



## President's Message

Ruth Gerson

In a twist of irony, the National Park Service is planning to take away our Recreation Area. The Recreation Area we have fought so hard to create. The Recreation Area we lobbied to fund.

Recently, the National Park Service released their Draft General Management Plan for the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA). Surprisingly, it proposes "less" and "fewer" as its long-term vision: fewer visitors, less active recreation areas, fewer parking spaces, less trails and less access just to name a few. It is less a plan than a cruel hoax on those who worked so hard to create the nation's largest urban Recreation Area.

We have dedicated this issue of our newsletter to a review of the Draft General Management Plan. Our goal is to provide you with a comprehensive look at the impacts of this plan on the National Recreation Area and the visitors. You can view the plan on the NPS web page at [samo\\_gmp@nps.gov](mailto:samo_gmp@nps.gov). Please take the time to comment to the National Park Service about the General Management Plan.

Recreation is not an alternative. It is the MISSION! We simply cannot let this plan be adopted as proposed. We owe it to future generations to push for the expansion of public access to this massive Recreation Area. It is irresponsible that there should be such an anti-public attitude for such a publicly owned facility. Outdoor enthusiasts, we need your support!

The Plan adds nothing; no campgrounds, no trails, no trailheads, no parking spaces, even though tens of thousands of acres have been acquired since the last Management Plan was adopted. If there wasn't a purpose for those acquisitions, why were they made in the first place? After all, isn't that what we thought we were getting for our \$200 million taxpayer investment?

The Plan calls for such amenities as visitor centers outside the Recreation Area. It proposes a scenic coastal boat tour (more "look from a distance"); and education, research and history centers that can substitute for real park experiences. It relegates the visitor experiences to manageable groups arriving on buses to buildings and parking lots. It is one step away from looking at the Recreation Area on cable television.

**Special points of interest:**

- Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area General Management Plan
- NPS - Many Unanswered Questions
- REC Mission Statement

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## Commentary

The recreation community should be extremely disappointed at the limited effort that went into developing a recreation plan for the National Recreation Area. On the whole, this so-called plan appears to be a poorly disguised effort to further limit public access to the National Recreation Area.

The premise of the document seems to be driven by a staggering 33 million annual visitors who are descending upon the National Recreation Area. However, this number is based on counting the beachgoers. By combining “bare feet” with “shoes” the plan misleads the reader into thinking that the recreation area is overwhelmed with visitors and can only be “saved” by reducing access and use in the mountains. It’s a clever shell game, but it won’t fool anyone familiar with the area.

Most appalling is the complete lack of mention of the role of private recreation providers in the mountains. If not for the services provided by the schools, camps, restaurants, conference facilities, spas, and stables, there would

be a great deal less opportunity to enjoy the Recreation Area. As a practical matter, the only way additional recreation facilities will be added, probably, is if they are developed and paid for by the private sector. Deleting something so obvious makes us wonder what else is missing in the plan’s details.

Perhaps we were naïve to think that a plan for the next generation should anticipate more financial resources, more land acquisition and more opportunities and facilities for outdoor enjoyment. Perhaps we over estimated the commitment of the National Park Service to operating a recreation area.

If this draft plan is the best vision that the National Park Service can produce for the lands within their control, then maybe it is time for them to abandon their post. There are other responsible agencies that can address the need for increased recreation access within the National Recreation Area.

## SMMNRA Area Plan Policies Need Revising

The following are just a partial list of the policies contained in the draft plan which should to be revised.

