriel Mountain Range. Please include in the proposal all the national forest land between the SR-14 on the west to the I-15 on the east. This vision would include the section of the San Bernardino National Forest east of the watershed study area that contains heavily used Ice House Canyon, the Cucamonga Wilderness and Lytle Creek.

- Recommending the protection of additional wilderness areas and designation of wild and scenic rivers in the Angeles and San Bernardino national forests.
- Insuring that the National Recreation Area connects Puente-Chino Hills to the Chino Hills State Park and the urban portions of the San Gabriel River. Adding the entire Puente-Chino Hills, including lands east of Harbor Boulevard--lands that include coastal sage scrub "critical habitat" and rare oak and walnut woodlands. This would allow wildlife to move from the San Gabriel Mountains along the rivers to the Puente-Chino Hills on to the Cleveland National Forest. It would also allow for completion of a trail network through the entire area.
- The study identified a significant wildlife corridor between the main section of the Angeles National Forest and the Castaic Mountains section of the ANF. This important wildlife corridor should be added to the National Recreation Area to facilitate protection of the corridor from additional urban encroachment.

Sincerely,
San Gabriel Mountains Forever Campaign

Comments submitted by the San Gabriel Mountains Forever Campaign on behalf of its member organizations listed below:

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