

DRAFT
Soka University Project Plan

Project Site Description

Soka University is an approximately 588-acre property located in western Los Angeles County, in the heart of the Santa Monica Mountains. It is bounded by Malibu Creek State Park and Las Virgenes Road to the west, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA) open space and privately-owned land to the south, the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA)-owned Las Virgenes View Park and privately-owned land to the north, and privately-owned land to the east. The City of Calabasas is just to the north of the property. Mulholland Highway follows the northwestern boundary of the property and then turns and bisects the property. The community of Monte Nido is just to the south of the property. The National Park Service (NPS) owns an 18-acre inholding in the center of the property called Diamond X Ranch. The property is located in the USGS Malibu Beach Quadrangle.

The property can be accessed directly off Mulholland Highway. The access point is just to the east of the intersection of Mulholland Highway and Las Virgenes Road, which becomes Malibu Canyon Road to the south.

Topography ranges from the relatively flat riparian valley in the northwestern and center portions of the property to gentle slopes and rolling hills in the south and northeastern portions of the property. Elevation ranges from 574 to 1181 feet.

The 588- acre Soka University is located in the center of the Santa Monica Mountains. The Soka site, also known as the King Gillette Ranch or Claretville, plays a critical role in maintaining connectivity within the Santa Monica Mountains. Soka University is located directly in the heart of both a linkage and the core habitat. The site is also a significant scenic resource in the region.

Several key creeks are located on the property and are part of the Malibu Creek watershed. The lower reaches of Malibu Creek support southern steelhead trout, a federally-listed species. It is possible that the Soka University formerly supported steelhead runs and spawning areas prior to the construction of the Rindge Dam in Malibu Canyon in the 1920's. The Ranch contains outstanding representative plant communities of valley oak savannah, coast live oak savannah, coastal sage scrub, chaparral, riparian woodland, and southern willow riparian vegetation. The property contains nine sensitive plant and wildlife species, as well as other locally important species.

Soka University provides optimal foraging and nesting habitat for many raptors, supports a full complement of southern California large-mammal species with the exception of California black bear, and is a highly important wildlife movement corridor. Acquisition will protect and buffer the entrance to the adjacent Malibu Creek State Park.

Soka University is included on the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy Acquisition 2000 Workprogram. This Workprogram contains thousands of parcels located in over 250 project areas. Acquisition of the property would play a key role in implementing the Santa Monica Mountains Comprehensive Plan.

The subject parcels are within State Senate District 23 (Senator Sheila James Kuehl), State Assembly District 41 (Assemblymember Fran Pavley), and Los Angeles County 3rd Supervisorial District (Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky). No project opposition is expected; widespread regional support for acquisition has been expressed by agencies, local governments, environmental groups, and a number of scientists.

Government Entities with Jurisdiction Over Project Area

County of Los Angeles
California Department of Fish and Game
California Coastal Commission
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Regional Water Quality Control Board
Las Virgenes Municipal Water District
National Park Service
California Department of Parks and Recreation
Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy
Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority

Planning Objectives and Principles Sought to be Achieved by the Project

Management objectives for the Soka University site include conservation of core wildlife habitat and a significant portion of a key wildlife corridor; preservation and restoration of sensitive and declining plant communities; protection of sensitive species; protection of the heart of the watershed of Malibu Creek and Malibu Lagoon; protection of a scenic resource; and provision of public access for nature education and low-impact recreational uses. Hikers, horseback riders, and mountain bicyclists currently have access to public trails on the nearby publicly-owned land, and the property already has a small framework for public trails. The property is located at the intersection of Las Virgenes Road and Mulholland Drive. If acquired for public parkland, the property presents ideal accessibility by public transportation, private car, bike, foot or horseback.

The project would implement the Santa Monica Mountains Comprehensive Plan and the Conservancy's Acquisition 2000 Workprogram. Acquisition of the subject property for

parkland will protect the open space and resources of the property, and provide for public use and access to low-impact recreational opportunities.

