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development concept plan and
finding of no significant impact

march 1983

SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS
PARAMOUNT RANCH



NATIONAL RECREATION AREA / CALIFORNIA

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RECOMMENDED:

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National Recreation Area

January 25, 1983

APPROVED:

Howard H. Chapman
Regional Director, Western Region

February 8, 1983

DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT PLAN
AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Paramount Ranch
Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area
California

Denver Service Center
National Park Service
United States Department of the Interior

CONTENTS

Development Concept Plan / 1

Finding of No Significant Impact / 13

MAPS

Site Plan / 9

Spatial Analysis / 11

DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT PLAN

BACKGROUND

Three alternatives were developed and analyzed in the Environmental Assessment For A Development Concept Plan, Paramount Ranch, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, California, which was published in July 1982. The alternatives provided for a variety of outdoor recreational and educational activities, visitor use of existing structures, continued use of the western town for filming, and extensive site rehabilitation. In addition, alternative A proposed new facilities for equestrian use and an activity center complex in the Longhorn area. A major component of alternative B proposed creation of a historical water feature through the extension of Malibu Lake into Paramount Ranch. The third alternative, the minimal action alternative, would maintain the area in its existing condition with some modifications to improve health and safety.

The environmental assessment and a summary brochure were sent out in early August 1982. Two public meetings were held by the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area Advisory Commission during the 60-day review period to hear public comments on the alternatives. The meetings were held on August 23 at Taft High School and August 28 at Paramount Ranch. Approximately 80 people attended the meetings, representing a variety of interest groups including equestrians, camper associations, special event organizers, conservation groups, and nearby homeowners. In addition, 15 letters were received. Public comments and the recommendations of the advisory commission were considered and resulted in the selection of a preferred alternative that includes elements of both alternatives A and B. This preferred alternative constitutes the final development concept plan for Paramount Ranch.

FINAL PLAN

Planning for Paramount Ranch reflects the need to have maximum site flexibility so that the area can accommodate many people during large events or a few people for small-scale outdoor activities and nature study. Many areas will be designed to perform more than one function. In addition to the need for flexibility, public comments strongly urged retention of the existing rural character of the ranch. Although the ranch will have heavy use on some days, the rural character of the site will be retained. Valuable natural values will be protected, and when possible, restored by the plan. The plan proposes minimal construction of new facilities.

The final plan is described in the following narrative and on the Site Plan map. Proposals are described by location and are keyed to the Spatial Analysis map, which divides the ranch into different areas based upon landscape characteristics.

Site 1 - Expansive Grasslands

This site features a large expanse of rolling grasslands with groves and individual specimens of large mature valley oaks.

Site 1a - Entrance Area and Longhorn/Woodshop Complex. The central location of this area to the entire ranch makes it an ideal entry and staging point. The main entrance is located at the north end, where there is adequate sight distance for inbound and outbound traffic. The Longhorn/woodshop complex will serve as an activity center and focal point for Paramount Ranch. Information on and orientation to the ranch and recreational opportunities in the surrounding region will be provided here, along with a shaded area for people to rest and relax. Food service, with a few simple but hearty refreshments, an area for showing films, and books and publications on mountain resources will also be available in the complex. Any sales of educational materials and light refreshments should be handled by a docent or nonprofit organization.

More extensive landscape planting around the activity center will enhance the sense of arrival and entry to Paramount Ranch. Native and drought-tolerant species will be used and interpreted. Additional plantings along Cornell Road will further separate and delineate the ranch from traffic and noise, as well as from the surrounding residences. The Longhorn/woodshop buildings will be renovated and used for a variety of activities both within and around the structures. Different programs could go on concurrently or separately. Nature classes, square dances, and ranger interpretive talks about the ranch's colorful history are just a few of the potentials available.

A comfort station will be provided in the Longhorn/woodshop complex, and a major pedestrian corridor will link this activity center across the creek to the western town.

A linear paved parking area for 200 cars will be provided near Cornell Road to serve the normal day-to-day visitor needs. The remaining open space between the parking area and Medea Creek will be seeded with durable grasses or ground cover that could be irrigated periodically to extend use of the area. When needed, the area will be used for overflow parking for events. For most of the year, however, the area will be available for unstructured, open-space recreation. Irrigation water will conform to health and safety standards associated with irrigation of public recreation land.