1. “Discourage the use of public funds for the rebuilding of public and private facilities destroyed by natural processes in zones of high hazard.” Current public facilities are already limited and the impacts of fires, quakes and floods cannot be controlled by the public agencies. The public should not be penalized and lose their use of the area due to natural disasters.
  2. The 1997 mission statement on page 43 omits any reference to public/private partnerships in the stewardship of the NRA. Nor does it even mention recreation. Without the private sector’s contribution in providing recreation amenities there would be insufficient outdoor experiences in the SMMNRA.
  3. Designating vast areas of the NPS holdings as “preserve” is completely unacceptable. This is merely a ploy to deny public access to publicly owned lands, which were acquired to provide the substance of the National Recreation Area. You can expect vigorous opposition to any effort to promote federal legislation to impose such a designation.
  4. The use of “gravel, compacted gravel/soil, or pavement” for trails is dangerous and completely unacceptable. We view it as a flagrant attempt to limit use of the trails.
  5. It is an inherent conflict to “limit the expansion of roadways within the SMMNRA” and to “improve the visitor experience.” Whatever means the public uses for access, it will be mostly vehicular. To limit vehicular access denies public access and defeats the stated mission of the NRA.
  6. The construction of a Joint Administrative/Visitor/Operations center at Soka University (Gillette Ranch) and its accompanying peak period traffic is a breach of the agreement made with the community and Soka University at the time their project was approved by the Park Agencies.
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## **The Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area General Management Plan Has Many Shortcomings**

All plans should be built on a solid foundation of facts and specifics. The Draft General Management Plan is full of glowing generalizations and unsupported “motherhood” statements. It reads like a sales pitch for a particular point of view rather than an objective analysis of the future use of the National Recreation Area. REC has outlined just a few of the more glaring shortcomings in the draft plan.

1. The proposed Plan conflicts with the Mission of the NRA, in that it does not “offer compatible recreation and education opportunities that are accessible to a diverse public.” The plan’s proposal to reduce the more intense uses of the NRA and to limit access is not acceptable. Protection does not mean isolation.
  2. The Plan proposes to reduce recreation access on the very parcels of land for which taxpayer dollars were expended to bring them into public ownership. According to the maps, reductions are proposed at Runyon, WODOC, Franklin, Topanga, Rocky Oaks, Zuma/Trancas Canyons, Charmlee and Rancho Sierra Vista, which include most of the NPS holdings. This is unacceptable to the taxpayers and the outdoor community who supported the allocation of funds and the acquisition of the properties. The proposal to increase some visitor use at Point Mugu and Leo Carrillo beach as an alternative is unacceptable, and it will not provide visitors with a meaningful mountain experience. Nor will it be provided with the creation of visitor centers at LAX, Olvera Street, 415 PCH (Marion Davies Home), or CSUCI Research facility, all of which are located outside the National Recreation Area.
  3. The visitor counts are misleading. The Plan uses 33 million annual visitors, which includes all beach goers. The visitor counts need to be separated into “barefeet” vs. “shoes” in order to get an accurate portrait of the real number of non-beach visitors to the National Recreation Area. Breakdowns of current visitors, such as riders, hikers, bikers and campers, needs to be included, as well as projections for future visitors.
  4. The Plan has given no mention to the dozens of privately owned recreation facilities in the National Recreation Area. These facilities attract tens of thousands of visitors to the mountains every month. To exclude their role in providing visitor services is to ignore the important contribution the private sector makes toward an outdoor experience in the recreation area. Further, it ignores the fact that private investment is probably the only way visitor amenities are going to be expanded in the recreation area.
  5. The Plan overstates the availability of publicly owned land for recreation. Water district facilities and sanitation district lands are not accessible to the public and not available for public use. They should be deleted from the acreage inventory.
  6. The Plan does not appear to include any further lands for priority acquisition and recreation development.
  7. The Plan lacks specifics on the public participation process. The text indicates that newsletters were distributed and community meetings were held but nowhere does it provide actual numbers of participants or respondents. These numbers should be included to provide a clearer picture of the actual participation in the preparation of the document. All comments should be provided verbatim in an appendix to the EIR.
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## NPS Plan Leaves Many Unanswered Questions

While the draft plan has some specific things it proposes to do, there are many specific improvements that would promote recreation on which the plan is silent. The following are just a few of the questions that occurred to REC members who have reviewed the plan.