The project is also in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act. Per California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, Section 15316 the following is exempt: acquisition of land for the purpose of establishing parks, where the land is in a natural condition and either the management plan for the park has not been prepared, or the management plan proposes to keep the area in a natural condition. Acquisition of lands for wildlife conservation purposes (Section 15313) and transfer of ownership of interest in land to preserve existing natural conditions (Section 15325), are also exempt. Under Sections 15303 and 15304, minor park improvements such as trails or pathways, and signage are also exempt.

Proposed Land Uses

The primary purpose for acquisition of Soka University is conservation of core wildlife habitat and a large portion of a key wildlife corridor. Other purposes include preservation and restoration of sensitive and declining plant communities, preservation of sensitive species and their habitat, protection of land in the heart of the Malibu Creek watershed, environmental education and interpretation opportunities, protection of scenic resources, and low-impact recreational uses.

Under initial ownership by the MRCA, Soka University would also be managed by the MRCA for an interim time. A portion of the property may also be acquired directly by California Department of Parks and Recreation. In particular, the interim management objectives for the project plan area would be similar to and would complement management objectives at Malibu Creek State Park and at MRCA-managed lands in the area, including Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Open Space Preserve, Rocky Peak Park, Baldwin Open Space, Las Virgenes View Trail, and Sage Ranch. Existing trails will allow for public access. Park compatible uses will be further defined after a joint public agency planning process but recreation activities would be low impact in nature such as horseback riding, hiking, nature studies, and cultural events similar to the current activities sponsored by Soka University.

The historic and other buildings on the property would be leased back to the current owners for students to continue their studies for approximately three years, which will provide a transition period for multi-agency park planning activities. A joint public planning process will be conducted by the National Park Service, California State Parks, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, and the MRCA. It is expected that the National Park Service would eventually take ownership of the property and use the buildings as the visitor and administration center for the National Recreation Area consistent with its General Management Plan. The site could be jointly shared with California State Parks and the

Conservancy consistent with the Cooperative Management Agreement between all of the agencies. However, the planning process will further define the park agencies' long term uses and management, consistent with resource protection, public accessibility, and all environmental and regulatory review.

Detailed Site Analysis of Soka University

A. Parcels

A total of twenty parcels make up Soka University. The following table lists the assessor's parcel number (APN), acreage, township, range and section for each parcel. The acreages in the table are based on the Los Angeles County Assessor. The acreages in the table total 578.83 acres, which differs from the property owner's total. The owner-commissioned survey of the property which was completed by B & E Engineering found that the gross acreage of the property is actually 588 acres.

Assessor's Parcel Number	Acreage	Section	Township	Range
4455-015-002	80.00	5	1S	17W
4455-016-032	1.94	8	1S	17W
4455-016-033	75.31	8	1S	17W
4455-028-043	50.30	6	1S	17W
4455-033-003	100.81	7	1S	17W
4455-033-005	5.30	7	1S	17W
4455-033-006	4.70	7	1S	17W
4455-033-007	1.69	7	1S	17W
4455-033-009	10.00	7	1S	17W
4455-033-010	10.00	7	1S	17W
4455-033-011	10.00	7	1S	17W
4455-033-018	10.00	7	1S	17W
4455-033-021	27.09	7	1S	17W
4455-033-022	1.11	7	1S	17W
4455-033-023	7.59	7	1S	17W
4455-033-026	113.15	6,7	1S	17W
4455-034-001	12.23	7	1S	17W

Assessor's Parcel Number	Acreage	Section	Township	Range
4455-035-001	18.39	7	1S	17W
4455-040-007	0.91	7	1S	17W
4455-040-010	38.31	7	1S	17W

B. Plant Communities and Habitats

Soka University supports numerous and extensive plant communities of interest to CDFG which are experiencing significant declines, such as oak woodlands, coastal sage scrub, willow scrub, and coast live oak riparian forest. The following table lists the plant communities and acreage of each community.

