

State of California
The Resources Agency
California Department of Parks and Recreation



Revised Notice of Preparation

Date: January 31, 2014

Project Title: Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area Interagency Trail
Management Plan EIR/EIS

This Notice of Preparation (NOP) updates the previously released NOP dated March 3, 2003 for the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area Interagency Regional Trail Management Plan. The revisions are related to revising the project schedule, public meeting dates, and due date for additional public comments.

Congressional Districts

District 26 Julia Brownley (D)
District 28 Adam Schiff (D)
District 33 Henry Waxman (D)

Senate

Barbara Boxer (D)
Dianne Feinstein (D)

In addition to the listed congressional offices, the California Department of Parks and Recreation (CDPR) and the National Park Service (NPS) have also notified state legislators, Ventura and Los Angeles Counties, and the cities of Malibu, Beverly Hills, Calabasas, Los Angeles, Agoura Hills, Thousand Oaks, Westlake Village, and Santa Monica that the EIS/EIR for the Interagency Trail Management Plan will now be prepared.

Introduction

The CDPR is the Lead Agency under the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and is considering the preparation of a joint Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) for the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area Interagency Trail Management Plan. The Trail Management Plan will serve as a "blueprint" establishing the overall direction of future development and management of the trail network. The NPS, the CDPR, and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy/Mountains Recreation & Conservation Authority (SMMC/MRCA) will be partners in the preparation of the Trail Management Plan.

CEQA Guidelines, Section 15082(a), provides that immediately after deciding that an EIR is required for a project, the CEQA Lead Agency shall prepare a Notice of Preparation (NOP) to

inform the Office of Planning and Research (OPR) and all CEQA responsible and trustee agencies of that decision. The purpose of the NOP is to provide responsible agencies and other interested parties with sufficient information describing the proposed project and its potential environmental effects to enable them to make meaningful responses as to the scope and content of the information to be included in the environmental analysis. The project description, location, and probable environmental effects that will be analyzed in the joint EIR/EIS are described in this notice.

Background:

The Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area encompasses 153,250 acres, with approximately 84,000 acres of public parkland and protected open space, with the rest in private or other government ownership. Within the national recreation area, there is a 500-mile public trail network made up of trails and dirt service roads. The greater Santa Monica Mountains trail network adjacent to the national recreation area features over 80 additional miles of public trails, several of which feed into the recreation area. Public lands and the trails in the national recreation area are managed by federal, state and local agencies with varying management policies. Additionally, much of the trail network consists of utility and old ranch roads that were inherited with the land and are not necessarily constructed to public trail management standards. After almost 35 years of continuous land acquisition, the public trail network has grown significantly, and several trails now cross parkland jurisdictional boundaries. Because much of the trail network was inherited with land acquisition, there has not been comprehensive planning to assure the trails were constructed for environmental sustainability, or to maximize visitor enjoyment and provide for a variety of recreational trail experiences.

NOP Background:

A Notice of Preparation was initially released March 15, 2003, and a Notice of Intent was originally issued in 2003 (Federal Register, Vol. 68, No. 11, January 16, 2003), with an estimated completion date of 2004 for the joint EIS/EIR. CDPR and the partner agencies held public scoping meetings in 2005 and gathered the public's input on conceptual trail policy map alternatives for crafting the draft EIS/EIR. During the initial public scoping period CDPR and the partner agencies received 320 comments. Comments typically ranged from concerns related to use designations to environmental concerns (e.g. erosion, impacts to natural resources, etc.). Owing to lack of funding, CDPR and the partner agencies were unable to continue preparation of the EIS/EIR after the 2005 public scoping effort. State and federal funding for the EIS/EIR has now been secured, and the agencies are reinitiating preparation of the trail management plan and joint EIS/EIR.

California State Parks Contact Person for Questions about the Project:

Craig Sap, District Superintendent

Angeles District

California State Parks

Address: 1925 Las Virgenes Rd.
Calabasas, CA 91302

Telephone: (818) 880-0396

Email: craig.sap@parks.ca.gov

Public Scoping:

Public scoping for a trail plan began with the Santa Monica Mountains Area Recreational Trails (SMMART) project that culminated in the 1997 SMMART Report. Comments on recreational issues were also received during preparation of the SMMNRA General Management Plan (GMP).