1. How many more parking lots and parking spaces will be added to the NRA, inland of the beach, under this plan?
2. How many individual overnight camping spaces will be added to the NRA under this plan?
3. How many more miles of trails will be added to this Recreation Area under this Plan?
4. How many more trailheads will be developed with adequate parking for varied users?
5. How many more restroom facilities will be constructed and in what locations?
6. Will there be an equestrian campground?
7. Will trail camps be developed? When and where?
8. Why are there no public/private partnerships proposed to create visitor serving amenities?
9. Why is the elimination of street parking on PCH being proposed? What will it achieve?
10. How many more visitors, with shoes, will be able to enjoy the NRA annually under this plan?
11. Where are the opportunities for the inner city dwellers?
12. Why are the existing farms and ranches, as well as the historic ones, not included as part of the cultural resources of the area?
13. What is the definition of “compatible recreation”? Who gets to make the decision? How do you assure that it will be objective?
14. What is the definition of “intensity” and “carrying capacity”? Can it be made quantifiable/measurable and applied objectively?
15. Where is the scientific evidence to support the roll-back of public access? Where is the data and the documentation of “disturbance”, “adverse impact”, “encroachment” and “non-compatible human activity”?
16. Why does the plan concentrate on day-use in its concept?

## Time for Action

**We encourage you to send emails, faxes and letters to NPS requesting an improved plan that has more trails, more trailheads, more access, trail camps and equestrian campgrounds - in short, more recreational facilities/opportunities. Send your comments soon, and thanks for your support!**

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## REC Mission Statement

The mission of the Recreation and Equestrian Coalition (REC) is to inform the public and policy makers about access to and the use of diverse recreational opportunities available throughout Los Angeles County and the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. REC will protect and defend the region's rich natural diversity and promote public/private partnerships to preserve and expand visitor-serving recreational facilities.

### RECREATION & EQUESTRIAN COALITON Membership Form

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
 ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
 CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_  
 PHONE (home) \_\_\_\_\_ (work) \_\_\_\_\_  
 EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_ (fax) \_\_\_\_\_

#### I can help with...

Phone Committee \_\_\_\_\_  
 Attend Hearings \_\_\_\_\_  
 Organize Events \_\_\_\_\_  
 Distribute Flyers \_\_\_\_\_  
 Newsletter \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

#### MEMBERSHIP LEVEL

Individual \$25 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Family \$50 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Organization \$100 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Commercial \$250 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Donation \_\_\_\_\_

Please mail your check payable to: **REC**  
**P.O. Box 245**  
**Agoura Hills, CA 91376**

### Time to Join and Renew Membership in REC

Now is the time to send your annual dues to REC. Your contribution will enable us to promote recreation and equestrian activities throughout the County, to monitor anti-equestrian zoning and policies, to continue providing a monthly newsletter, and to organize our rides and events. Remember that there is a national movement to restrict the public's access to publicly owned lands. We need your support to resist these efforts in our National Recreation Area. A membership form is provided for you to renew, to join, or to add a friend to REC.

The list of issues important to equestrians and recreation enthusiasts has grown remarkably. If you would like to help monitor and research any of the issues, please contact us and maybe plan to attend our meetings. They are casual, friendly, humorous, informative, and held usually on the second and fourth Monday nights at 7:30 pm. Call to confirm in case of changes 818-991-1236.

We have made great progress so far with only a handful of volunteers. We welcome anyone who is willing to help promote our recreation agenda.

# ACTION ALERT - PLEASE RESPOND

**REC**  
*Recreation & Equestrian  
Coalition*  
P.O. Box 245  
Agoura Hills, CA 91376

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## How to Contact REC

Phone (818) 991-1236; fax (818) 889-4540

Email <ruth@gotorec.org>

P.O. Box 245, Agoura Hills, CA 91376

Visit REC's website at:

**www.gotorec.org**

## How to Contact the Planning Commission

Regional Planning Commission

320 West Temple Street

Los Angeles, CA 90012

Fax: (213) 626-0434

Email <lstark@planning.co.la.ca.us>

## How to Contact the National Park Service

401 W. Hillcrest Service

Thousand Oaks, CA 91360

(805) 370-2300 Phone

(805) 370-1850 Fax

To visit the Plan: [www.nps.gov/samo](http://www.nps.gov/samo)

email: [samo\\_gmp@nps.gov](mailto:samo_gmp@nps.gov)

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