Plant Communities and Habitat Types at Soka University				
Habitat Type	Sawyer Keeler-Wolfe Plant Community ¹	CNDDDB type ²	CDFG Sensitivity Ranking ³	Approx. Acreage ⁴
Riparian Habitat				6.5
	Arroyo willow series	Southern willow scrub	s2.1	
	Coast live oak series and California sycamore series	Southern coast live oak riparian forest and Sycamore alluvial woodland	s3.3	
Oak Woodland				115.3
	Coast live oak series	Southern coast live oak woodland	s3.3	
	Valley oak series	Valley oak woodland	s2.1	
Chaparral				246.2
	Chamise-hoaryleaf ceanothus series	Chamise chaparral	s3.3	
Coastal Sage Scrub				33.1
	Mixed sage series	Venturan coastal sage scrub	s2.1	

Plant Communities and Habitat Types at Soka University			
Annual Grassland			23.1
California annual grassland series	Non-native grassland	s3.3	
Disced/mowed fields			86
Fallow/herbaceous succession			3.9
Barren/Residential brush clearance			7.2
Ornamental			48.6
Developed (e.g., structures)			10.1
TOTAL			580
1	Sawyer, J.O. and T. Keeler-Wolfe. 1995. A Manual of California Vegetation.		
2	California Department of Fish and Game Natural Diversity Database		
3	CDFG. 2000. Sensitivity of Top Priority Rare Natural Communities in Southern California.		
	s1.1 = Less than 6 known locations; very threatened		
	s2.1 = 6-20 known locations; very threatened		
	s3.3 = 21-100 known locations; no current threats known		
4	The acreages presented in this table were obtained from the "Soka University Proposed Expansion Final Biota Report." They differ with the total acreage on the property determined by a commissioned survey.		

Riparian Habitat: The riparian habitat on the project site consists of three plant communities, which are Southern willow scrub, Southern coast live oak riparian forest, and Sycamore alluvial woodland. These communities are found along Stokes Canyon Creek and a drainage that runs east to west through the property. The property has 6.5 acres of riparian habitat.

Southern willow Scrub is characterized as a dense, broad-leaved, winter deciduous thicket dominated by several willow species (*Salix* spp.), with scattered emergent cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*) and sycamore (*Platanus racemosa*). Dominant species include willows, mulefat (*Bacharis salicifolia*), and some sycamores. Southern willow scrub is considered to be very threatened by CDFG.

The mixed Southern Coast Live Oak Riparian Forest and Sycamore alluvial woodland is an open to locally dense evergreen riparian woodland dominated by coast live oak (*Quercus*

agrifolia) and sycamore (*Platanus racemosa*). In addition to the coast live oak and sycamore, the other common species in this habitat are willow (*Salix* spp.), elderberry (*Sambucus mexicana*), and wild rose (*Rosa californica*). This riparian woodland habitat is found in a stretch upstream of the bridge over Stokes Canyon Road, and smaller patches downstream between the bridge and Malibu Canyon Road.

Oak Woodland: Oak woodland is characterized as having a grassy understory savannah with one species of oak tree dominating. The oak trees form an open canopy, not exceeding 30 to 40 percent cover. Oak woodland occupies 115.3 acres on the property. The oak woodland on the project site consists of two types: southern coast live oak woodland and valley oak woodland.

The southern coast live oak woodland is dominated by *Quercus agrifolia* with an open understory of various grasses and shrubs. This plant community is located at the toe of the hills along the southern and southeastern boundaries of the property, between the mixed chaparral-coastal sage scrub on the hillsides above and the non-native grassland in the flatter areas below.

The valley oak woodland is more open, forming a grassy, savannah-like understory, rather than a closed woodland. Valley oak (*Quercus lobata*), the dominant tree, is a winter-deciduous species. The understory is largely introduced grasses and forbs. This community is found along the western and southwestern boundaries of the property. Valley oak woodland is considered to be very threatened by CDFG.

Venturan Coastal Sage Scrub: Venturan Coastal Sage Scrub is adapted to respond to fire and is characterized by low, mostly soft-wooded shrubs, usually with crowns touching. Common plant species on the property in this community include California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), black sage (*Salvia mellifera*), California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), yucca (*Yucca whipplei intermedia*), and California encelia (*Encelia californica*). The Venturan Coastal Sage Scrub plant community totals 33.1 acres on the property. This community occurs on the south-facing slopes on the project site. It forms mosaics with the grasslands, woodlands, and chaparral on the property. Venturan Coastal Sage Scrub is considered to be very threatened by CDFG. Venturan Coastal Sage Scrub provides habitat for southern California rufous-crowned sparrow, California horned lizard, and San Diego desert woodrat. Coastal sage scrub has experienced significant declines with 80 to 90 percent lost and is threatened by development throughout the state.

