



Santa Susana Mountain Park Association

Dedicated to the Preservation of the Santa Susana Mountains and Simi Hills

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July 29, 2013

Connie Chung, AICP
Supervising Regional Planner
Dept. of Regional Planning
Los Angeles County
320 West Temple Street, Room 1356
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Comments by Santa Susana Mountain Park Association (SSMPA) - Response to Notice of Preparation (NOP) June 2013, of a Draft Environmental Impact Report for Los Angeles County General Plan Update

Dear Ms. Chung,

We are an organization that has been involved for over 40 years with preserving open space areas in the Santa Susana Mountains and the Simi Hills.

Of the greatest current concern to us is the incredibly critical nature of a viable wildlife corridor that would provide transitional habitat to allow wildlife to move between the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area and the Los Padres Forest to the north and the Angeles Forest to the east. To be viable, a habitat corridor of very significant width is needed to allow deer and mountain lions, in particular to traverse selected large open space parcels, in northern West Hills, and westerly Chatsworth, such as the Upper Las Virgenes Open Space Preserve (former Ahmanson Ranch), the Chatsworth Nature Preserve, the Santa Susana Pass State Historic Park.

We request that in addition to the appropriate concerns and safeguards to aid preservation of open space, outlined in your SEA considerations, that Los Angeles County Regional Planning implement a study to determine the optimal path for such a transitional habitat. We further request that County implement a planning process to outline appropriate use in the area, that provides for good habitat for wildlife corridors.

We have recently seen the County participate in the following discretionary approvals that show the critical need for a cohesive planning process as requested here:

- a. transfer land north of Porter Ranch to the City (i.e. Hidden Creeks; surrounded by blue-line streams, critical habitat in our dry climate),
- b. approve lands north of the 118 freeway between Topanga Canyon and Canoga Avenue for development (Deerlake Ranch), and

- c. approve development of property to the west of Chatsworth Nature Preserve (Dayton Canyon).

We are concerned that the County has no global plan to establish this critical wildlife corridor, and the development "march" up our surrounding hillsides continues, using a variety of techniques to develop the hillsides, notwithstanding the county SEA's.

We suggest the only way to effectively manage the remaining open space is to set a development moratorium for any unapproved project to provide the County time to develop an appropriate plan:

- A. that is protective of an optimal path for wildlife habitat (a wildlife "corridor"), based on the areas that still are not developed in west and northerly San Fernando Valley, and
- B. that is a significant width to minimize being lit up at night due to nearby development and allow larger mammals such as deer and mountain lion to pass and be able to feed when they are in that area.

Without a global plan, the remaining undeveloped lands (such as along Woolsey Canyon which bridges the Upper Las Virgenes Open Space/Santa Susana Field Lab to the Chatsworth Nature Preserve) will be subjected to piecemeal development. Having a plan, and setting development within that region to a specific and pre-established development plan, is the only chance to retain any viable open space for wildlife connectivity. Of course, the various considerations outlined in all the SEA's must be considered as this plan is developed and implemented.

It should be noted also, that the County should consider the National Park Service's Rim of the Valley Corridor Trail Study presently underway and should incorporate features in the Rim of the Valley plan, expected out next year, in its land use plan. Consideration of related projects is a cornerstone in environmental law, and we encourage similar considerations in development of a regional plan, and the open space and land use elements.

We welcome feedback on your thoughts and hope comments such as ours will help the County craft a more viable, protected Regional Plan in our area of the northwest San Fernando Valley. Prudent planners feel that infill development is a better idea, but clear guidance from Regional Plans, and Regional Planning Departments, is necessary to provide the public better indications about specific open space goals and guidelines, with much clearer instructions for preservation of key habitat in this area. The County needs to stop small developments that irrevocably destroy key open space linkages that must be preserved for the future.

Sincerely,



Teena A. Takata
President, Santa Susana Mountain Park Association

About **Santa Susana Mountain Park Association:**

Santa Susana Mountain Park Association is a 42 year-old non-profit organization based in Chatsworth, Los Angeles, California.

We represent approximately 700 members and concerned citizens, and we partner with many organizations to promote ecological and recreational quality in Southern California.

SSMPA's mission is to preserve and protect the Simi Hills, Santa Susana Mountains, and surrounding open space.

SSMPA Board of Directors:

Teena Takata, John Luker, Vanessa Watters, Diana Dixon-Davis, Bob Dager, Carla Bollinger, Warren Stone, Donna Nachtrab, Tom Nachtrab