After the SMMART process and the SMMNRA GMP scoping, the TMP Planning Team convened in 1998. The team reviewed trail management issues and developed a detailed inventory of trails, trailheads, and camp locations throughout SMMNRA. A Recreational Visitor Survey was carried out in 2002. Trail physical conditions were recorded using the Universal Trail Assessment Process (Beneficial Designs, Inc.). In early 2003, NPS and State Parks issued a Notice of Intent and Notice of Preparation of a joint EIS/EIR. Conceptual trail map alternatives were compiled for public scoping held in September, 2005. The conceptual alternatives were not ready for analysis in a draft EIS/EIR, but rather were presented to illustrate differing trail network development directions and management emphasis. The public offered many comments on the alternatives, trail use, and on specific trails, trailheads, and camps. Lack of funding halted preparation of the TMP EIS/EIR after the 2005 public scoping. Funding has now been secured, and CDPR, NPS and partners are moving forward again with the TMP EIS/EIR.

As CEQA Lead Agency, the CDPR needs to know the views of CEQA responsible and trustee agencies as to the appropriate scope and content of the environmental information that are germane to your agency's responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. CEQA Guidelines Section 15082(b) provides that the responses of responsible and trustee agencies must be provided within 60 days after receipt of this notice. Please designate a contact person in your agency and send your response, along with appropriate contact information, to the contact information provided below.

Affected agencies, organizations, and the public are also invited to participate in a public scoping meeting for the proposed EIR/EIS consistent with the requirements of CEQA Guidelines Sec. 15082(c). Two public scoping meetings will be conducted for the project. The public scoping meetings will be held at the following dates, times, and locations identified below. Comments received during the public scoping meeting for the EIR/EIS should be limited to specific comments related to scope and breadth of the environmental analysis contained in the EIR/EIS (e.g. environmental resources, range of alternatives, etc.). Public scoping will be limited to written comments collected at the public scoping meetings or through mail, fax, or electronically (online).

Public Scoping Meeting #1
February 20, 2014 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.
 King Gillette Ranch ó Dining Hall
 26800 Mulholland Highway
 Calabasas, CA 91302

Public Scoping Meeting #2
February 22, 2014, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
 Temescal Gateway Park - Woodland Hall
 15601 Sunset Blvd.
 Pacific Palisades, CA 90272

Please send comments to:

Attention: Management Team
SMMNRA Interagency Trail Management Plan
Address: 401 W. Hillcrest Drive
Thousand Oaks, CA 91360
Fax: (805) 370-1850
Online: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/smmnra-tmp>

Due to time limits mandated by State law, please submit comments to the contact above **no later than April 1, 2014**. Include the full name, telephone number with area code, and email address of a contact person for your agency or organization with each submittal.

Project Description:

The National Park Service, the California Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy/Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority will jointly prepare a Trail Management Plan (TMP) and integrated EIS/EIR intended to establish the overall, coordinated, long-range direction of future management and development and completion of the trail network throughout Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. Based on identified desired conditions for park natural, cultural and recreational resources, the TMP will prescribe actions to support interagency management of the trail network throughout the national recreation area. The TMP will include a trail map depicting the planned trail network use designation and management actions. The planning and environmental analysis associated with the TMP could potentially result in a program that would modify current trail policies, recreational use patterns, and future trail openings and closures.

Probable Environmental Effects:

The Draft TMP EIS/EIR will address environmental and social impacts associated with the national recreation area's existing and proposed trail network and related facilities. Environmental issues will include, but not be limited to, sensitive plant and animal habitat, cultural and archaeological resource sites, erosion and water resources; soils and geology, and visitor safety. Social issues will include, but not be limited to, allowable uses and user conflicts on trails; trail network public access; compatibility with gateway communities and local neighborhoods; trail network and facilities compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act requirements. Feasibility of trail network management and operation will also be considered.

Intended Uses of the SMMNRA Trail Management Plan:

The proposed Trail Management Plan will present a long-term trail network vision for SMMNRA that NPS and each partner agency can support as the future optimum. The plan will inform NPS and partner agencies' decisions on trail network inclusions and exclusions and construction of trail-related facilities, including new trails, trailheads, backcountry camps along the 65-mile Backbone Trail, and trail directional and regulatory signage. The plan will also analyze potential impacts of trail use designation and provide the basis for completing federal and state policy requirements for recommended trail use.