



NPS Revises Study Scope

Newsletter 3 ■ February 2006

The National Park Service (NPS) has revised the scope of the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study to address comments provided during the study’s initial public comment period. Revisions and adjustments have been made both to the overall study approach and to the area which will be studied.

Background

In January of 2005, the NPS announced the start of the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study. In a special resource study, the NPS evaluates the natural and cultural resources of an area, identifies opportunities for public enjoyment and recreation, determines if any resources are eligible for NPS designation or some other form of protection, and provides a report to Congress and the local community with recommendations for the protection and public enjoyment of natural and cultural resources.

The NPS introduced the study in a newsletter and at meetings with organizations, agencies, elected officials, and the public. Many communities, elected officials, agencies, organizations and individuals provided comments on the initial proposed study approach, important resources that should be included in the study, the potential impacts of the study, the scope and size of the study area, and the range of possible study outcomes. A summary of these comments was included in Newsletter #2 and posted on the study website. The revisions to the study described in this newsletter are based on those comments and on additional discussions with stakeholders.

Revised Study Approach

The revised approach to the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study seeks to bring together the NPS process for special resource studies with the realities of a densely populated urban area managed by many different landowners, agencies and jurisdictions. With this revised approach, the primary emphasis of the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study will be to identify opportunities for collaborative management and partnerships among local, state and federal governments and other entities, in order to:

- ❑ Address current and future recreation and open space needs;
- ❑ Protect or restore significant natural resources and important habitats;
- ❑ Preserve historic and cultural resources;
- ❑ Maintain or improve water quality, water conservation and flood protection.

The study’s recommendations will be based on:

- ❑ A comprehensive analysis of recreation and conservation needs in the San Gabriel watershed and mountains;
- ❑ Resource analysis and determination of whether there are nationally significant resources in the area that might be appropriate for further NPS involvement;
- ❑ Community involvement and input from local jurisdictions and agencies, resource specialists, landowners, residents, and other stakeholders.

Existing Agencies and Local Control

In conducting this study, the NPS will only consider management alternatives which respect property rights and the authorities that currently belong to existing local, state and federal agencies (*see box, p. 4*). Local support will be a key factor in any recommendation considered by the NPS.

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Revised Study Area

The NPS has revised the study area based on analysis of the intent of Congress, public comments, ecological systems, recreational opportunities and important natural and cultural resources. The revisions include a different definition of the southern edge of the study area, and additions around the Rio Hondo Channel, Santa Anita Wash and Sawpit Wash.

Congress tells the NPS what to study in an NPS special resource study through legislation authorizing the study. When a more specific definition is needed, the NPS interprets the legislation. The San Gabriel River Watershed Study Act directed the NPS to conduct a special resource study of (1) the San Gabriel River and its tributaries north of and including the city of Santa Fe Springs, and (2) the San Gabriel Mountains within the territory of the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC). The NPS presented an initial interpretation of the study area in a newsletter and at community meetings in the region, and sought public comment on that interpretation.

The following sections explain our analysis and reasoning in revising the study area. (*See map on p. 3*)

Requests from Cities and Elected Officials to be removed from the study area. Several communities and elected officials requested that certain areas be removed from the study. The NPS reviewed the Congressional direction for the study, and determined that certain areas could be removed, while others were clearly part of the study area as defined by Congress. The NPS has tried to address the specific concerns of these cities and elected officials through a revised approach to the overall study. This is just the beginning of a study process and these areas will not necessarily be included in the study's recommendations.

Tributaries vs. watershed focus. Some public comments asserted that the study should focus on the tributaries rather than the watershed of the San Gabriel River. Based on the use of the word "watershed" in the study area legislation, and discussions with Congresswoman Hilda Solis and others involved in the development of the legislation, the NPS position is that the study was intended to include the watershed, not just the river corridor and tributaries. Of course, there are many areas within the watershed that have little or no recreation, conservation or park potential, and those considerations will be acknowledged throughout the study process.