Chamise-Hoaryleaf Ceanothus Chaparral: The dominant plant species in the chaparral include chamise (*Adenostoma fasciculatum*) and *Ceanothus* spp. Other species present in the habitat are mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus betuloides*), scrub oak (*Quercus dumosa*), toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*), bigberry manzanita (*Arctostaphylos glauca*), sugarbush (*Rhus ovata*),

and black sage (*Salvia mellifera*). Chaparral occurs on steep, rocky slopes with poor drainage and thin infertile soils. This community is dominated by dense, woody, evergreen shrubs, usually with thick leathery or waxy leaves. This plant community intergrades with Venturan Coastal Sage Scrub to form mosaics. This plant community totals 246.2 acres on the property. This is the dominant plant community on the property and is mostly located on the slopes surrounding the riparian valley. Chaparral provides habitat for coastal western whiptail and loggerhead shrike.

Non-native Grassland: Non-native Grassland is characterized by a dense to sparse cover of annual grasses. The community is often associated with numerous species of native annual forbs/wildflowers. Non-native grassland occurs on 23.1 acres on the property. Small pockets are found along the shoulders of roads and trails and within the chaparral and scrub-dominated hillsides. This plant community is also located north of Mulholland Highway on steeper slopes. Dominant species include red brome (*Bromus rubens*), ripgut brome (*B. diandrus*), wild oat (*Avena fatua*). Herbs such as jimson weed (*Datura meteloides*), black mustard (*Brassica nigra*), and wild radish (*Foeniculum vulgare*) are also present in the community. The grassland provides habitat for raptors, coyotes, and badgers.

Other Areas: The developed areas and areas where ornamental plants occur on the property total 58.7 acres. The developed areas include the buildings and roads. A total of 19.7 acres of the property is comprised of disced/mowed fields, fallow fields, and brush clearance. Deer are frequently observed grazing on these portions of the property. And many raptors use these fields to forage in.

Wetlands/Riparian Corridors: The property contains over 1.5 miles of USGS blue line streams. Southern Coast Live Oak Riparian Forest and Southern Willow Scrub are the plant communities found along the streams. Stokes Canyon Creek and the other unnamed drainage on the property feed into Malibu Creek just downstream of the property. Associated with the drainages is also a pond. Any of the portions along these drainages and near the pond that are disturbed could be restored easily and cheaply.

c. **Wildlife Corridor and Core Habitat**

Soka University plays a critical role in maintaining connectivity within the Santa Monica Mountains. Soka University is located directly in the heart of the wildlife corridor linkage and the core habitat. This ecosystem-level function preserves the integrity of wildlife populations in the Santa Monica Mountains. The property is part of the approximately 200-square-mile Santa Monica Mountains ecosystem.

The long-term persistence of wildlife in the Santa Monica Mountains depends on their ability to move within this mountain range to the large tracts of open space. The wildlife movement corridor through Soka University is integral in maintaining populations of badgers, long-tailed weasels, mountain lions, bobcats, coyote, gray fox, and mule deer. Soka University also supports an excellent representative example of core habitat for these and other wildlife species.

Soka University is part of the highest quality east-west wildlife movement route in the Santa Monica Mountains. This movement route connects the northeastern portion of the Santa Monica Mountains to the large and protected Malibu Creek State Park and ultimately Zuma/Trancas Canyons, which is part of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. Soka University is the key wildlife corridor interface across Malibu Canyon Road, allowing wildlife to directly access Malibu Creek State Park.