At the present time, an equestrian riding ring is located in this area. If this location proves unsatisfactory through future monitoring, the ring will be moved to a permanent location in site 1b north of the oak restoration area. Additional parking requirements associated with major events will eventually be provided offsite by the sponsor of the event. In the future, use of offsite parking and shuttle service will reduce the amount of open space devoted to automobiles and encourage use by people instead. Parking in other than designated areas will be phased out over the next five to ten years as event sponsors are able to locate suitable areas for parking offsite. When the plan is fully implemented, it is estimated that approximately 2,000 spaces will be available in designated parking and overflow areas on the ranch.

The existing access road will be rehabilitated as needed. The road from Cornell Road to the Longhorn area will be retained as a service road and for emergency access.

Creek crossings will be constructed and rehabilitated at several locations. A cement base will be placed at the northernmost crossing in the creek channel and just north of the western town to provide apron ford crossings. This method will be a considerable improvement over the current use of culverts covered with fill material that wash out in heavy rains. The existing bridge that links the Longhorn area with the western town will be retained. Wooden footbridges are also proposed for two locations. Any crossing and/or bridge across Medea Creek will be reviewed by the Los Angeles County Flood Control District for location, span, and clearance.

Site 1b - Oak Restoration Area and Equestrian Riding Ring. This broad open area has magnificent views to Sugarloaf Mountain. Picturesque valley oaks occur throughout this grassland and add to the grand scale of space. Two features are proposed--an oak restoration area and an equestrian riding ring.

The oak restoration area will be a positive beginning in preserving the life cycle of this valley oak community, which has been 90 percent decimated in California. Research projects will be carried out by scientists concerned with preservation, natural rejuvenation, and propagation of valley oaks and their habitat. Some of the oaks will be fenced off from the public for research purposes, while others will be accessible to pedestrians. Visitors will be able to picnic beneath these magnificent trees or just sit, relax, and enjoy the shade. Interpretation of the oak restoration area will be provided in an information display. An aesthetic buffer of fencing and/or native shrubs and trees will provide a visual screen along Cornell Road and between the adjacent homes from any activities occurring at the ranch. With the addition of fences and shrubbery, the approach to the ranch from the north will be visually enhanced and will create a further sense of entry and arrival to the national recreation area.

As previously mentioned, an equestrian ring is located in site 1a. As this plan is implemented, circulation difficulties (car, horse trailer, and pedestrian) may require that the ring be moved to a permanent location that is separated from other uses of the ranch and less congested. If the ring must be moved, its permanent location will be in an open grassy area away from the oaks. Fencing to delineate the oak restoration area will further define the adjacent area for the trailers and cars associated with the equestrian activities. Equestrian-oriented programs could be observed from various points surrounding the ring. Hitching posts and water will be provided nearby. Because equestrian staging facilities are proposed by the California Department of Parks and Recreation at Malibu Creek State Park, no additional equestrian staging facilities are proposed at Paramount Ranch.

Sites 1c and 1d - Adjacent Private Property. These areas are in private ownership, and the National Park Service can make no future plans for their use.

Site 1c is a large open slope facing Paramount Ranch. It contains numerous bowls and shaded drainages that separate the area from adjacent traffic and residential areas. The Renaissance Pleasure Faire has been held here for the last 16 years. This area includes the actual festival presentation site, while logistic support has traditionally taken place at Paramount Ranch. Both properties have, in combination, allowed the successful staging and production of the Renaissance Faire. In the event that the privately owned lands can continue to be leased as the site of the Faire, the National Park Service will also continue to work with the Faire sponsors to provide necessary logistic support.

Side 1d is a cluster of level grassy meadows formed by the meandering Medea Creek. It is adjacent to residential development and provides a foreground for a fleeting first view of the Paramount Ranch from Cornell Road.

Sites 1c and 1d have many possibilities for future private and/or public use and provide opportunities for compatible transition from the freeway corridor to park land. The opportunities for working with the landowner are unknown at this point. The relationship between these privately owned areas and Paramount Ranch will therefore not be defined in this document.

