

Headline: A shared vision for Los Angeles County wild areas: Adam Schiff
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A shared vision for Los Angeles County wild areas: Adam Schiff

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More than 10 years ago, former Representative Hilda Solis and I introduced parallel legislation to preserve open space, manage unique ecosystems and provide recreational opportunities in Southern California. My bill, the Rim of the Valley Corridor Study Act, authorized the National Park Service (NPS) to study the possibility of providing federal protection to the Rim of the Valley, an area stretching from the existing Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA) through the Simi Hills and Santa Susannas, the Verdugos and on to the San Gabriel Mountains. The other measure, introduced by my colleague, was the San Gabriel River Watershed Study Act, which similarly authorized NPS to study the suitability of federal protection for the San Gabriel River Watershed and San Gabriel Mountains.

Both bills were signed into law by President George W. Bush and share the goals of ensuring that future generations of Southern Californians are able to make recreational use of our region's beautiful rivers and Mediterranean landscape, obtain an understanding of the rich tableau of animals and plants that populate the area, and preserve rare ecosystems and wildlife corridors. Upon her election to Congress, Representative Judy Chu joined our efforts to expand the national park service in the region and has become one its staunchest advocates and champions.

Although both measures were introduced in the summer of 2001, their passage and implementation

has varied; the final report on the San Gabriel study was recently released to Congress, and the Rim of the Valley study will be completed next year. While this is understandable in a legislative process, it is not

ideal in a resource study of adjacent areas. It is certainly true that there are unique needs in each area of study, but at the same time, many of the challenges facing both habitats are nearly identical "" an extraordinary level of public use due to close proximity to one of the largest urban areas in the nation, and some of the rarest ecosystem in the world.

The San Gabriel report recommends the creation of a San Gabriel Unit of the SMMNRA, comprised of the San Gabriel Mountain foothills, San Gabriel and Rio Hondo river corridors and the western Puente Hills. This new unit would be separated from the rest of the SMMNRA by nearly the entirety of the Los Angeles basin. It is little wonder then that the public is so confused by the newly released proposal "" without reference to the Rim of the Valley area under study it would appear to recommend the creation of a new floating unit of the SMMNRA that would be difficult to efficiently administer and effectively oversee from the far western edge of the region.

Along with several members of the Los Angeles delegation, I have recommended that when the NPS issues its final report to Congress on the Rim of the Valley study next year, it propose an expansion of the SMMNRA from its current boundaries eastward through the Rim of the Valley and up to the San Gabriel Mountains. If this were to be done, a new San Gabriel Unit would be contiguous with the enlarged SMMNRA. I believe there may be compelling reasons for the San Gabriel area to comprise a completely new national recreation area, but without considering the Rim of the Valley it is impossible to make an informed decision on a proposal to include San Gabriel within such an expanded SMMNRA.

The San Gabriel report also raises a serious issue over whether much of its study area in the Angeles National Forest should remain under Forest Service management and control, subject to an untested program called "Service First Authority." This was not the alternative I supported when the draft report was released, and seems at odds with the views of the NPS itself which earlier appeared to favor taking a lead role in the management of these precious resources. This important question is also implicated in the Rim of the Valley study, which analyzes the best management structure for other large segments of the forest/city interface. This must not be about a jurisdictional fight between federal agencies, but rather a determination based on which management structure is best suited to preserving these vital resources for future generations.

In the coming weeks and months, preservationists must work together to ensure better coordination by the NPS on these two important studies. Though the recommendations in the San Gabriel report and the process used to complete the study were disappointing, this marked an important milestone in the effort to preserve the precious lands around us.

Soon it will be in the hands of Congress to enact legislation to protect open space in the region on the basis of both reports, and to achieve the shared vision that was the inspiration for our legislation more than a decade ago.

Representative Adam Schiff, D-Burbank, serves in the U.S. House of Representatives and authored the Rim of the Valley Corridor Study Act.