

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**National Park Service****Final Environmental Impact Statement/
General Management Plan Santa
Monica Mountains National Recreation
Area Ventura and Los Angeles
Counties, CA; Notice of Approval of
Record of Decision**

SUMMARY: Pursuant to § 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (Pub. L. 91–190, as amended) and the implementing regulations promulgated by the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR part 1505.2), the Department of the Interior, National Park Service has prepared, and the Regional Director, Pacific West Region has approved, the Record of Decision for the General Management Plan for Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, in southern California. The formal no-action period was officially initiated January 31, 2003, with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's **Federal Register** notification of the filing of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Decision: As soon as practicable the NPS will begin to implement the General Management Plan described and analyzed as the Preferred Alternative contained in the Final EIS. The selected plan features a deliberate, long-term strategy to protect significant cultural and natural resources, while providing for compatible recreation (e.g., hiking, wildlife observation) and increased educational opportunities to a diverse public. This plan was also deemed to be the "environmentally preferred" alternative.

This course of action and four alternatives were identified and analyzed in the Final EIS, and previously in the Draft EIS (the latter was distributed in December 2000). The full spectrum of foreseeable environmental consequences was assessed, and appropriate mitigation measures identified, for each alternative. Beginning with early scoping, through the preparation of the Draft and Final EIS, numerous public meetings were conducted and newsletter updates (in English and Spanish) were regularly produced. Approximately 600 written comments responding to the Draft EIS were received and duly considered. No substantive or adverse comments responding to the Final EIS were received during the no-action period which ended on March 3, 2003. Key consultations which aided in the preparation of the Draft and Final EIS involved (but were not limited to) the

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Dept. of Fish and Game, State Historic Preservation Office, native American Tribes, Los Angeles and Ventura Counties, cities of Thousand Oaks, Malibu and Calabasas, and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy.

Copies: Interested parties desiring to review the Record of Decision may obtain a complete copy by contacting the Acting Superintendent, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, 401 West Hillcrest Dr., Thousand Oaks 91360–4223; or via telephone request at (805) 370–2300.

Jonathan B. Jarvis,

Regional Director, Pacific West Region.

[FR Doc. 03–10027 Filed 4–22–03; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310–70–P

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**National Park Service****Draft Environmental Impact
Statement/Fire Management Plan,
Whiskeytown National Recreation
Area, Shasta County, CA; Notice of
Availability**

SUMMARY: Pursuant to § 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (Pub. L. 91–190, 42 U.S.C. 4321–4347, January 1, 1970, as amended), and the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 CFR Part 1500–1508), the National Park Service, Department of the Interior, has prepared a Draft Environmental Impact Statement identifying and evaluating four alternatives for a Fire Management Plan for Whiskeytown National Recreation Area, in northern California. Potential impacts and mitigating measures are described for each alternative. The alternative selected after this conservation planning and environmental impact analysis process will serve as a blueprint for fire management actions at Whiskeytown National Recreation Area over the next 10 years.

This Whiskeytown Fire Management Plan (FMP) and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) identifies and analyzes three action alternatives, and a no action alternative, for a revised Fire Management Plan at Whiskeytown National Recreation Area. Revisions to the current plan are needed to meet public and firefighter safety, natural and cultural resource management, and wildland urban interface objectives of the park. The action alternatives vary in the emphasis they place on fire management goals developed by the park. The current program has been effective in fire suppression, but has not

been able to restore large portions of the park landscape to circa 1800 conditions as required by the 2000 General Management Plan (GMP). Each action alternative contains an amendment to the park's GMP to clarify that the park's administration building may be rebuilt in its current location at park headquarters in conjunction with relocating the fire cache to the Oak Bottom recreational complex.

Whiskeytown National Recreation Area is located eight miles west of Redding, California and encompasses 42,500 acres, including the 3000-acre Whiskeytown Lake—a reservoir created as part of California's Central Valley Project, Trinity River Diversion. In the past, wildland fire occurred naturally in the park as an important ecosystem process that kept forest fuels and vegetation structure within the natural range of variability. Mining, logging and fire suppression activities have led to increased fuel loads and changes in vegetation community structure. This has increased the risk of large, high-intensity wildland fire within the park, threatening developed zones, the park's natural and cultural resources, and neighboring landowners and communities.

Alternatives: Under the park's preferred alternative (Alternative IV), the park would focus on restoring Whiskeytown's plant communities to reduce the risk of high severity wildland fire by decreasing forest stand density, reducing surface fuels, and attempting to restore fire as a natural disturbance process to the greatest extent feasible using prescribed fire, mechanical treatment and managed wildland fire when appropriate. Up to 2,200 acres per year would be treated through prescribed fire and wildland fire use. Three levels of mechanical treatment would be utilized to reduce fuel levels and mimic the effects of fire on structural patterns of woody vegetation, including the use of hand tools, chainsaws, weed eaters, chippers, brush mastication and small-scale logging of trees up to 12 inches in diameter at breast height. Mechanical treatment would be used to reduce forest fuels in and around developed areas, and to install and widen some new and existing shaded fuel breaks. Mechanical treatment would be used on up to 1,075 acres per year.

Under the no-action alternative (Alternative I), the current fire management program would continue utilizing a limited range of fire management strategies—including prescribed fire, limited mechanical treatment and suppression of all wildland fires (including natural