

**SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY**

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January 23, 2006

Ms. Fran Mainella, Director  
National Park Service  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington DC 20240

**Comments on Proposed Changes to National Park Service  
Management Policies**

Dear Ms. Mainella:

The National Park Service (NPS), California Department of Parks and Recreation, Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (Conservancy), and countless other governmental agencies, non-governmental entities, and individuals work cooperatively to acquire and manage parkland in the 150,000-acre Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA). The SMMNRA is nationally significant because it protects for the American people the greatest expanse of mainland Mediterranean ecosystems in the NPS system.<sup>1</sup> It is one of rarest and most endangered ecosystems that occurs in only five locations throughout the world, and each has experienced intense human occupation. Located within the highly developed and rapidly developing greater Los Angeles area, each year, more than 33 million visitors enjoy the beaches and mountains of the SMMNRA.

The Conservancy was established by the California State Legislature in 1980. It has helped to preserve over 60,000 acres of parkland in both wilderness and urban settings, and has improved more than 114 public recreational facilities throughout Southern California. Through direct action, alliances, partnerships, and joint powers authorities, the Conservancy's mission is to strategically buy back, preserve, protect, restore, and enhance treasured pieces of Southern California to form an interlinking system of urban, rural and river parks, open space, trails, and wildlife habitats that are easily accessible to the general public.

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<sup>1</sup>United States Department of the Interior-National Park Service. 2002. Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. Final General Management Plan & Final Environmental Impact Statement. July.

The Conservancy is concerned that subtle and not-so-subtle, yet consistent, proposed text changes throughout the existing 2001 management policies, if implemented, would lead to a near complete reversal of NPS practicing policy in the NPS system. These proposed changes would add up to a significantly reduced level of protection of park resources, conceivably leading to an unsustainable existence of park resources in our national parks. We touch upon only a few of the obvious examples in this letter. It would not be practical to comment on every single proposed change with these types of implications. To that end, we ask the NPS to heed the recommendations made in previous comment letters, and in this one, to consider abandoning the whole of these proposed revisions. (In the rest of this letter, new text proposed by NPS in the 2001 Management Policies is shown with an underline, and text proposed by NPS to be deleted is shown with a ~~strikeout~~.)

### **Deemphasis on Protection of Park Resources**

Repeatedly throughout the proposed revised Management Policies, the proposed changes deemphasize the importance of protecting park resources. Language in Section 1.4.3 in Chapter 1: Foundation is proposed to be deleted. This includes the following text:

~~Congress, recognizing that the enjoyment by future generations of the national parks can be ensured only if the superb quality of park resources and values is left unimpaired, has provided that when there is a conflict between conserving resources and values and providing for enjoyment of them, conservation is to be predominant.~~

Also, in Section 4.1 General Management Concepts of Chapter 4: Natural Resource Management, the following changes are proposed by NPS: "...preserving park resources and values unimpaired is the ~~core, or primary,~~ overarching responsibility of NPS managers."

The following underlined language is proposed to be added to Section 4.1 General Management Concepts:

The Service will not intervene in natural biological or physical processes, except...:

- when necessary to provide for appropriate visitor enjoyment so long as the intervention does not lead to unacceptable adverse impacts, or...

These are just a few examples where the proposed changes place less emphasis on protection of park resources, compared to the current language. The original language emphasizing protection of park resources must be retained.

### **Definition of Impairment and Consequences for Park Protection**

The revisions propose several new definitions, which could be interpreted in such a way such as to decrease protection for park resources. The following definition for impairment is proposed in the Introduction:

Impairment means a significant impact that, in the professional judgment of the responsible NPS manager, would harm the integrity of park resources or values, including the opportunity that otherwise would be present for the enjoyment of those resources or values, in violation of the NPS Organic Act.

This is an isolated new definition of impairment referenced in the Organic Act and the Redwood amendment (referenced as “derogation”), if implemented, would result in weakening of the protection of park resources.