Ecological integrity. To the extent possible, the revised study area includes entire watersheds and habitat areas. Where splitting or segmenting important ecological communities and watersheds is unavoidable, the NPS will analyze and assess those resources as a whole.

Study Area Changes

The following sections explain the changes to geographic locations of the revised study area:

■ DEFINITION OF THE STUDY AREA AT THE CITY OF SANTA FE SPRINGS (SOUTHERN AREA)

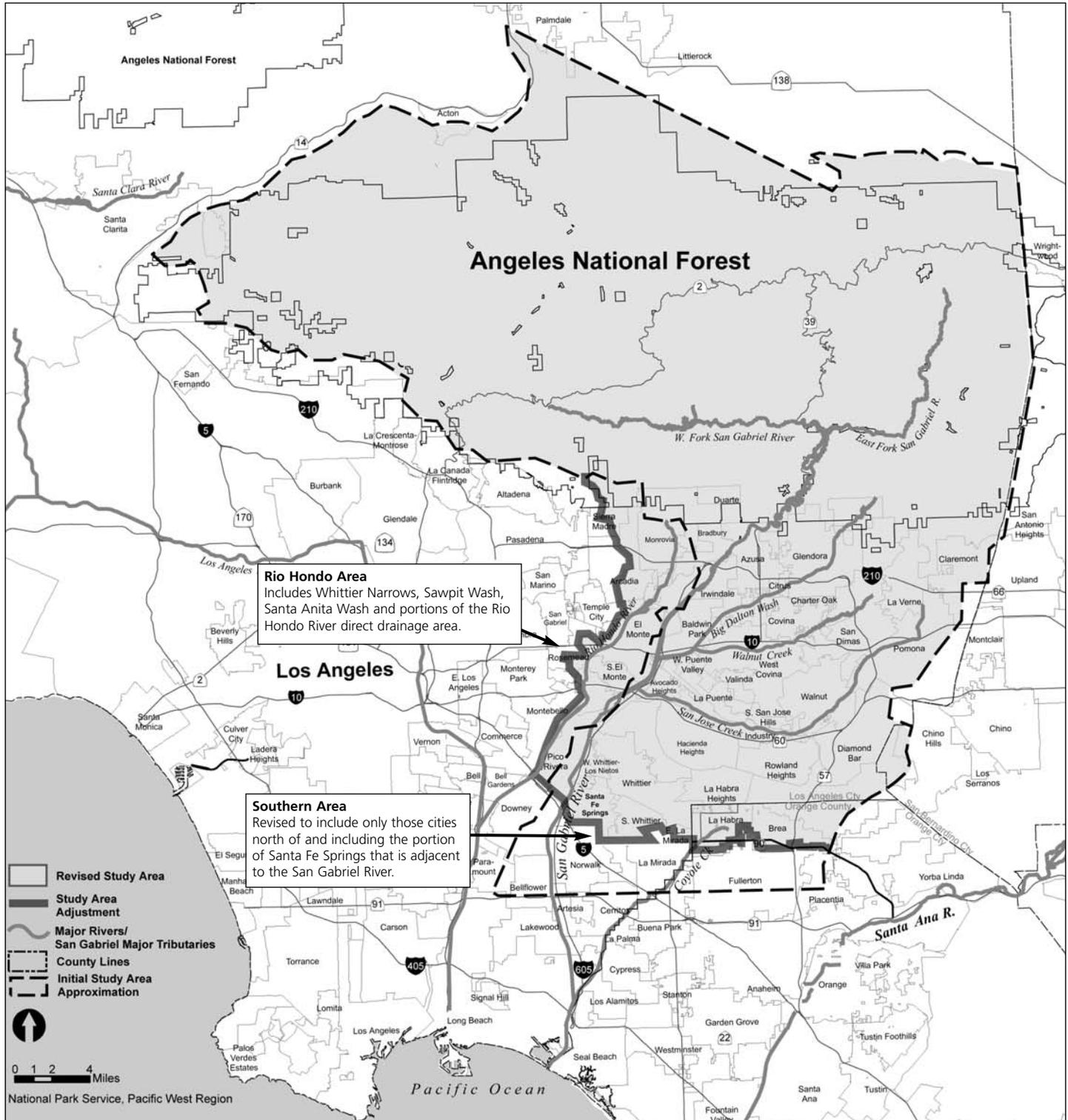
The study legislation describes the study area as including the San Gabriel River and its tributaries, north of and including the City of Santa Fe Springs. Based on further discussions about the history of this legislation, the study area has been revised to include only those cities north of and including the portion of Santa Fe Springs that is adjacent to the San Gabriel River, rather than the southernmost boundary of Santa Fe Springs. The following cities will therefore no longer be included in the study area: Bellflower, Buena Park, Cerritos, Downey, La Mirada, Norwalk, Paramount, Fullerton, and Placentia.