Site 2 - Western Town and Special Events Area

This area includes several small open spaces enclosed by low chaparral-covered hills that offer magnificent views to Sugarloaf Mountain and Castro Ridge. The central focus for the area is a complex of buildings that re-create a western town through the use of structural facades.

Once within the town, the ambience suggests an era long past. The saloon, hotel, hitching posts, and other town features are reminiscent of Hollywood westerns, qualities cherished by the film industry as much as by the people who visit these sets. The sets also provide one of only two working western sets still available in the Los Angeles area.

The western town will continue to be used for filming and interpretation. As is the case with all working sets, the building facades will change with different filming requirements, creating a dynamic quality to the town. The changes in the sets will conform to the colorful western theme already established. Modifications to the facades will contribute to the versatility of activities offered at Paramount Ranch and will allow for maintenance of the sets by movie companies. There is a unique opportunity for visitors to use their imaginations to relive an era and to observe filming.

Several small open spaces in site 2 will be improved to enhance their use for small-scale events and recreational uses. A small rustic amphitheater will be built into an embankment to provide seating for 50 to 100 people on grassy slopes east of Medea Creek. A picnic area will be located under an existing grove of eucalyptus trees just west of the western town. The barn in the western town will be retained for operations and

maintenance needs. Another structure in the town will be rehabilitated as a pavilion where dancing, crafts programs, little theater productions, and sheltered picnicking could occur.

The special events area, which has been heavily impacted and modified, will be regraded and revegetated. A portable stage will be available to accommodate a variety of productions, including concerts, folk dance demonstrations, and ranger interpretive programs in the special events area. Irrigation will lengthen the season of use in the open special events area and add increased flexibility to the site's year-round capabilities for family and group picnicking and events. Ground covers and grasses that are native or naturalized and that are durable and drought-tolerant will be introduced; manicured lawns are not proposed. Future irrigation water will conform to health and safety standards associated with irrigation of public recreation land. An intermittent stream that separates the special events area from the western town will be recontoured and revegetated to create a more natural appearance.

Site 3 - Mulholland Picnic Area

The southern portion of the ranch that faces Mulholland Drive is separated from the rest of the ranch by a large flat knoll. A picnic area with walk-in access is proposed here. Landscaping will enhance the picnic area and provide a buffer from the road. Hitching posts will be provided for equestrian use. Overflow parking during major events will also be accommodated here.

Malibu Creek State Park offers a wide variety of equestrian and hiking experiences. A trail from Paramount Ranch into the state park will link the two public recreation areas. An existing residence along Cornell Road will provide housing for a ranch caretaker, who will be available to respond to emergency situations.

Site 4 - Natural Knoll

A large knoll provides a separation between the isolated internal areas of the ranch and those spaces adjacent to the road. An interpretive loop trail will begin at Medea Creek and wind to the top of the knoll to take advantage of panoramic views and to provide a more intensive look at the natural systems associated with riparian, chaparral, and woodland environments.

Site 5 - Water Feature in Medea Creek

Historically, adjacent Malibu Lake extended into Paramount Ranch, but heavy rains and siltation from upstream filled the portion of the lake on the ranch.

Because of the lack of water features within the Santa Monica Mountains, the addition of a lake would be an attractive element of the ranch. In the Potential Visitor Use Survey (USDI, NPS, SMMNRA 1981), the desire

for water as a part of the recreational opportunities in the Santa Monica Mountains ranked very high.

The opportunity for fishing and the creation of wildlife habitat could provide new potentials for education and enjoyment. The concept of creating a lake received public support in meetings on the development concept plan alternatives. A study will be undertaken to determine the engineering and environmental feasibility of creating a lake in Medea Creek at the south end of Paramount Ranch.

Areas requiring further investigation include the following:

- Status of NPS water rights that may be needed to support the lake

- Means of providing necessary security and protection of property rights for adjacent Malibu Lake Mountain Club residents

- Location of the lake in relationship to the Las Virgenes Municipal Water District sewer line

- Design and engineering considerations

- Environmental impacts on riparian habitat and adjacent natural and cultural resources

- Projected maintenance requirements and costs

If the lake project appears to be feasible following study, an environmental impact statement would probably be required before implementation because both wetland and floodplain areas would be modified to create the lake.