### **Weakened Language for NPS to Address Park Use Issues**

While the language protecting park resources has been weakened in these revisions, so has the language addressing uses where they may conflict with protection of park resources. Section 3.2-Land Protection Methods (Chapter 3: Land Protection) is proposed to be revised as follows: “...in which it [the Service] only needs to ~~restrict~~ modify uses of the land in order to protect ~~resource~~ resources or values...”

In the introductory paragraph of Chapter 4: Natural Resource Management, again the intent that NPS could enforce human actions is weakened. The following changes are proposed: “The Park Service recognizes that natural processes and species are ~~evolving~~ dynamic and will ~~allow this evolution to continue, minimally influenced by human actions to evolve.~~”

In Section 4.4.2.3 Management of Threatened or Endangered Plants and Animals, the following change is proposed “...~~control~~ manage detrimental visitor access...” Again the original language should be retained.

### **Deemphasis on Land Acquisition**

Land acquisition should be retained as a method of primary importance throughout the Management Policies, particularly in Chapter 3: Land Protection. Land acquisition has been a key tool of the NPS for years, and this policy provides a significant net benefit to the American public. Changes should not be made to the Management Policies to give the perception that the ability to utilize this tool is being downgraded or compromised. While acquisition in fee simple is listed first as a method to protect park resources in Section 3.2 Land Protection Methods, it is being proposed to be swapped with the third-listed, “cooperative approaches.” (Cooperative approaches is defined in the Management Policies as: cooperative approaches, such as cooperative agreements, participated in regional consortiums, local planning and zoning processes, or other measures that do not involve federal acquisition of any interest in real property. Acquisition of less-than fee real property easements, such as easements or rights-of-way is listed second, and no change is proposed to that location.)

This section also deletes the language pertaining to the “need” for land acquisition. The proposed changes in Section 3.1-General states:

When ~~non-federal~~ nonfederal lands exist within park boundaries, acquisition of those lands and/or interests in those lands ~~is often necessary~~ may be the best way to protect and manage natural and culture resources or provide for public enjoyment.

The proposed revisions also emphasize a “minimum interest in land,” without considering looking at acquiring beyond the minimum. Section 3.3-Land Protection Plans is proposed to be changed as follows:

Land protection plans (LPPs) should be prepared to determine and publicly document ~~what~~ all nonfederal lands or interests within a park unit, the minimum interest in land need that needs to be in public ownership, and ~~what means of protection are available to achieve the purpose for which the unit was created~~ the relative priority for acquiring that interest.

Again, the original language should be retained in all these cases to maintain the emphasis on acquisition.

### **Deemphasis on Designating and Protecting Wilderness**

The proposed changes to the opening paragraph of Chapter 6: currently named Wilderness Protection and Management, are evident of the intent of the changes, that is, to deemphasize the importance of designating and protecting wilderness areas. The following language [in part] is proposed to be deleted:

~~The National Park Service will evaluate all lands it administers for their suitability for inclusion within the national wilderness preservation system. For those lands that possess wilderness characteristics, no action that would diminish their wilderness suitability will be taken until after Congress and the President have taken final action...~~

The following language [in part] is proposed to be added in its place: “The Park Service has stewardship responsibility for more designated wilderness than any other land management agency...”

Also, with respect to wilderness areas, the “preservation” text is proposed to be deleted again, to be replaced by “stewardship” language. The title of Chapter 6 is proposed to be changed from “Wilderness ~~Preservation and Management~~” to “Wilderness Stewardship.” These are just some examples where the original language protecting wilderness resources must be retained.

In summary, the Conservancy has grave concerns related to the proposed changes to the 2001 NPS Management Policies and how they pertain to protection of national parkland, including the SMMNRA, which supports resources of nation-wide significance. We encourage NPS to consider abandoning this effort to revise these policies, and instead to use that effort to continue implementing the current policies. Please direct any questions and all future correspondence to Paul Edelman, Director of Natural Resources and Planning, at the above address and by phone at (310) 589-3200, ext. 128.

Sincerely,

ELIZABETH A. CHEADLE  
Chairperson

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cc: NPS-SMMNRA