■ INCLUSION OF AREAS IN THE RIO HONDO WATERSHED (RIO HONDO AREA)

Some commenters requested that the Rio Hondo River or its watershed be included in the study area because of its hydrological connections to the San Gabriel River and the opportunities these connections offer for recreation and habitat enhancement.

Portions of the Rio Hondo Channel direct drainage area north of and including Pico Rivera, Santa Anita Wash, and Sawpit Wash watersheds have been added to the study area. The addition includes larger portions of cities that were partially within the original study area proposal (Arcadia, Bradbury, Duarte, Monrovia, Irwindale, El Monte, Pico Rivera, Sierra Madre, and South El Monte), and very small portions of Temple City, Rosemead, and Montebello, cities which were previously not considered part of the study area. Additional areas in the Whittier Narrows recreational area are also included.

Revised Map of Approximate Study Area



Rio Hondo Area
Includes Whittier Narrows, Sawpit Wash, Santa Anita Wash and portions of the Rio Hondo River direct drainage area.

Southern Area
Revised to include only those cities north of and including the portion of Santa Fe Springs that is adjacent to the San Gabriel River.

What does it mean to be in a study area? The study area is not a proposal for a national park. It is simply an area in which the National Park Service is asked to evaluate resources. As the study team learns about resources in the study area, the focus of the study becomes narrower. For example, the study team may find that there are several small areas such as a section of a river or a historic building that are eligible for NPS designation or assistance. Once significant resources are

identified, the NPS will explore a range of options or alternatives to protect these resources and provide for public enjoyment. These alternatives may focus on specific historic sites, creeks or trail/open space corridors with exceptional resource values. These alternatives will emphasize collaborative efforts and will respect property rights and the authorities that currently belong to existing local, state and federal agencies and jurisdictions.

Existing Agencies, Local Governments, and Private Property Rights

Many people expressed concerns about how the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study might impact existing agencies, jurisdictions, and property owners. In order to address these concerns, the NPS revised the overall approach to the study to focus on collaborative opportunities with other organizations, and will only consider management alternatives which respect property rights and the authorities that currently belong to existing local, state and federal agencies and jurisdictions (*see p. 1*):

