

# San Gabriel National Recreation Area

## **History and Process**

The San Gabriel Mountains provide over 70% of L.A. County's open space and host over 3 million visitors a year.<sup>1</sup> That's almost as many visitors as major national parks like Yellowstone. But for over a decade community leaders, environmental advocates, and legislators have been concerned that this volume of people is more than the Forest Service can handle in terms of maintenance and visitor services. As a result the mountains are in desperate need of clean up, signage, guardrails, park benches, picnic areas, trash bins, restrooms, parking, and more.

In order to remedy this problem, then-Congresswoman Hilda Solis introduced a bill in January 2003 requiring the National Park Service (NPS) to conduct a study that would determine whether or not a National Recreation Area (NRA) would be possible for the region. After years of research and two extensive public comment periods, the National Park Service released its "San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study" which provided its final recommendations in April 2013 – nine long years after the process officially began.<sup>2</sup> The study declared that the San Gabriel Mountains and Watershed have diverse characteristics and unique ecosystems that do not exist anywhere else in the United States. As a result, they deserve more resources and better protection.

Once the study was completed, Congresswoman Judy Chu undertook an extensive public outreach process to determine what various stakeholders wanted to see in a San Gabriel NRA. Our office engaged in this process *before* drafting legislation. She hosted 4 stakeholder roundtables with Elected Officials, Water and Public Works Agencies, Business entities, and Environmental groups.<sup>3</sup> She held a large public town hall meeting for constituents from all over the San Gabriel Valley to voice their opinions and concerns.<sup>4</sup> She had extensive conversations with the San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments, as well as regular discussions with water agencies, non-profit groups, city councils and elected official, chambers of commerce and business representatives, utilities and sanitation, county officials from Los Angeles and San Bernardino, homeowners, and recreational groups.

As a direct result of the feedback she received from her public outreach, Rep. Chu drafted legislation for the NRA that ensures a continuation of property rights, local land control, water rights, fire management and several other priorities.

## **Why do we need an NRA to protect this area?**

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<sup>1</sup> "Draft San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment," Chapter 3, page 110, <http://www.nps.gov/pwro/sangabriel>  
California Wilderness Coalition, [http://www.calwild.org/san\\_gabriel\\_mts](http://www.calwild.org/san_gabriel_mts)  
Sierra Club, <http://www.sierraclub.org/habitat/san-gabriel/>  
"Bringing the San Gabriel Mountains Closer to the People," Rober Garcia, February 9, 2012, <http://www.kcet.org/socal/departures/columns/green-justice/national-recreation-area-in-the-san-gabriels.html>

<sup>2</sup> San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study, [http://www.nps.gov/pwro/sangabriel/San\\_Gabriel\\_SRS\\_Final\\_Recommendations\\_April\\_2013.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/pwro/sangabriel/San_Gabriel_SRS_Final_Recommendations_April_2013.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> June 21 and 24, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> September 7, 2013.

*San Gabriel Mountains* – The San Gabriel Mountains are visited by over 3 million people each year. Persistent trash, graffiti, and safety issues increase fire dangers, decrease water quality, and threaten the ecology and unique habitats of the mountains. More resources are needed to better maintain this open space while ensuring that the public can enjoy it.

*River Corridors and Puente Hills* – The river corridors and Puente Hills provide important ecological connections to the mountains. But parks in these urban areas are few and far between, and lack the resources to adequately provide opportunities for residents and to walk, jog, bike, picnic, or enjoy other outdoor recreational activities.

*Economic Value and Resources* – Studies show that national parks and recreation areas increase revenues for local economies. In fact, in 2012 national parks across the country generated \$26.75 billion in economic activity and supported 243,000 jobs. From that amount, NPS visitors spent \$14.7 billion in communities within 60 miles of a park or recreation area.<sup>5</sup> An NRA designation could bring the kind of resources and recognition that places like Santa Monica and the West Side already enjoy.

*Public Health and Environmental Justice* – Los Angeles is one of the more park-poor region in the United States. Lack of recreational opportunities – large or small – has severe impacts on urban populations struggling with obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and chronic illness.<sup>6</sup> Opportunities to enjoy outdoor activities are vital for public health and the well being of people of all ages and walks of life.