Terry Lieberstein conducted a study on reserve design in the Santa Monica Mountains in 1989.¹ In this study, she found that there is a large “hub” of open space, undeveloped land halfway in between Topanga and Malibu Creek State Parks. This hub includes parks such as Red Rock Canyon, Cold Creek Canyon Preserve, Stunt Ranch, and Saddle Peak. Several wildlife movement routes run in between Malibu Creek State Park and the hub, and the same is true between the hub and Topanga State Park. Soka University is a major component of one of these routes. Due to topography, Soka University also provides the highest quality access to Malibu Creek State Park across Malibu Canyon Road.

The National Park Service has conducted wildlife tracking studies throughout the Santa Monica Mountains. They continue to document the use of the property and area by both bobcats and coyotes. They have also documented via radio-collar tracking the movement of mountain lions throughout the Santa Monica Mountains. Soka University is located within the home range of one of the mountains lions.

D. Wildlife

The property supports both common and rare wildlife species diversity. Many of these species are considered “special animals” by CDFG and/or other conservation groups because they are experiencing significant declines or threats throughout the state and/or are have highly restricted distributions. Eight sensitive wildlife species have been observed on the site.

Listed Wildlife Species

¹ Lieberstein, Terry A. 1989. Reserve Design in the Santa Monica Mountains. California State University, Northridge, California.

Southern steelhead trout: Southern steelhead trout, which is federally-listed endangered, inhabits the lower portions of Malibu Creek and Malibu Lagoon. Historically, the trout moved all the way up the watershed into East Las Virgenes Creek on Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Open Space Preserve. It is also possible that the steelhead formerly occupied Stokes Canyon Creek. Rindge Dam was erected in the lower stretches of Malibu Creek in the early part of the 20th century, effectively blocking the steelhead run. Several agencies are conducting a study on the removal of the dam. Once the dam is removed, steelhead will be able to move further up Malibu Creek. Preserving southern steelhead trout runs may prove more critical as the effects of global warming increase. The southern steelhead trout, unlike the northern subspecies, is adapted to warm waters. As waters warm along the coast, this subspecies may be the only one able to survive.

Other Sensitive Wildlife Species

A total of 8 sensitive wildlife species have been observed on the property.

Monarch butterfly: The monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) is common on the project site. Both larval host plants, narrow-leaf milkweed (*Asclepias fascicularis*) and California milkweed (*A. californicus*), are present on the project site. Suitable trees (*Eucalyptus* spp., oak, sycamore, and walnut) are also present. Overwintering by the monarch has not been observed on the project site.

Coastal western whiptail: The coastal western whiptail (*Cnemidophorus tigris multiscutatus*) is a Federal Species of Concern. This species has been observed throughout the project site and can utilize a variety of plant communities including grassland, coastal sage scrub, chaparral, riparian habitats, and woodlands on the property.

San Diego horned lizard: The San Diego horned lizard (*Phrynosoma coronatum blainvillii*) is both a Federal and California Species of Special Concern. The horned lizard utilizes the coastal sage scrub and chaparral habitats throughout the upland areas of the property. This species requires sandy soil and an abundance of harvester ants, both of which are found on the project site.

Loggerhead shrike: The loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) is both a Federal and California Species of Special Concern. This species has been observed numerous times on the project site. They prefer open habitats with scattered shrubs, trees, posts, fences, utility lines, or other perches. The shrike utilizes grasslands, open woodlands, and chaparral.

Northern harrier: The northern harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) is a California Species of Special Concern. The northern harrier prefers open grasslands, agricultural lands, and woodlands. They have been observed using the disced fields on the project site.

Cooper's hawk: The Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperi*) is a California Species of Special Concern. This species is regularly observed in the woodlands on the property. The Cooper's hawk occupies deciduous and mixed forests and open woodland habitats such as woodlots, riparian woodlands, semiarid woodlands of the southwest, and other areas where woodlands occur in patches and groves or as spaced trees. They nest in riparian and oak woodlands.

Sharp-shinned hawk: The sharp-shinned hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) is a California Species of Special Concern. The sharp-shinned hawk is a winter visitor to the Santa Monica Mountains and prefers oak and riparian woodlands and chaparral.

