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Puente-Chino Hills Task Force
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Martha Crusius, Project Manager
National Park Service
San Gabriel Special Resource Study
333 Bush Street, Suite 500
San Francisco, CA 94104

**Comments on Draft San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special
Resource Study**

Dear Ms. Crusius,

The Sierra Club is a well-known nationwide environmental non-profit group. The Puente-Chino Hills Task Force of the Sierra Club was formed in 2002 upon unanimous recommendation of the Conservation Committee of the Angeles Chapter of the Sierra Club. Members come from the four counties that touch the Puente-Chino Hills. We offer hikes, sponsor educational events and provide input on projects that threaten the biological and recreational integrity of this important hillside system.

The Puente-Chino Hills Task Force strongly supports Alternative D (with amendments noted below) as presented in the Draft San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study. Alternative D would create a robust National Recreation Area (NRA) that would provide a much needed recreational/educational resource for the large urbanized population of the Los Angeles region.

We ask for an amendment to Alternative D. We again recommend that the entire Puente-Chino Hills be included in the proposed NRA, including lands east of Harbor Boulevard. The lands east of Harbor Boulevard include federally designated coastal sage scrub "Critical Habitat," in addition to rare oak and walnut woodlands.

As the Study points out:

The Puente-Chino Hills are part of a biologically diverse regional wildlife corridor that provides habitat for ecological communities with an abundance of endemic, threatened, and rare plants.

The proposed NRA only includes purchase of land with the landowner's consent, so concerns about eminent domain are misplaced and should not affect the boundary decisions. Decisions that affect the boundaries should be determined by the desire to include contiguous habitats, not a veto of landowners whose property rights are not affected.

As an alternative, the legislation should state that any enlargement of the NRA boundaries within the original Study Area could be done administratively by the National Park Service if the landowner is willing.

For three decades residents and their elected officials have worked to protect this backbone and backdrop of open space in one of the most highly engineered regions on the planet. Under the management of the Puente Hills Landfill Native Habitat Preservation Authority, 4,000 acres have been saved on the western end of the hills while another 14,100 acres have been saved on the eastern end as Chino Hills State Park.

The inclusion of the entire Puente-Chino Hills would also allow the completion of a trail network that would run north from Cleveland National Forest, through the Puente-Chino Hills, up the San Gabriel River, and connecting to the Angeles National Forest. This system of trails and parks would provide recreational opportunities to the park-poor communities which lie along the trails and within the NRA.

We are excited about the possible development of a National Recreation Area that would provide quality recreational and educational opportunities for the larger Southern California region.

Thank you for allowing us to comment on this important Study.

Sincerely,

Eric Johnson
Chair