Site 6 - Natural Area East of Cornell Road

This portion of Paramount Ranch adjoins Malibu Creek State Park. Composed of steep hillsides covered with dense chaparral and oak woodlands, the area serves as a visual backdrop for activities in other parts of the ranch. Within this rugged terrain is a small shady alcove next to Cornell Road, with a primitive road leading up to a series of level terraces. From these terraces, panoramic views encompass both the mountains and the central core of the ranch. A small (ten-car) parking area and picnic area is proposed in a wooded alcove, along with a trail (the old road) to the terraces above, which could also be used for walk-in picnicking. Primitive camping by permit will be explored in this area through an experimental program to gauge demand for this experience and to monitor impacts. Outdoor classes and nature walks will provide interpretation of the area's natural resources. Trail connections will be developed from this area into Malibu Creek State Park.

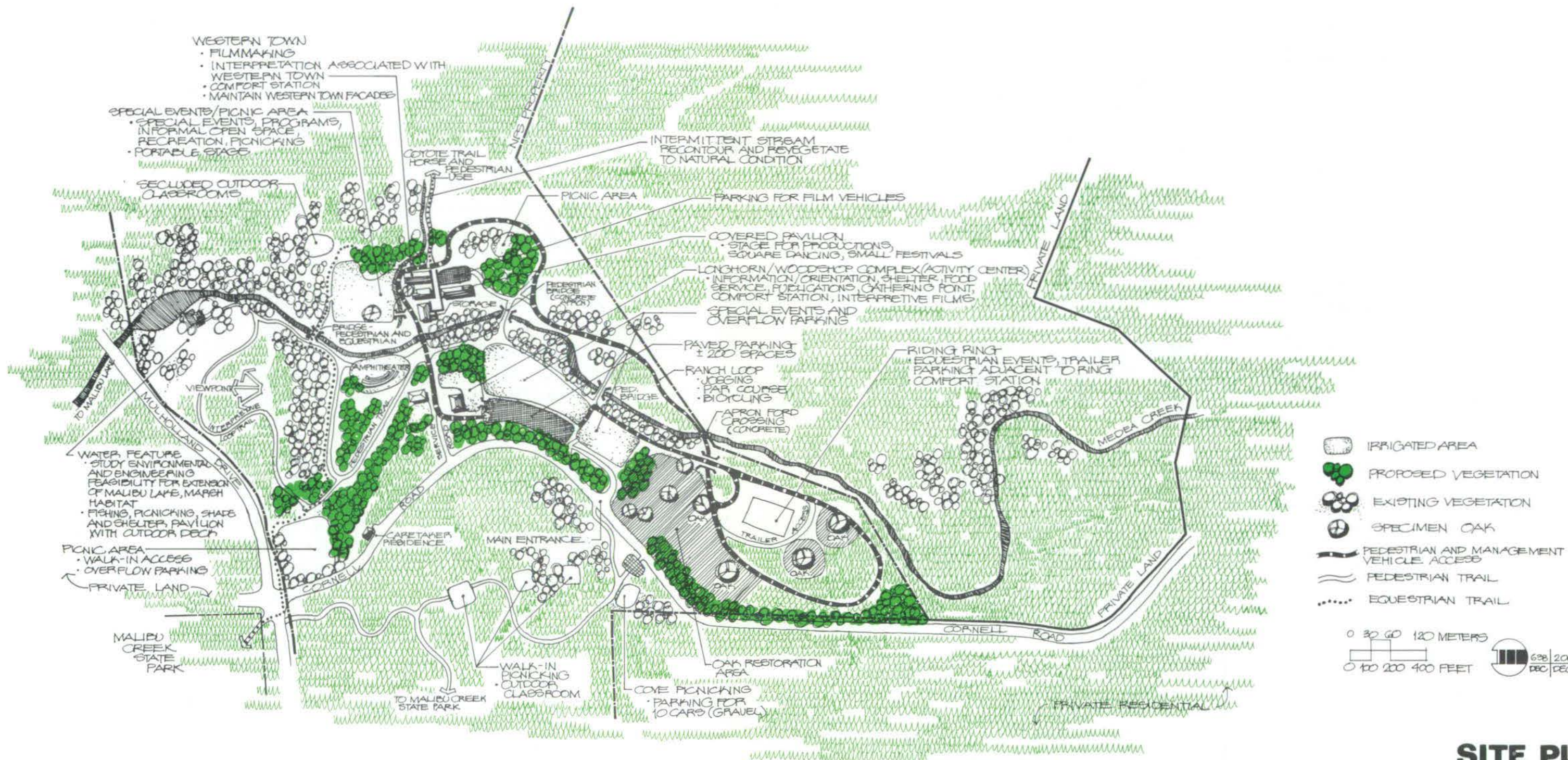
Internal Circulation and Trails

Winding through the ranch are the remnants of a roadway once used for auto racing. An opportunity to link different portions of the ranch

exists through modification of this track to create a multiuse corridor. The current alignment forms a continuous pathway from one end of the ranch to the other and will provide a trail loop for general circulation (pedestrian and bicycle), as well as occasional access for maintenance vehicles and film crews and equipment.

The northern loop will be suitable for an exercise par course and for handicapped Olympics, bicycling, and similar events requiring a linear hard surface. The southern loop will be ideal for more passive activities such as quiet strolls, bird-watching, nature walks, and contemplation. The entire loop or shorter segments of it could occasionally be used for parts of long-distance running events.

A variety of pathways and trails will be developed to vantage points and interesting natural environments, such as oak woodland, riparian woodland, oak savanna, and chaparral in the hills and valleys surrounding the ranch. A hiking/equestrian trail (Coyote Trail) with connections to a future regional trail system will pass through Paramount Ranch.



SITE PLAN **PARAMOUNT RANCH** UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS NRA

ON MICROFILM



0 30 60 120 METERS
0 100 200 400 FEET

628/20021A
DEC 1982

SPATIAL ANALYSIS
PARAMOUNT RANCH
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS NRA

ON MICROFILM