- **Private Property Rights** – In the management alternatives for this study, the NPS will emphasize collaborative projects with other organizations. The NPS will only consider land acquisition or land management alternatives in specific areas that are found to be nationally significant and meet NPS criteria for suitability* and feasibility**, and where there are willing sellers / landowners. The NPS will not consider alternatives that would involve land acquisition by eminent domain.
- **Local Land Use Authorities** – The NPS will only consider alternatives that respect and retain the local land use authority of jurisdictions within the study area. Opportunities for regional cooperation and collaboration or assistance to local jurisdictions will be explored. The NPS collaborates with local jurisdictions in many areas without changes in land ownership or management.
- **Existing Regulatory Agencies** – The NPS will only consider alternatives that respect and retain existing decision-making and regulatory authorities, including authorities over flood protection and water supply. Opportunities for collaboration with these agencies to address multiple objectives will be explored. For example, there may be opportunities to provide habitat and recreational opportunities that could also improve water quality, provide water retention for flood protection or contribute to water conservation. The Los Angeles County Department of Public Works already works collaboratively with other local and state agencies on achieving such objectives.
- **Water and Infrastructure** – The NPS will only consider alternatives that will respect existing water rights, water supply, flood protection, drainage and public infrastructure.
- **Angeles National Forest** – The NPS will only consider alternatives that retain US Forest Service management of the Angeles NF, and the study will not reopen policy issues decided in the recent forest planning process. Opportunities for collaboration or assistance from the National Park Service will be considered. For example, the NPS could work with the US Forest Service in examining ways to address the growing demand for recreational opportunities and habitat management in the Forest and the high levels of visitation in the San Gabriel Canyon.

* "Suitable" areas include significant resource types that are not already found in the national park system or are not currently protected for their resource values by another land managing organization.

** "Feasible" areas must have local and landowner support, be of adequate size and configuration to allow for resource protection and visitor enjoyment, and be manageable at a reasonable cost.

What Roles Could the NPS Play?

When many people think of national parks, they think of the large and mostly natural parks like Yosemite and Yellowstone. However, the national park system includes many types of sites including national historic sites, national monuments, national preserves, and wild and scenic rivers. Many are smaller parks located in urban areas, which rely on partnerships and may have little, if any, federal landownership or management. The NPS also offers grant and technical assistance programs that help local communities achieve their goals for conservation and recreation.

We have prepared a set of case studies (*see newsletter insert*) illustrating NPS roles in urban areas, including descriptions of small historic sites, parks at which we manage little or no land, and grant and technical assistance programs. We hope that these case studies provide you with a broader understanding of the ways in which the NPS works in urban and developed areas.

What Roles Could the NPS Play in the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains?

As the study progresses, the study team, with your input, will begin to consider alternatives that explore collaborative opportunities and smaller NPS roles, as well as opportunities that do not include any long-term NPS role. The NPS could provide assistance to or collaborate with interested agencies and local communities and offer ideas on how the region can work together to provide additional opportunities for recreation, public enjoyment, and the protection of significant resources. Some resources may be eligible for NPS designation, grants, or assistance. The NPS will only consider acquiring or managing land in specific areas that are found to be nationally significant and meet NPS criteria for suitability and feasibility, and where there are willing sellers/landowners (*see box at left*).

Resource Analysis and Recreation Assessment Underway

This winter the NPS study team began work on the resource analysis phase of the study process which includes:

- Resource inventories and determination of whether there are nationally significant natural or cultural resources in the area that might be appropriate for further NPS involvement.
- A comprehensive analysis of recreation and conservation needs and opportunities in the San Gabriel watershed and mountains;

The team will continue to conduct this research and analysis through the spring with existing information, and we will work with scientists, historians, local researchers, community members and others who know the area's resources.

Evaluation of the Natural and Cultural Resources

The NPS study team will compile an inventory of natural and cultural resources in the San Gabriel watershed and mountains. After this information is compiled, the NPS will evaluate whether any of these resources are nationally significant. The NPS considers a resource to be nationally significant if it is an outstanding example of a particular type of resource, it possesses exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting our nation's heritage, it offers superlative opportunities for public enjoyment or for scientific study, and it retains a high degree of integrity as a true, accurate and relatively unspoiled example of a resource.

Examples of the types of natural and cultural resources that may be nationally significant include:

- A critical refuge that is necessary for the continued survival of a species.
- A site that has invaluable ecological or geological importance due to an extensive and long-term record of research and scientific discovery.
- A resource importantly associated with the lives of persons nationally significant in United States history.
- A resource associated with events that significantly contributed to and are identified with broad national patterns of United States history.

