

Agenda Report

June 22, 2015

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council

FROM: Department of Public Works

SUBJECT: SUBMITTAL OF COMMENTS TO THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE REGARDING THE RIM OF THE VALLEY CORRIDOR DRAFT SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT REPORT AND PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the City Council authorize the Mayor to send a letter to the National Park Service in support of alternative 'D' for the potential local and regional benefits including recreational opportunities and conservation that would be possible.

HAHAMONGNA WATERSHED PARK ADVISORY COMMITTEE REVIEW:

On May 26, 2015 an informational presentation was made to the Hahamongna Watershed Park Advisory Committee (HWPAC) regarding the National Park Service's *Rim of the Valley Corridor Draft Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment* (the Study), including a summary of the study from Anne Dove of the National Park Service (NPS), Project Manager for the study. The Department of Public Works indicated that the Pasadena lands within the study area extend well beyond Hahamongna Watershed Park. The presentation was made to the Committee for timeliness and to make the members of the Environmental Advisory and Northwest Commissions aware of the study.

RECREATION AND PARKS COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

On June 2, 2015 the study was presented to the Recreation and Parks Commission. This presentation focused on the potential benefits and impacts to Pasadena and Pasadena lands. The Commission unanimously recommended that the City Council consider supporting alternative 'D', Regional Rim of the Valley Boundary Adjustment with Cooperative Conservation Areas.

BACKGROUND:

In 2008, the United States Congress passed the Consolidated Natural Resources Act which directed the National Park Service (NPS) to conduct a study of the area known as the Rim of the Valley Corridor. The area covers more than 1,000 square miles of Los Angeles and Ventura Counties in predominantly natural and undeveloped lands. The study would determine the suitability and feasibility of designating all or a portion of the corridor as a unit of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA) and methods for the protection of this area by the NPS and other federal, state, or local agencies and/or private or non-profit organizations.

In April 2015, the Study was released for public review and comment. The Study determined that a new unit of the NPS is less feasible than an expansion of the boundary of SMMNRA. The comment period closes on June 30, 2015.

The study area is generally described as the mountain areas surrounding the San Fernando, La Crescenta, Santa Clarita, Simi, and Conejo Valleys (Attachment A). Portions of 27 communities are contained within the study area including Pasadena's Arroyo Seco, portions of Eaton Canyon Wash, and the area of the San Rafael Hills in west Pasadena. According to the Study, the basis of the study area is the State of California's *Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy Zone – Rim of the Valley Corridor* map.

The study evaluated four alternatives (Attachment B), including alternative 'A', a No Action alternative where there would be no changes to the existing conditions.

Alternative 'B', Cooperative Conservation Partnership would foster cooperative planning and funding tools for the NPS, partner agencies and landowners in the study area as well as key habitat linkages to the Los Padres and Angeles National Forests. The existing SMMNRA boundary would remain intact and no new areas would be added.

Alternative 'C', Rim of the Valley Boundary Adjustment, includes an SMMNRA boundary adjustment adding approximately 173,000 acres with an emphasis on creating more recreational opportunities near urban areas. The included areas could benefit from additional resources in the form of more parks and open-space acquisitions, improvement projects, and increased protection of habitat linkages. Alternative 'C' is identified in the study as the NPS recommended alternative.

Alternative 'D', Regional Rim of the Valley Boundary Adjustment and Cooperative Conservation Areas, includes an SMMNRA boundary adjustment adding approximately 313,000 acres, most areas within the study area, with an emphasis on protecting regional wildlife corridors. Alternative 'D' would have the same potential benefits described for Alternative 'C' over the larger included area. Cooperative conservation approaches would also be recommended for key habitat linkages between the study area and the Los Padres and Angeles National Forests.

Within the study, alternatives 'B', 'C', and 'D' share a number of common elements including the retention of existing local land use and regulatory authorities, retention of existing fire protection responsibilities, retention of existing water rights and utility infrastructure systems and support for the completion of the Rim of the Valley Trail. Any land acquisition by NPS, which would only occur in alternatives 'C' and 'D', would only be from willing sellers. NPS would take a cooperative approach to management under all alternatives, partnering with local agencies to develop and expand existing regional programs. In alternatives 'C' and 'D', NPS could potentially provide funding for land acquisitions, trail planning and development and wildlife corridor connectivity. NPS has indicated they would not become a Responsible Agency under CEQA for local projects within the SMMNRA boundary.

The implementation of any of these alternatives would require Congressional action.

As they relate to Pasadena, alternatives 'C' and 'D' are effectively the same. Under either alternative, the Pasadena lands within the study area would be included in an expanded SMMNRA. The Department of Public Works has determined that while either of these alternatives potentially benefit the City in the same way, alternative 'D' would provide the greatest potential protections, enhancements, and opportunities for the region and therefore is recommended.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

The Environmental Assessment determined that there would be no significant adverse impacts from the proposed alternatives (Attachment C). The assessment found that in most categories, the alternatives would result in environmental benefits and that the potential benefits increase with the implementation of alternatives 'C' or 'D'. The assessment identified potential impacts in the areas of visitor experience and park operations associated with an expansion of the boundary and the resulting availability of more recreational land.

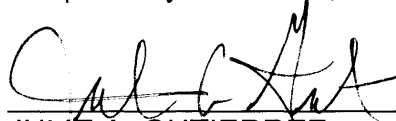
COUNCIL POLICY CONSIDERATION:

This action is consistent with the City Council's Green Space, Recreation and Parks Master Plan goal regarding the protection of existing open space.

FISCAL IMPACT:

It is anticipated that there will be minor costs associated with ongoing staff review and coordination with NPS staff through the completion of the study process. In the event that Congressional action adopts one of the alternatives, additional staff review and participation would be necessary. If the Rim of the Valley Proposal is approved by Congress, new grant opportunities could exist for open space acquisition, trail development, and maintenance.

Respectfully submitted,



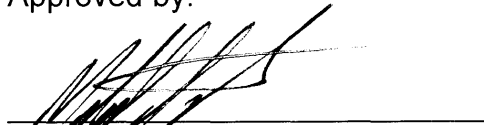
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MICHAEL J. BECK
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Attachment A – Study Area
Attachment B – Study Alternatives
Attachment C – Summary of Environmental Consequences