White-tailed kite: The white-tailed kite (*Elanus leucurus*) is a Fully Protected species with the State of California. Kites utilize a large variety of habitats within the coastal plains and low foothills, including riparian woodlands and groves of oak and/or sycamore bordering open fields or grasslands, cultivated lowlands or orchards, and even some suburban habitats. They nest in trees and woodlands and forage in open, grassy fields.

Potential sensitive wildlife species: There are also some sensitive species that, while they have not been observed on the project site, are still expected or have a high potential for occurrence. These species include two-striped garter snake, golden eagle, yellow warbler, yellow-breasted chat, southern California rufous-crowned sparrow, and San Diego desert woodrat.

Other Wildlife

The onsite habitat supports the full complement of southern California large mammal species. Large mammal species found at Soka University include mountain lion (*Felis concolor*), gray fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*), mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), bobcat (*Felis rufus*), badger (*Taxidea taxus*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), long-tailed weasel (*Mustela frenata*), raccoon (*Procyon lotor*), and ringtail cat (*Bassariscus astutus*). The property also supports the full complement of reptile, bird, and rodent species. Other species that have been observed on the property include barn owl (*Tyto alba*), western bluebird (*Sialia mexicana*), great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*), black-crowned night heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), and red-shouldered hawk (*Buteo lineatus*).

E. Plants

Soka University contains several sensitive or rare plant species. The property also contains a wide diversity of other plant species.

Sensitive Plant Species

Malibu baccharis: Malibu baccharis (*Baccharis malibuensis*) is listed by the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) as 1B. CNPS defines 1B plants as being rare, threatened or endangered in the State of California. This species occurs in two locations on the property. Thirty individuals have been identified. This is the largest concentration of Malibu baccharis in the world. There are less than ten known locations of this species, all within the Santa Monica Mountains.

Oak and walnut trees: Soka University contains over 4,500 oak and walnut trees. This includes many heritage valley oak trees (*Quercus lobata*). Valley oaks reach the edge of their distribution on the property. Soka University provides an excellent example of these species and their plant communities. Also present on the site are coast live oaks (*Q. agrifolia*) and scrub oaks (*Q. dumosa*).

Other plants

The property also contains several plant species, that while they are not listed are becoming more rare in the region. They include Nevin's brickellia (*Brickellia nevinii*), leafy bentgrass (*Agrostis diegoensis*), downy monkeyflower (*Mimulus pilosus*), splendid mariposa lily (*Calochortus splendens*), false indigo (*Amorpha californica*), valley lupine (*Lupinus subvexus*) and Indian tobacco (*Nicotiana bigelovii*).

Abundant plant species include lemonadeberry (*Rhus integrifolia*), California encelia (*Encelia californica*), narrow-leaved milkweed (*Asclepias fascicularis*), woolly blue-curly (*Trichostema lanatum*), hoary-leaved ceanothus (*Ceanothus crassifolius*), and stinging nettle (*Urtica holoserica*).

F. Malibu Creek Watershed

Soka University's location within the Malibu Creek watershed is significant both locally and statewide. The Malibu Creek Watershed totals 109 square miles and is the second largest discrete watershed draining into Santa Monica Bay. It is the most ecologically significant watershed in Los Angeles County and the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA). Approximately 100,000 people live within the watershed in seven cities and unincorporated areas of Ventura and Los Angeles counties. Over 1.5 miles of blue-line streams are located on the property, all of which are part of the Malibu Creek watershed. The property lies in the southern portion of the watershed, just upstream of where Stokes Canyon

Creek joins Malibu Creek. Because of the location of the property in the watershed, it is critical for maintaining ecosystem functions. The watershed includes Malibu Creek State Park.

The creek drains into Malibu Lagoon, which is the only lagoon in Los Angeles County, and it is the only one between Point Mugu in Ventura County and Anaheim Bay in Orange County. The presence of a perennial stream, and its sharp relief between the interior valleys and the coast are unique to the Santa Monica Mountains. Because of this high quality habitat, the lagoon provides a refuge for over 200 migrating birds.