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The impacts of the proposed actions are analyzed in detail in the environmental assessment for Paramount Ranch. Construction impacts associated with the provision of visitor use facilities will be short term and minor because most of the proposed facilities and activities will take place in previously disturbed areas where the soil is compacted and is sparsely vegetated with annual grasses and weeds. Positive, long-term effects include the enhancement of visual quality through landscaping and rehabilitation and the enhancement of the visitor experience through provision of additional educational and recreational opportunities. No impacts on cultural resources are anticipated, and there are no properties on Paramount Ranch that are listed on or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (see accompanying letter from California State Historic Preservation Officer).

Based upon limited impacts, the National Park Service records a finding of no significant impact on this proposal. No additional compliance steps are necessary prior to plan implementation. One plan element, the creation of a water feature, is proposed for feasibility study, not action. If the study shows that the project is feasible, additional environmental documentation may be required. Implementation of the final plan does not result in a major federal action significantly affecting the human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

Recommended by:

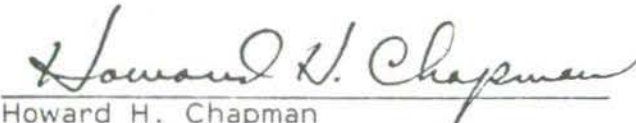


Robert S. Chandler
Superintendent, Santa Monica Mountains
National Recreation Area

1/25/83

Date

Approved by:



Howard H. Chapman
Regional Director, Western Region

2-8-83

Date

DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

P.O. BOX 2390

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(916) 445-8006



AUG 23 1982

Mr. Howard H. Chapman
Regional Director, Western Region
National Park Service
450 Golden Gate Avenue, Box 36063
San Francisco, CA 94102

IN REPLY REFER TO: NPS 820809 A

Dear Mr. Chapman:

Development Concept Plan/Environmental
Assessment, Paramount Ranch, Santa Monica
Mountains National Recreation Area

The referenced document was received on August 9, 1982. We concur in your determination that the Paramount Ranch area includes no properties listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

If you have any questions on this matter, feel free to contact Stephen Mikesell of my staff at (916) 322-8599.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading 'Knox Mellon'.

Dr. Knox Mellon
State Historic Preservation Officer
Office of Historic Preservation

J-0923H

As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities to protect and conserve our land and water, energy and minerals, fish and wildlife, and parks and recreation areas, and to ensure the wise use of all these resources. The department also has major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.

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