### **What are the benefits of the NRA?**

The NRA will allow the National Park Service to contribute to community-based, community-driven projects. It can help cities create more pocket parks and walking paths among their communities, as well as access points to existing trails and bike paths. It can help improve signage, and increase education about the environment, fire safety, the special history of the region, and more. In the mountains, where there are too few resources to handle the current volume of visitation, NPS could build bathroom facilities, picnic areas, and better parking grounds. Rangers could make sure trash does not end up in the rivers that supply our drinking water. Additionally, the NRA would empower communities across the area to work on projects and opportunities in a more cohesive and coordinated manner. At the moment there is no clear way to work together to develop recreational plans and projects. The NRA will create a direct path for the residents, County, Cities, US Forest

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<sup>5</sup> “2012 National Park Visitor Spending Effects: Economic Contributions to Local Communities, States, and the Nation,” National Park Service, [http://www.nature.nps.gov/socialscience/docs/NPSVSE2012\\_final\\_nrss.pdf](http://www.nature.nps.gov/socialscience/docs/NPSVSE2012_final_nrss.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> See highlighted sections, <http://www.cityprojectca.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/NPS-draft-study-SG-NRA-2012-EJ.pdf>

“L.A. ranks 45th out of 60 U.S. cities in park space; Long Beach ranks 24th in Trust for Public Land study,” Steve Scauzillo, San Gabriel Valley Tribune, <http://www.pasadenastarnews.com/lifestyle/20140530/la-ranks-45th-out-of-60-us-cities-in-park-space-long-beach-ranks-24th-in-trust-for-public-land-study>

“Parks and Recreation in Underserved Areas: A Public Health Perspective,” National Park and Recreation Association, [http://www.nrpa.org/uploadedFiles/nrpa.org/Publications\\_and\\_Research/Research/Papers/Parks-Rec-Underserved-Areas.pdf](http://www.nrpa.org/uploadedFiles/nrpa.org/Publications_and_Research/Research/Papers/Parks-Rec-Underserved-Areas.pdf)

“LA’s Median Park Size is 6.66 Acres and Other Facts About Our Crappy Park System,” James Brasuell, Curbed Los Angeles, <http://la.curbed.com/archives/2012/05/las-median-park-size-is-666-acres-and-other-facts-about-our-crappy-park-system.php>

Service, National Park Service and other entities to address needs, challenges, and opportunities. There exist several possibilities for local governments and other stakeholders to create community driven projects.

### **What does this bill actually do?**

The bill establishes the National Recreation Area as a space in which the National Park Service can apply resources and work with partners at the State, county, and local level to pursue projects the focus on sustainable recreation, education, and telling the story of the area. It creates the space and sets the parameters for different stakeholders to work together that could not otherwise easily cross jurisdictions to work together.

### **What does this bill NOT do?**

It does NOT override existing laws, rules, ordinances, plans, or regulations. It does NOT prohibit particular forms of recreation such as Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) use in existing areas. It does NOT transfer private lands to any Federal entity. It does NOT have adverse impacts on water supply or management, sanitation, utilities or fire management. It does NOT establish specific projects or programs (that will be determined later by the Partnership). It does NOT force any city to participate in any project or program. It does NOT create fees.

### **Included Recommendations from Community**

1. **Water Rights** – After working closely with water stakeholders and attorneys to negotiate appropriate water language that fully satisfies their concerns, Rep. Chu incorporated several additional pages of text to Section 6 of the bill, which is devoted to water provisions. She also incorporated substantial water related terminology as requested by water entities, the San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments (COG), individual cities. Water is fully protected so that companies and agencies can continue to deliver, without any hindrance, clean and reliable water to residents of the San Gabriel Valley.
2. **Local Control and Property Rights** – Sections 5 and 9 of the legislation explicitly ensure that NO eminent domain will be used to acquire lands. It also ensures that property rights and land use are not affected by retaining existing rights, jurisdictions, and authorities. It does not transfer any lands to the National Park Service except small parcels currently owned by the Bureau of Land Management. Rep. Chu also went further, incorporating recommended language from cities like Monrovia to specify that local plans, in addition to local laws and ordinances, must be respected. Another key addition proposed by the COG, was language specifying that nothing in the bill requires any city to participate in any program administered by NPS or Forest Service. Rep. Chu strengthened language in Section 4 and Section 8, at the request of the COG and the San Gabriel Valley Economic Partnership, regarding the NRA Partnership's role in helping to craft the management plan. Rep. Chu added to the Partnership two designees from the San Bernardino Associated Governments (SANBAG) and an additional water designee from Six Basins Watermaster. And she added language empowering the Partnership to establish a Water Technical Advisory Committee and a Public Safety Advisory Committee.
3. **Fire Management** – Nothing in the legislation adversely affects fire management and fire operations. Nonetheless, Rep. Chu adopted language from the COG in Section 4 that explicitly states this and strengthens the role of firefighting agencies.
4. **NRA Management Partnership** – The composition is reflective of the community and made up of a majority elected officials.
5. **Utilities and Sanitation** – Rep. Chu included language recommended by SoCal Edison and L.A. County Sanitation Districts to ensure that neither is negatively impacted.

