

SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY

RAMIREZ CANYON PARK
5750 RAMIREZ CANYON ROAD
MALIBU, CALIFORNIA 90265
PHONE (310) 589-3200
FAX (310) 589-3207



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Planning and Development
Department of Recreation and Parks
City of Los Angeles
1200 West 7th Street, Suite 700
Los Angeles, California 90017

Griffith Park Master Plan Comments

Dear Planning and Development Staff:

The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy is glad that the City is pursuing a new Master Plan for Griffith Park. The Park and its environs are a key element in the acquisition program of the *Santa Monica Mountains Comprehensive Plan* (1979). Few people realize that Griffith Park is a designated Significant Ecological Area in the Los Angeles County General Plan. The continuation of these ecological, scenic, and recreational resources in the park is the objective of this agency. Being the principle State planning agency for the area, the Conservancy welcomes being a partner with the City in this endeavor. We urge the City to consult with our staff in this process.

We are aware that the 2004 addition of the Master Plan is in need of revision and that, in the interim, the Griffith Park Master Plan Working Group is rewriting portions of the document. In short, the Conservancy supports the Working Group's efforts to overlay the "Urban Wilderness Designation" over all of the existing natural areas in the park.

The City is fortunate to have an approximately 5,000-acre, contiguous natural area comprised of the park and surrounding public and private lands. The tenants of conservation biology and minimum population viability analyses dictate that the habitat size warrants the utmost protection of all remaining natural areas to guarantee the long term presence of the full range of existing mammalian, herpetological, and avian species. Those tenants also dictate that all possible habitat linkages (wildlife corridors) to the park from larger habitat areas be protected and enhanced.

Habitat Linkage to Eastern Santa Monica Mountains

Since its inception, the Conservancy has invested tens of millions of dollars on properties in the eastern Santa Monica Mountains to maintain a functional wildlife movement corridor to Griffith Park via the Cahuenga Pass freeway over-crossings. Perhaps the most important remaining property to cement a minimum viability connection to the park, across the 101

Freeway, is the Department of Water and Power-owned (DWP) property that sweeps north of Lake Hollywood to the 101 Freeway. It is probable that some larger predator species reach the park via the Verdugo Wash, but otherwise this Cahuenga Pass connection is the park's only source of grey fox, mule deer, and bobcat. We urge the City to expand the scope of the Master Plan to include all existing public and private lands contiguous to the park in the area framed by the 101, 134, and 5 Freeways. The subject DWP property must be included as a high priority acquisition.

Expansion of Open Space Acquisition Section

The ecology of the park is fragile. To maintain the full complement of existing mammal species, it is vital that every opportunity be considered to add protected land to the park, no matter how small of a parcel. With increased visitor use of the park, inevitably the park's wildlife carrying capacity is going to diminish. The only means of offsetting that decline is to employ an aggressive land acquisition and protection program for the surrounding private and public parcels. The Master Plan should encompass this acquisition goal and include maps showing every possible undeveloped parcel that could be added to the park and/or permanently protected. Public lands should receive equal scrutiny because other City departments and the DWP often have objectives antithetical to complete habitat preservation.

The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) has recently acquired a couple dozen small parcels contiguous with the park and other public lands—such as the Los Angeles County property around the John Anson Ford Theater. The Master Plan documents should show these properties and all other public ownership in the subject area as being possible park additions, or at a minimum, as being park buffer.

It is best to be inclusive of properties in the Master Plan and thus lay the groundwork for future, unforeseen acquisition funding opportunities. The Open Space Acquisition section should not be limited to just the properties on the northern park perimeter above Forest Lawn, but include all possible additions from Beechwood Canyon to Wonderview Drive.

Los Angeles River Headworks Site

The Master Plan's treatment of the Headworks property along the Los Angeles River is excellent. The maximization of wetland habitat and using the property as a habitat linkage between the park and the Los Angeles River is in lock step with the objectives of this agency.

The broad demarcation of "Exotic Plant Eradication Zones" is forward thinking.

We agree with many other groups and individuals that overhead trams do not belong in the park. Their visual and biological impacts are incongruous with other key "Urban

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Wilderness Designation” objectives supported by this agency. We support visitor serving uses such as shuttles to provide improved public access.

Please direct any additional documents and comments to Paul Edelman of staff at the above address and at (310) 589-3200 ext. 128.

Sincerely,

ELIZABETH A. CHEADLE
Chairperson