Recreation and Conservation Needs

This analysis will look at the existing recreational resources and conservation areas in the study area (e.g. parks, trails, open space) and determine whether communities in the San Gabriel watershed and mountains have adequate access to these types of resources. Several initiatives to assess recreation needs in the Los Angeles Region are underway by local organizations. The NPS will build on and coordinate with these existing efforts. The NPS will also assess current efforts to provide more opportunities for recreation and explore new opportunities and approaches for recreation and conservation in the area.

This analysis will inform the next step in the study process, identifying study "alternatives." Alternatives are a collection of potential actions assembled to provide a range of reasonable options for conservation and recreation opportunities in the study area.

Do you have information to share?

Please let us know if you can provide information on your community's history, natural resources and recreational areas that you think would help our analysis.

You can call Barbara Butler Baunsgard (510) 817-1322 or Jean Boscacci (510) 817-1422. You can also send information to us by letter or e-mail (pwrsangabriel@nps.gov).



Little Tujunga Canyon, NPS photo

What do you mean by . . . ?

A glossary of terms used in this study

Scope: The “scope” of the special resource study refers to the overall approach to the study - the area being studied, the goals or focus of the study, the issues under consideration, and the relationship of this study to other projects or studies.

Alternatives/Management Alternatives: A collection of potential actions assembled to provide a range of reasonable options to address certain goals or objectives.

Open Space: Open space could be any land that is not developed for urban use. This may include natural areas set aside to protect plants or wildlife; land used for agriculture, resource extraction, recreational areas or areas unsuitable for development either due to a potential hazard (such as slide areas or floodplains) or due to other conservation purposes. In this study, “open space” implies areas that are in a reasonably natural state and that can serve as wildlife habitat in addition to public access for passive forms of recreation.

Recreation: Recreational use may be designated active, passive or both. Passive use refers to activities that are generally low impact such as hiking, fishing, picnicking, bird watching, or non-motorized boating. Areas for active recreational use may include facilities designed for sports such as soccer or baseball, lakes for motorboats and jet skis, bicycle trails or equestrian trails.

Recreational needs: In many urban communities there is a need for more access to parks, open space and other recreational opportunities.

National Significance: Statements of why, within a national, regional, and system wide context, an area's resources and values are important enough for national park designation.

Suitability: The NPS considers a resource to be suitable for inclusion in the national park system if it 1) is not already adequately represented in the national park system or 2) is not comparably represented and protected for public enjoyment by other entities.

Feasibility: National Park Service management can only be included in the alternatives if the NPS considers it to be feasible. NPS management will be considered feasible only if the area has adequate size and configuration to allow for resource protection, visitor enjoyment, and can be administered at a reasonable cost. Other considerations include land ownership, access, threats to the resource, staff and development requirements and public support.

Tributary: A body of water flowing into a larger body of water. For example, San Jose Creek is a tributary of the San Gabriel River (see adjacent figure).

Watershed: A watershed is the area of land that catches rain and snow which drains or seeps into a given marsh, stream, river, lake, or groundwater basin. The adjacent figure shows the watershed and tributaries of the San Gabriel River.

We all live in a watershed and our individual actions can directly affect it. Homes, farms, ranches, forests, small towns, big cities and more can make up watersheds. Some cross county, state, and even international borders.

Watersheds come in all shapes and sizes. Some are millions of square miles; others are just a few acres. Just as creeks drain into rivers, watersheds are nearly always part of a larger watershed.



