

Center for State of the Parks



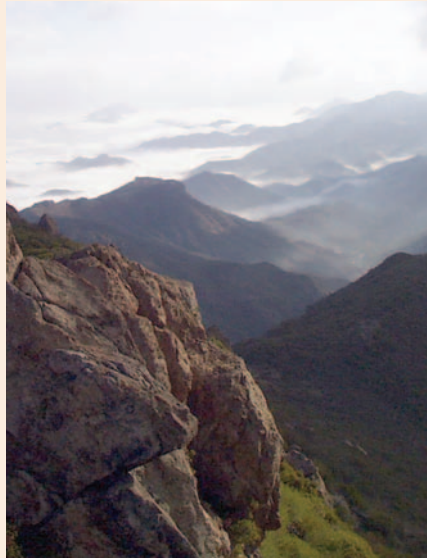
SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

SNAPSHOT

Located within the ever-growing Los Angeles metropolitan area, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area provides residents and visitors with recreational opportunities, and it provides wildlife with critical habitat. Encompassing 154,095 acres, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area is the world's largest urban national park and is considered by many to be the best mainland example of a Mediterranean biome in the entire National Park System. In addition to its beaches, rugged back-country, cool canyons, and scenic mountain vistas, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area is home to more than 1,000 archaeological sites and historic landscapes ranging from ranches to a movie studio.

HISTORY

For at least 10,000 years, the Santa Monica Mountains have supported humans, including the Chumash, an assemblage that is comprised of more than 150 different groups who shared a language. European settlement of present-day California began with visits by Spanish explorers in the 16th century. The Spanish heavily influenced native populations by the late 18th century, when missionaries arrived, erected mission ranches, and began to convert native peoples to Catholicism.



In the 19th century, land granted to soldiers by Mexican governors ushered in the *rancho* period. After California achieved statehood in 1850, existing and new ranches flourished in the area, fostered by newly arrived investors and immigrant workers. At the onset of the 1900s, the burgeoning film industry in Los Angeles began to use the varied landscapes within the Santa Monica Mountains as movie locations.

In the early 20th century, area residents began to suggest that parts of the Santa Monica Mountains should be considered for permanent protection. As city growth accelerated mid-century, residents renewed the call for setting land aside for nature and recreation. A small but devoted group of activists was instrumental in the formation of the

Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, and after years of collaboration among various private individuals and entities, the park was established in 1978.

THREATS

- Urban growth and development, habitat fragmentation, invasive species, and human-caused fires threaten the ecological integrity of Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. The park is surrounded by private property, and close to 70,000 acres of privately owned land are contained within the park's boundaries. At the present time, about 78 percent of the private land in the national recreation area is undeveloped—yet potentially developable. On average, 1,300 acres of private land within the park are developed each year. Although the park has the right to review and comment on permit applications, the number received overwhelms park staff. This complicated system of land ownership means that the Park Service is unable to manage the ecological health of the park on a landscape level.
- Invasive species management projects are grossly underfunded and understaffed. One park staff member with the aid of a technician generally performs much of the ongoing control work, with short-term assistance from the California Exotic Plant Management Team and volunteers. Grant funding often does not



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last long enough for staff members to complete eradication and control projects. Because only limited control efforts are possible due to staffing and funding shortfalls, the spread of invasive species outpaces control projects and non-native species overtake native vegetation.

- Development and nearby water treatment facilities are primary threats to water resources at Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. The Park Service would like to take the lead in coordinating water resource information, but a lack of funds has prevented the park from collecting water quality data and has prohibited any significant direct park involvement in water quality research. Recent funding made available through the Park Service's Natural Resource Challenge will allow the park to conduct some water quality monitoring, but only at selected sites and with limited frequency.
- As personnel costs increase and budgets remain steady or decrease, the park is not always able to fill vacated positions, and new positions deemed crucial remain vacant as well. Current staff handle many duties not in their official job descriptions, leaving these employees with less time for their primary job responsibilities.

WHAT'S BEING DONE

- **American Indian cultures well interpreted.** The Satwiwa Native American Culture Center, which receives more visitors than the visitor center at park headquarters, teaches guests about traditional and contemporary American Indian cultures through exhibits and a variety of interpretive programs.
- **Proposed legislation would benefit park.** Recently, legislation titled America's Historical and Natural Legacy Study Act (H.R. 3998) was passed by the House of Representatives. If passed by the U.S. Senate, the Park Service would be authorized to study the feasibility of significantly expanding the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, potentially doubling its size and providing additional habitat for wildlife, protection for cultural resources, and recreation opportunities for visitors.
- **Large carnivore research conducted.** Park Service scientists and other partners conduct internationally recognized research on the effects of urbanization and habitat fragmentation on carnivores, including bobcats, coyotes, and mountain lions. Through this work, researchers discovered that poisons applied by nearby residents and contractors to control rodent pests were harming other species such as the carnivores that ate the rodents. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has proposed more restrictive regulations based, in part, on these research findings. The EPA has proposed that certain anticoagulant rodenticides would not be available over-the-counter and only could be applied by certified pesticide applicators. The EPA has also proposed more restrictive guidelines on how these rodenticides can be applied (e.g., only in sealed bait boxes, etc.).
- **Youth program reaches diverse audiences.** The park's SAMO Youth program trains urban high school students for careers in the National Park Service. The program, which teaches natural resource principles through hands-on management techniques, is in its seventh year.

ABOUT NPCA AND CENTER FOR STATE OF THE PARKS

Since 1919, the National Parks Conservation Association has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System. NPCA, its members, and partners work together to protect the park system and preserve our nation's natural, historical, and cultural heritage for generations to come.

NPCA initiated the State of the Parks® program in 2000 to assess the condition of natural and cultural resources in the parks. The goal is to provide information that will help policymakers, the public, and the National Park Service improve resource conditions in national parks, celebrate successes as models for other parks, and ensure a lasting legacy for future generations.

CONTACT US

For a copy of NPCA's full report on Santa Monica Mountains National Recreational Area, to get copies of reports on other parks, or for more information about the Center for State of the Parks, visit www.npca.org/state-oftheparks or contact Dr. James Nations, vice president for the Center for State of the Parks, at jnations@npca.org.

For more information on Santa Monica Mountains National Recreational Area, contact Ron Sundergill, Director of NPCA's Pacific Regional Office, at 415.989.9921, or visit the park online at www.nps.gov/samo. For media inquiries, please contact Lindsay Bartsh, NPCA media relations manager, at 415.989.9921 or lbartsh@npca.org. To learn more about what the public and our elected officials can do to help improve the health of this park, visit www.npca.org/take_action.