Two federally-listed endangered fish, the tidewater goby and southern steelhead trout, inhabit the lower portions of Malibu Creek. The goby is found mainly in Malibu Lagoon. The trout inhabits the stream up to Rindge Dam. Historically, the trout occurred upstream as far as East Las Virgenes Creek on the Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Open Space Preserve. Several agencies are conducting a study on the removal of Rindge Dam. Removal of the dam would allow the trout to access a high-quality stream that would give them access to the upper reaches of the watershed. Southwestern pond turtles inhabit Las Virgenes Creek just north of Malibu Creek State Park.

G. Cultural Resources

The Soka University property has highly significant identified cultural resources. The National Park Service recently described the Gillette Ranch property as “one of the preeminent cultural resources of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. The Gillette Ranch is potentially eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places . . .”

In correspondence from the California Department of Parks and Recreation on February 25, 1993 to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, Richard Rayburn, then Chief of the Resource Management Division said

“This property is of interest not only for its natural values but also for the significance of the cultural resources it incorporates . . . Archaeological surveys in adjacent areas have recorded over 40 sites, including seven villages, 10 temporary camps and variety of special use sites such as shelters, petroglyphs, milling stations, workshops and a chert quarry.”

The remains of the prehistoric Chumash city of Talapop are buried on the property. Numerous archeological sites related to Chumash history occur on the property, with continuous Chumash occupation from approximately 7,000 B.P. until the mid-1700's. Between 1769 and the 1830's the property was most likely used for grazing by the Mission San Fernando.

In 1898, Edward Stokes homesteaded the property and built an adobe house that remains to this day. King Gillette, the razor baron, bought the property in 1925. He owned the property until 1930. During those years he commissioned the famous architect Wallace Neff (“Architect of California’s Golden Age”) to build the estate. Adobe excavated on the property was used to construct the buildings.

MGM movie director Clarence Brown (directed films including “National Velvet, “Anna Karinina” and “The Yearling”), bought the property in 1930. In 1952, Mr. Brown sold the property to Dolores Hope, who donated it to the Catholic Church. The property was renamed Claretville and used as a seminary until 1979 by the Claretian Order of the Roman Catholic Church. The Claretian Order sold the property to Church Universal and Triumphant. In 1986, the property was purchased by Soka Gakkai/Nichren Soshu of America to be used as a university. The owners began plans to transform the property into a major university.

H. Compatibility with Other Nearby Protected Lands and Regional Plans

Since the mid-1970's, the Soka University property has been considered by several park agencies as a priority for acquisition. California State Parks began to purchase the then 244-acre site known as Claretville from the Claretian Brothers in the late 1970's, but the Claretians, impatient with the lengthy state process, sold instead in 1979 to the Church Universal and Triumphant. Likewise, as a priority in its Land Protection Plan, the National Park Service tried to purchase the property in the 1980's from the Church, but lost out to Soka Gakkai/Nichren Soshru of America. The MRCA then attempted to acquire the property between 1992 and 1994 through its first and only eminent domain action, but had to settle the litigation because of insufficient funding to complete acquisition.

The General Management Plan² for the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area identified Soka University as the location for their administration, environmental, and cultural education center. This administration center would be jointly operated by the National Park Service and California State Parks. Both agencies could house operations, curatorial, and management functions at this location. The administration center could provide parking for individuals recreating in the region. The center may also be a stop along the planned shuttle route run by the National Park Service that will transport people to the different parks. The Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA) totals 153,075 acres and includes the Santa Monica Mountains and portions of the Simi Hills. The SMMNRA is the largest urban national park in the nation. It is anticipated that if a successful purchase of Soka

² United States Department of the Interior - National Park Service. 2002. General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement. Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, California.

is completed, all or a portion of the property would be eventually transferred to the National Park Service.

Acquisition of Soka University is consistent with and necessary for the regional objectives of numerous park agencies and other groups including Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, California Department of Parks and Recreation, National Park Service, County of Los Angeles, Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, and the Santa Monica Mountains Resource Conservation District. Soka University is also significant regionally because numerous agencies have spent considerable efforts and funds to preserve the critical wildlife linkage and habitat blocks within the Santa Monica Mountains. Protection of the University site increases the value of all of the nearby parkland.