6. **Roads and Transit** – Rep. Chu incorporated language suggested by SANBAG regarding roads and public transit to ensure there is no adverse effect on either of these.
7. The San Gabriel NRA is separate from the Santa Monica NRA.
8. The NRA is separate from the Wilderness and Wild & Scenic River designations
9. **Map of the boundaries** – The total acreage of the National Rec Area will be 615,245. Of that, 2,987 acres of land currently owned by the Bureau of Land Management adjacent to the Angeles National Forest lands will be transferred to the National Park Service. These lands would serve as places where the Park Service could set up offices. Rep. Chu has worked with an independent Global Imaging Services GIS mapmaker, using the GIS files provided by the National Park Service, to create a map that reflects the NRA boundaries at a very detailed level. This is not an official map from NPS. <http://bit.ly/1tOWXH3>

### **Supporters**

#### ***Local Government & Elected Officials***

City of Alhambra  
 City of Claremont  
 City of El Monte  
 City of Glendora  
 City of Monterey Park  
 City of San Gabriel  
 City of South El Monte  
 City of Rancho Cucamonga  
 City of Sierra Madre  
 Puente Hills Landfill Native Habitat Preservation Authority  
 San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments  
 San Gabriel Valley Legislative Caucus  
 LA County Supervisor Gloria Molina  
 LA County Supervisor-Elect Hilda Solis

#### ***School Districts***

El Monte Union High School District  
 El Monte City School District

#### ***Water Agencies***

San Gabriel Valley Water Association  
 San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority  
 Main San Gabriel Basin Watermaster  
 Fontana Water Company  
 San Gabriel Valley Water Company  
 Valley County Water District  
 Upper San Gabriel Municipal Water District

#### ***Community Leaders***

Jeannie Chari, Professor, Biology Department at College of the Canyons  
 Jim Bloomquist, Cabin Owner  
 Laurene West, Mayor, City of Santa Clarita (individual letter of support)  
 Joyce Shulman, Ph.D., and Angel Flight pilot

Lee M. Shulman, Ph.D., and Angel Flight pilot  
Leon Worden, President and CEO, SCVTV and SCTV News  
Peter Keller, Executive Director, Aid Africa  
Santa Clarita Trails Advisory Council

***Businesses and Business Leaders***

Adana Moses, DC & Christopher Vargas, DC – Owners, Innate Family Chiropractic  
Adventure 16 (Outdoor and Travel Outfitters)  
ALG Aviation  
Alternative Health Care Concepts  
Art CreActive Marketing Solution  
Antelope Valley Florist  
Bob Ota – Owner, Johnny’s Sport Shop  
Bradley J. Kirst, DDS - Owner, Kirst Family Dentistry  
Clare Macauley, DDS  
Coach RJ Foot Fitness  
Countries and Crossroads Travel  
Culinary Wonders Cooking School  
Daniel Sterkel - General Manager, Nissan of Valencia  
Daniel Yoo, Realtor  
Eve’s Wine 101  
Insurance SCV  
Jack Kazarian – Owner, Unicar Auto Body  
Jayne Ann Saporito-Stucker, author  
Joe Kroening – President, Andy’s Transfer & Storage  
Joyce Evans – Owner, Evans Appraisal Service  
Just My Style Radio  
Law Offices of Linda Castro  
Law Offices of Ross A. Stucker  
Line Jumper Talents (A Division of National Geographic)  
Michael Daney, CPA  
Michael Shaar – President, S.I.G. Property  
Mosaic Services, Inc.  
NOHOJO Jewelry  
Ole Time Painting  
Ramsey-Shilling Associates  
Realty Executives Santa Clarita  
Realty World Legends  
Robin Becerra, Realtor, Dilbeck Real Estate  
Robroy “Sandy” McGregor, Realtor  
Ron Jones - Founder & President - The Lean Berets  
Sand Canyon Homeowners Association  
Santa Barbara Art Glass Studio  
Santa Clarita Valley Latino Chamber of Commerce  
SketchPad  
Sparr Heights District Business Association  
Spreebird  
Sue McGregor, Realtor

Vanessa Vandersande, DMV – Owner, Cooper Hill Animal Clinic  
Vibe Performing Arts Studios

***Non-profit Organizations***

Anahuak Youth Soccer Association  
Amigos de Los Ríos  
Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council (A3PCON)  
Asian Youth Center  
Boys and Girls Club of Santa Clarita Valley  
Boy Scouts of America, Troop #2379  
California Wilderness Coalition  
The City Project  
Climate Resolve  
Community Hiking Club of Santa Clarita  
COFEM (Council of Mexican Federations in North America)  
Crescenta-Cañada Rotary Club  
Equestrian Trails Inc. Coral 35  
Friends of the River  
Gibbon Conservation Center  
Girl Scouts of America, Troop #4362  
Girls Today, Women Tomorrow  
Hands on Earth  
National Parks Conservation Association  
NatureBridge  
The Oldtimers Foundation  
Outward Bound LA  
The Pew Charitable Trusts, U.S. Public Lands program  
San Gabriel Valley Conservation Corps  
Santa Clara Upper Watershed Conservancy  
Santa Clarita Valley Archeological Society  
Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society  
The Sierra Club  
The Wilderness Society