Lashbrook Park in El Monte, NPS photo



Next Steps

The San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study is still in the early stages. Future steps in the study process will include:

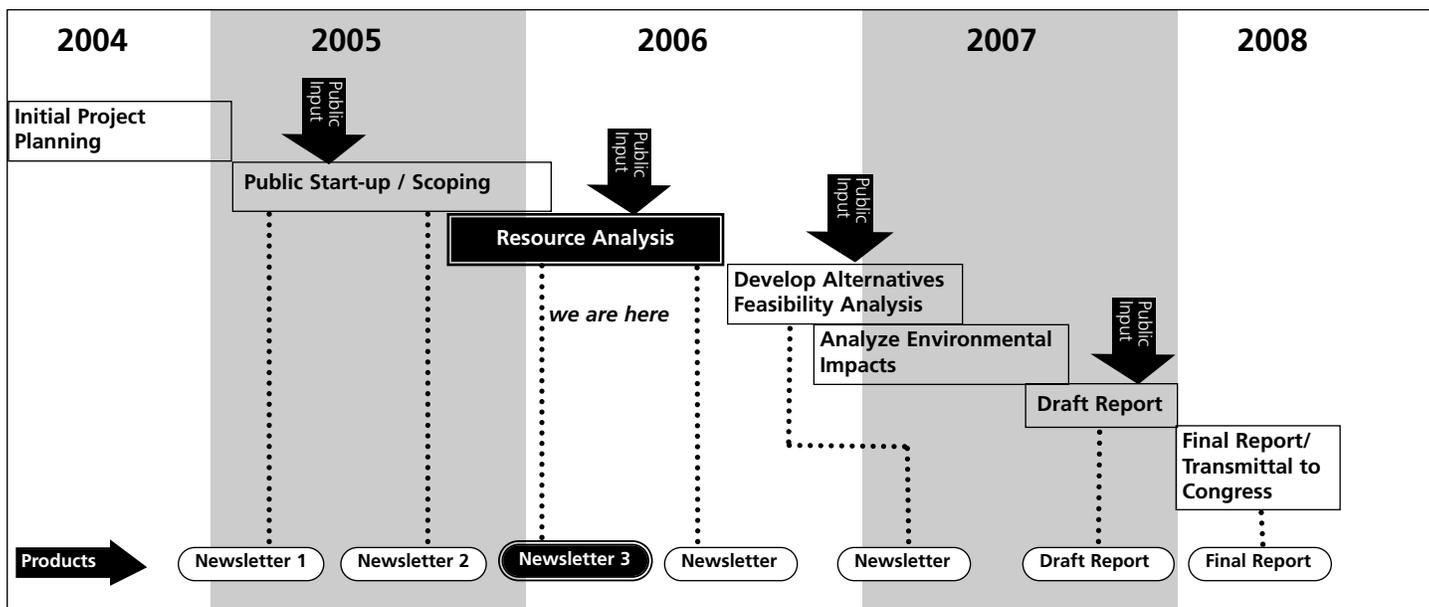
- ▣▣▣▣ **Resource analysis:**
 Explore recreation and conservation needs; identify nationally significant natural and cultural resources. *(See p. 5 for more information)*
- ▣▣▣▣ **Alternatives development:**
 Identify opportunities for collaborative management and partnerships to protect resources, provide for open space and recreation and other community needs; based on community input and resource analysis.
- ▣▣▣▣ **Ongoing community involvement:**
 Continue meetings and conversations with stakeholders to discuss ideas and concerns about the study, and gather information for the study's resource analysis and development of recommendations and alternatives.

How to Stay Involved

This study depends on input from you. There will be opportunities throughout the study process to provide comments and information. Your ideas will be combined with resource analysis and NPS criteria to develop the study's findings and recommendations. We will send out newsletters to report back to you on what we learn throughout the study process. You may contact us at any time throughout the study.