Soka University is located adjacent to or in the near proximity of numerous parks and open space. The property is located in the heart of the Santa Monica Mountains. Malibu Creek State Park lies immediately to the west and also further to the south of the property. Further west of Malibu Creek State Park is Castro Crest and Zuma/Trancas Canyons. The MRCA-owned Las Virgenes View Park is immediately to the north of the property. Further to the north is the 101 Freeway and Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Open Space Preserve (formerly known as Ahmanson Ranch). Diamond X Ranch, which is owned by the National Park Service, is an inholding of the property. To the east of the property is a large block of protected land comprised of many different parks, including Red Rock Canyon, Cold Creek Canyon Preserve, Stunt Ranch, Saddle Peak. Even further east is Topanga State Park.

Soka University is included on the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy Acquisition 2000 Workprogram. This Workprogram contains thousands of parcels located in over 250 project areas. Acquisition of the property would play a key role in implementing the Santa Monica Mountains Comprehensive Plan.

I. Viewshed

Preserving the property is critical to protect and maintain the viewshed of the region. The property is visible from many of the parks in the area including Malibu Creek State Park, Diamond X Ranch, and Las Virgenes View Park. The property is located adjacent to the entrance for Malibu Creek State Park. Mulholland Highway runs along the northwestern edge of the property and then veers south and bisects the property. Mulholland Highway has been designated a Scenic Parkway. Both Las Virgenes Road and Mulholland Highway have been designated California Scenic Highways. The property is so critical to the viewshed of the area that a scenic overlook was constructed by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy in the 1980's. Now named the Alisa B. Katz Overlook, it is situated along Mulholland Highway where

the road bisects the two halves of the property. The overlook looks west across the property to the spectacular mountain backdrop of Malibu Creek State Park.

Government Agencies, Organizations and Private Parties Consulted

Hon. Sheila Kuehl, California State Senate
Hon. Fran Pavley, California State Assembly
Hon. Zev Yaroslavsky, Los Angeles County Supervisor
Mike Chrisman, Secretary for Resources
Ginny Kruger, Los Angeles County 3rd Supervisorial District Office
Hon. Leslie Devine, City of Calabasas
Hon. Dennis Washburn, City of Calabasas
Woody Smeck, Superintendent, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area
Dr. Ray Sauvajot, NPS
Suzanne Goode, California Department of Parks and Recreation
Dave Brown, Sierra Club
Ruth Coleman, Director, California Department of Parks and Recreation
Al Wright, Executive Director, Wildlife Conservation Board
Sam Schucat, Executive Officer, State Coastal Conservancy
Marianne Yamaguchi, Executive Officer, Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission
Mark Gold, Heal the Bay

Analysis of Economic Feasibility of Proposed Project

The MRCA has submitted a Land Acquisition Evaluation (LAE) Grant Request to the Wildlife Conservation Board and the California Department of Fish and Game. An appraisal has been prepared for Soka University and submitted to the State Department of General Services for review. The total amount being requested from the Wildlife Conservation Board and other potential grantors is subject to approval of fair market value by Department of General Services and will be used solely for acquisition. If funds are awarded by the Wildlife Conservation Board, the SMMC, State Parks, State Coastal Conservancy, and/or other potential grantors, the funds would allow fee title acquisition of Soka University by the MRCA, and subsequent management by the MRCA. The strong potential for joint ownership and management with the National Park Service and California State Parks in the future, will provide a cooperative approach to resource stewardship, use, and preservation of Soka University.

The County of Los Angeles approved the Soka University Specific Plan for development of the property in 1997. In 1998 the California Coastal Commission also approved the plan to build a university that would accommodate 650 students and have a 440,000 square foot building area. As part of the approvals, a conservation easement was conditioned over a portion of the property. However, development of this property has been a highly controversial land use issue in Southern California for years; the approvals were litigated by the Sierra Club and others, and were ultimately overturned in the Courts.

Soka University of America could begin considering purchase offers from merchant builders and other institutions. The opportunity to purchase the property for public parkland and resource protection is indeed a narrow one that is not expected to continue much past the near future.