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Executive Officer

Belinda Faustinos

November 23, 2009

Martha Crusius, Project Manager
National Park Service
San Gabriel Special Resource Study
Park Planning and Environmental Compliance
1111 Jackson Street, Suite 700
Oakland, CA 94607

RE: Comments on the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains
Special Resource Study Draft Alternatives

Dear Ms. Crusius:

The Lower Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC) is grateful for the opportunity to provide comments on the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study Draft Alternatives. The RMC was established as an independent State agency within the California Natural Resources Agency to preserve urban open space and habitats in order to provide for low-impact recreation and educational uses, wildlife and habitat restoration and protection, and watershed improvements.

The goals of the RMC are described in "Common Ground", the Conservancy's Watershed and Open Space Plan (found at <http://www.rmc.ca.gov/plan/intro.html>). The Plan presents a simple vision for the future: restore balance between natural and human systems in the watersheds. The centerpiece of the Plan is a series of Guiding Principles that cities, federal, state and local agencies, communities, groups and individuals can use to plan preservation, restoration and establishment of future open space, water resources, and habitat projects. More than 60 cities in Los Angeles County have adopted this document.

The RMC has reviewed the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study Draft Alternatives. While the three alternatives presented are thoughtful and considerate of the constraints of the region the RMC would recommend that there is an alternative that covers our territory and allows for the largest potential benefits that can be derived from National Park Service involvement within the territory. There are elements from all three alternatives that are included in the alternative the RMC proposes.

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The alternative that the RMC proposes creates a National Recreation Area (NRA) that encompasses the entire study area (See Exhibit B) provided that it can be established consistent with many of the provisions which led to the formation of the RMC. The legislation language would first and foremost mandate consistency with local land use, water conservation, flood control and water quality mandates as may currently exist and are updated in the future. This option will provide the greatest amount of resources to the region, including funding for open space projects, technical assistance, and coordination between agencies.

Some member agencies of the San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments, including the water agencies and the cities of Diamond Bar and Industry have expressed concern that any designation could impact future development, regulating oversight and water projects. In order to address these concerns, RMC is recommending that any alternative be contingent upon the following conditions:

1. Protection of local water rights, preservation of our water supply (including use of adjacent lands to access that supply), and prevention of water contamination from recreational activities.
2. Provisions allowing cities or entities with water/sanitation facilities to “opt out” of any future designation.

These guarantees will protect against the impact that any new designation might have on future development or water projects, while at the same offering those agencies that are interested to access additional resources. This would also include appropriate provisions for landfills (there are currently two active landfills in the area), discharge facilities for reclaimed water, the flood control infrastructure, water conservation, water storage and others. This NRA option would also allow for the National Park Service to own and manage property within the proposed NRA.

The vision of the National Recreation Area would be to expand and protect the interconnected system of parks, habitats, and open spaces, in an effort to connect urban neighborhoods, mountains, and rivers within a broader ecosystem. Under this alternative coordinated education and interpretation would focus on connecting people to the special resources and stories of their mountains and watershed. Additionally adding access to recreational opportunities closer to home is increased and enhanced.

In this proposed alternative the Angeles National Forest and the Puente Hills are within the boundary and the special character of the San Gabriel Mountains and the associated foothills and hills are recognized in our region as a collection of nationally significant resources, a habitat connector, and an urban recreation area.

The RMC, WCA, USFS, Cities and other agencies and organizations with land and interests in the area would continue to manage their own land. Specifically, the upper watershed would continue to be operated by the USFS. In the lower portion of the watershed the operation and maintenance would continue with the existing owners. The members of this partnership would work through the partnership to develop and implement a comprehensive management strategy for the watershed's natural and cultural resources, public access and recreation opportunities, as well as interpretive and educational

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opportunities. The partnership would also develop a voluntary program throughout the rest of the watershed that would allow existing conservation and recreation-oriented sites to offer coordinated interpretation and information. Water and flood protections would continue to be managed by those currently responsible.

An information sharing network led by NPS would be established to organize, consolidate, and distribute scientific information related to the region. An urban satellite office connected to the California Mediterranean Research Learning Center at Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area would provide research and educational opportunities to communities, universities, colleges and schools. Serving as a research facility as well as information dissemination point, this partnership would serve as a model for future efforts in other areas such as the north slope of the San Gabriel Mountains, the Santa Clara River and Antelope Valley.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. If you have questions or comments, please contact Jane, Project Manager at 626.815.1019 ext. 109 or jbeesley@rmc.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Belinda V. Faustinos,
Executive Officer

Enclosure(s)

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San Gabriel & Lower Los Angeles Rivers & Mountains Conservancy Alternative for the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study

