

HACIENDA HEIGHTS IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION
COMMITTEE REPORT
ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE
JEFF YANN, CHAIR

MEETING DATE: June 16, 2014
SAN GABRIEL NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

PRINCIPAL ADVANTAGES OF THE PROPOSED NRA

1. All existing property rights and current land uses are protected.
2. National Park Service (NPS) oversight will bring a uniform standard of excellence to development of recreational and educational facilities throughout the NRA.
3. Heavy visitation by recreational users throughout the area included in the NRA demonstrates the critical need for enhanced recreational opportunities.
4. Initial multi-agency planning studies required by the legislation will result in a comprehensive plan and prioritization of resource needs.
5. Federal funds available through NPS can be allocated to the highest priority facility needs.
6. NPS involvement will likely focus a higher level of awareness of the importance of the Puente-Chino Hills Wildlife Corridor.
7. NPS will provide an additional safety net for maintaining local parks in the event of future funding restrictions.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This week, U. S. Representative Judy Chu introduced a bill in Congress to implement the San Gabriel National Recreation Area. Although this bill may have little chance of being passed during the current highly polarized congress, its introduction will call attention both to the importance of lands within the San Gabriel River watershed as well as the remarkable opportunity available to substantially protect and preserve this resource. It is important to remember the length of time the Desert Protection Act was introduced session after session until finally the stars aligned and it was passed, creating not only the Mojave Preserve—one of my personal favorite areas of the California desert—but also greatly expanding Death Valley and Joshua Tree National Monuments and changing their designation to National Parks.

I have reviewed the draft language of the bill and believe it provides substantial protections for all rights currently held by various agencies and property owners within the vast area covered by the NRA designation, but also provides opportunities for significantly improving the important benefits this area offers to residents of the Los Angeles basin as well as enhancing recreational opportunities it provides. The following section of the bill clearly defines these objectives for the Secretary of the Interior:

“(6) PRIORITY.—The Secretary shall give priority to actions that

(A) conserve the significant natural, historic, cultural, and scenic resources of the recreation area; and

(B) provide educational, interpretive, and recreational opportunities consistent with the purposes of the recreation area.”

The areas included within the NRA proposed in the legislation include nearly all of the Angeles National Forest and a portion of the San Bernardino National Forest west of Interstate 15. The SBNF portion was not originally included in the NPS study area but was added in response to suggestions made by many, including Joan Licari, because it adds many significant features associated with the geology of the San Andreas Fault. In addition, it includes foothill areas of the San Gabriel Mountains which many local cities have sought to protect, as well as the main stems of the San Gabriel River and Rio Hondo known as the Emerald Necklace because of its importance as a ground water and recreational resource. Of importance to our local area, it includes the Puente-Chino Wildlife Corridor east to Harbor Blvd—an area which many local cities and neighborhood Associations, including HHIA and RHCCC, have labored for decades to protect.

The Forest Service lands will continue to be managed by the Secretary of Agriculture but with oversight by the National Park Service consistent with the joint administration now common in many recently created national monuments. It is important to understand several facts about the Angeles National Forest, and the U. S. Forest Service in general, to understand the implications of this recommendation. The Forest Service is organized under the Department of Agriculture to emphasize that its primary mission was intended to be guidance of use of forest resources in a sustainable manner. Principal activities the agency oversees are logging, grazing by cattle and sheep, and mining. While most forest lands are suitable for recreation and are used for outdoor activities by many, recreation and education are not part of the core mission of the agency. As a result, limited agency resources are allocated by the Forest Service to these activities. This is especially true of the local forests where core activities are very limited.

The Angeles National Forest was established on July 1, 1908 and now covers 655,387 acres of land in the San Gabriel Mountains. In contrast to many national forests, which are located in remote areas, the Angeles National Forest comprises seventy per cent of the available recreational open space in one of the most populous counties in the United States. It receives approximately 3 million visitors from the nearby metropolis rivaling that of such prominent National Parks as Yosemite and the Grand Canyon. Yet this forest receives nothing close to a budget from which can provide services to this large number of visitors. As a result, facilities are sparse and in poor condition, with little opportunity to provide improvements.

Formation of a National Recreation Area within the watershed of the San Gabriel would bring into its management chain an agency is dedicated almost solely toward prioritizing outdoor

recreation and education while preserving these lands for the enjoyment of future generations. Although all may not agree, this admirable and seemingly contradictory goal has been managed well by the National Park Service as it approaches its 100th anniversary protecting America's natural and historic treasures. While current economic conditions may seem to limit the resources the Park Service can bring to bear to improve the enjoyment of these areas, the U.S. economy and economic fortunes of the National Park Service have both shown great resilience over the years.

MOTION: That HHIA send a letter of support for legislation by US Representative Judy Chu to implement the San Gabriel National Recreation Area.