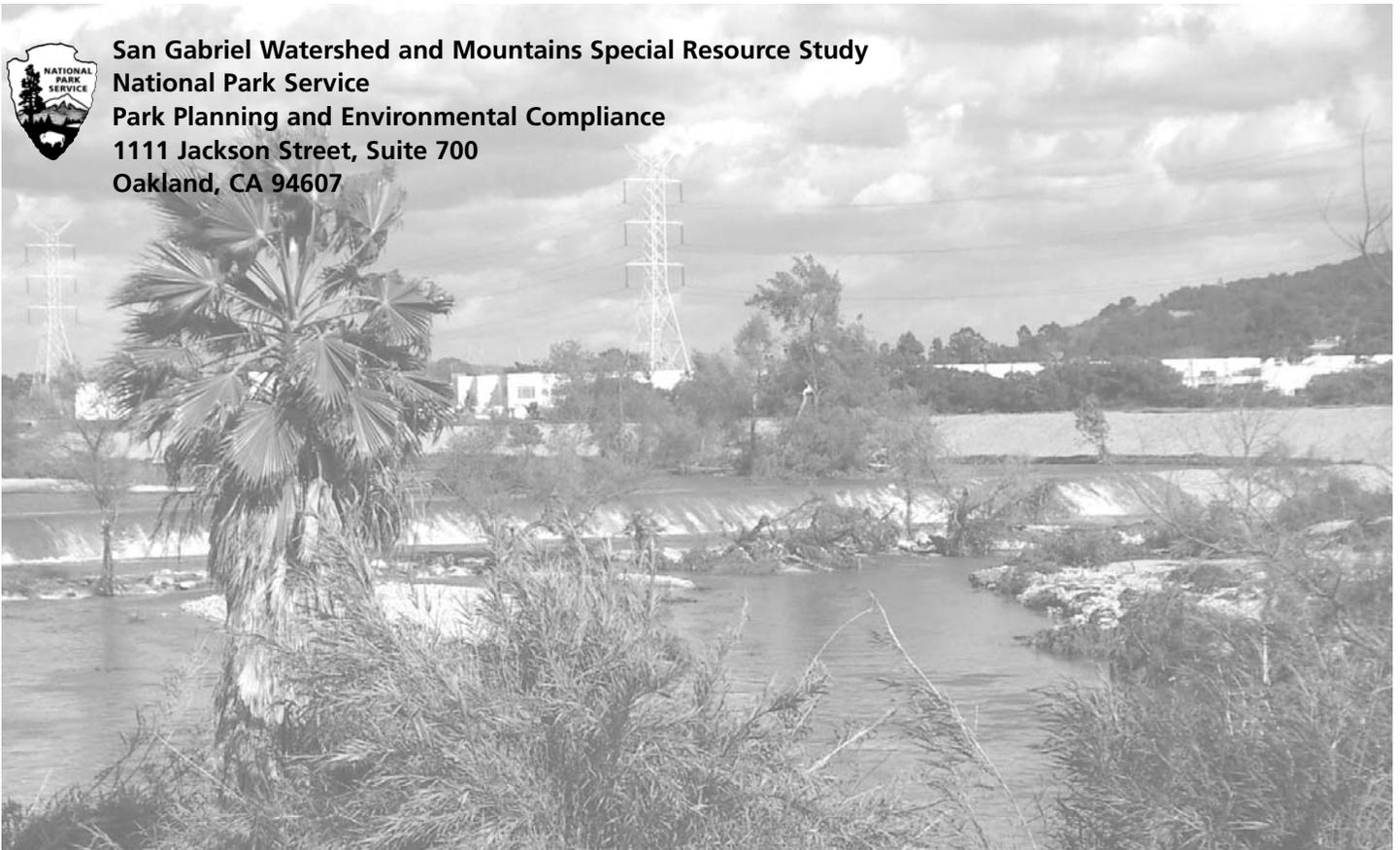
- ▣▣▣▣ Send us your thoughts, comments, and information by letter, e-mail (pwr_sangabriel@nps.gov), or through the study web site (www.nps.gov/pwro/sangabriel).
- ▣▣▣▣ Watch for announcements about future public meetings or workshops to share information, discuss issues, concerns, and potential outcomes.

Project Timeline





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Whittier Narrows, NPS photo

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Visita la página web del estudio (www.nps.gov/pwro/sangabriel) para ver este boletín en español, o pida una copia del equipo de estudio.