

SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS AREA
RECREATIONAL TRAILS COORDINATION PROJECT

SMMART

FINAL SUMMARY REPORT
September, 1997



This report was prepared through a cooperative effort of the Santa Monica Mountains Area Recreation Trails Coordination Project. This project was facilitated by the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service. Report sections were prepared by Action Team members.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“*SMMART*” stands for Santa Monica Mountains Area Recreation Trails; it refers to a process working on improving and enhancing coordination on trails-related issues. The *SMMART* project is the first regional trail coordination effort ever undertaken in the Santa Monica Mountains. It brought together trail managing agencies, local governments, trail user groups, and interested citizens to explore opportunities, to consider shared issues and concerns, and to work towards improving trail user experience in the Santa Monica Mountains.

Priority Coordination Issues

SMMART participants identified the need for better coordination between trail managing agencies, local jurisdictions, and trails-related interest groups in the following areas:

- Developing an inventory of trails
- Identifying locations for trail camp facilities, particularly on the Backbone Trail
- Renewing a commitment to working with volunteers
- Developing common standards for multiple-use trails
- Improving signage for trail uses, wildlife, and degree of difficulty
- Compiling information on historical use of trails
- Encouraging agencies to commit to cooperating
- Establishing a multi-agency trail crew
- Sharing equipment across agencies and among volunteers
- Determining access for mountain bicycles
- Establishing priorities for missing trail segments within the trail system

Of these, six issues were considered by “Action Teams”. The findings and recommendations of these teams are included in this report.

Work of *SMMART* Action Teams

This report summarizes the work of six Action Teams, some of which contain recommendations for implementation by trail managing agencies and local governments. Action Teams began working in late 1995 to find ways to address priority areas needing coordination. These teams are listed below along with a description of the issue they were tackling and the contents of their report:

Trails Inventory Team

The first mountain-wide trail inventory on public lands in the Santa Monica Mountains and Conejo Valley is being coordinated by this action team. Students, community volunteers and agency staff are

working together to collect information about trail locations and various trail features. This information will assist agencies and volunteers with trail planning and maintenance activities. The project will also result in the creation of a regional trail map available to the public in summer 1997.

Missing Links Team

The team identified 39 trail segments within the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area that either are a) currently in use by the public, but cross private land without a public right-of-way or b) missing linkages within the trail system and are desired by the public to link existing parks or complete long distance, regional trails. For these 39 “missing links”, the team described the general route of the trail, actions needed to complete the linkage, the jurisdiction(s) with responsibility for implementing these actions. A regional map of the missing links is also provided.

Trail Camps Team

The Backbone Trail of the Santa Monica Mountains is precisely that: a trail crossing the Santa Monica Mountains along the ridge, forming the spine for the rest of the trail system. For the average rider/hiker its 65 mile length requires several days to traverse and, therefore, trail camps are necessary. The team recommends that trail camps are located six miles apart along the Backbone Trail. The team evaluated existing trail camps and campgrounds, recommended locations of supplemental camps along the Backbone Trail and suggested location and operation guidelines.

Signage Team

The park lands within the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area are controlled by a variety of public and private agencies. Via signage, each agency communicates pertinent information to their visitors. Due to the number of jurisdictions and regulations relating to use of the park lands, signage can sometimes convey conflicting information or look quite different across agencies. This report details this team’s review of park signage needs and includes an inventory of signage. It discusses recommendations pertaining to signage needs for trail, regulation, and service identification signs.

Multiple Use Trail Guidelines Team

The premise of this report was to develop multi-use trail guidelines that will allow the accommodation of equestrians, hikers and mountain bicyclists on multiple use trails. A summary table of trail design features and recommended trail construction guidelines are provided in this report with definitions and visual examples of each trail design feature included in an attachment. These guidelines are recommended for new trail construction. No guidelines are provided for application to existing trails. Decisions relating to application of such guidelines to existing trails are left up to the managing agency.

Trail System Team

The Trail System Team met to provide guidance to land managers on the accommodation of trail users on Santa Monica Mountains and adjacent trail systems. This report summarizes the process used by the team to reach agreement, describes the limited areas of agreement found, discusses the obstacles that stand in the way of further work to reach an agreement, and contains statements by each trail user representative (accessibility, equestrian, hiking, mountain bicycling, and trail running) describing their perception of the issue and desired solutions. A summary table of options and users’ perspective on the options is included.

Implementation Recommendations

A summary of recommendations made by the Action Teams is included in the project overview and at the end of each team report. Most of the recommendations are to be implemented by public agencies with responsibility for trail management in the Santa Monica Mountains. Highlights of the recommendations include:

- Undertake regional coordination on the remaining, identified priority areas, not addressed by SMMART Action Teams,
- Update the trails inventory completed through this project regularly,
- Undertake the right-of-way acquisition, trail construction, or master plan amendment needed for 50 identified “missing links,”
- Develop identified trail camp facilities along the Backbone Trail,
- Analyze existing signage to help ensure more consistency in the “look and feel” of signs and the information provided via signage, and
- Adopt the identified multiple use trail guidelines and trail design features for newly constructed trails designated for multiple use.

PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

The development of this report was the result of the hard work of many people. Many participated actively on Action Teams and prepared the reports included here. Others attended regular meetings of SMMART and contributed their thoughts and concerns to provide guidance to Action Team members. Still others made significant contributions, although behind the scenes, providing administrative and technical support. This project could not have succeeded without the contribution of everyone listed here. Thanks to all who contributed!

Participation in SMMART was open to the public. Initial invitations to the first meeting were mailed to representatives of government agencies, trail-related organizations, homeowner associations, and other organizations that had been actively involved in trails and open space issues in the Santa Monica mountains. SMMART participants identified additional organizations that should be encouraged to participate and invitations were subsequently extended. All meetings of the larger SMMART body were open to the public. One could become a “SMMART participant” simply by attending a meeting.

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For funding and equipment: National Park Service, Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, Santa Monica Mountains Fund, and the California Department of Parks and Recreation.

For providing meeting space: City of Malibu City Hall, City of Calabasas Parks and Recreation Department, Las Virgenes School District, Glendale Federal Savings, Calamigos Ranch, Temescal Canyon Conference Center, Malibu Community Center, Topanga Canyon Community Center, Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky's Office, Agoura Hills High School, William O. Douglas Outdoor Classroom, and Kaiser Permanente Medical Center.

For designing the report cover and dividers: Mary Moehle, Baseline Design.

For providing the opportunity to excerpt source material "Potential Funding Sources": Los Angeles County - Public Works Department, from the *Los Angeles River Master Plan*, and the National Park Service and Greenbelt Alliance, from the *Green Access Guide*.

For providing the opportunity to excerpt the "Los Angeles County Hiking and Riding Trails Map": Bertha Ruiz, Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation Department.

For providing support at the public open houses: Rebecca and Chris at the William O. Douglas Outdoor Classroom, the janitorial staff at Agoura Hills High School, Grant Gerson, Ted DePass, Mike Taylor, and Kevin Donnelly.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Coordinated planning among the agencies with responsibility for trails and the public who uses and enjoys trails is important to promoting the goals of resource protection and recreation within the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. The Santa Monica Mountains Area Recreation Trails (SMMART) Coordination Project was intended to be a place to bring together agency representatives, trail users, and interested citizens to act more in concert in planning and managing trails. The goal of SMMART was to find ways to provide a better trail experience to park visitors, to share resources, to explore new opportunities, and to identify action items that could benefit from regional coordination.

SMMART was established to be a *coordination* project, different from more traditional comprehensive planning processes, such as regional trails plans. We focused on coordination because that was seen as a more immediate way of enhancing the experience of trail users within the mountains. By bringing trail users and agency personnel together, we hoped to identify common concerns and to suggest creative and proactive ways to address them. SMMART was to be an advisory process, recognizing that some of the suggested changes would require the implementing agencies to subsequently prepare planning documents consistent with their own environmental and public review procedures. We hoped to find ways to work better together and to take a broader view of trails in the mountains and present this information to the agencies for their implementation.

Vicinity

The Santa Monica Mountains form the western backdrop for Los Angeles, juxtaposed with the heavily urbanized Los Angeles basin, San Fernando and Conejo valleys. The mountains stretch 46 miles from Griffith Park above Hollywood to Point Mugu State Park at the Pacific Ocean. Contained within the mountains are rugged open spaces, jagged rock outcroppings, primitive wilderness areas as well as homes, ranches, and communities. In 1978, the United States Congress established the *Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area* (SMMNRA) to “manage the recreation area in a manner which will preserve and enhance its scenic, natural, and historical setting and its public health value as an airshed for the Southern California metropolitan area while providing for the recreational and educational need of the visiting public.” (Public Law 95-625).

Today, the National Park Service cooperates with numerous public land management and park and recreation agencies in order to protect the mountains’ natural and cultural resources and to provide the public with recreation opportunities. Agencies administering public lands include the California Department of Parks and Recreation (CDPR), the National Park Service (NPS), the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC), the Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation Department, the Los Angeles City Department of Recreation and Parks, the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Agency (MRCA), and the Conejo Open Space and Conservation Agency (COSCA). In addition, many local communities

manage trails and open spaces through their parks and recreation departments or their local general plans.

Project History

SMMART began with a request from the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, California Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy to the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program of the National Park Service to provide technical assistance in coordinating trail planning issues. Their request was supported by letters from several cities and trail organizations. The RTCA Program provides planning, public involvement, and technical assistance to state and local governments and citizens organizations in the context of river, trail and greenway protection efforts.

In March, 1995, over 45 trail managing agencies, trail interest groups, and related associations were invited to attend a workshop to identify coordination needs relating to trails. At this first meeting, we identified almost 50 steps that could be taken to improve trail management and coordination among agencies, trail-related organizations, trail users, and other interested citizens and associations. From this we identified a dozen priority issues we wished to address through the coordination project. These priority issues are described in the next section.

Over the summer, we learned more about each other, the mission and goals of the organizations we represented, and the mandates and responsibilities of the various government agencies. By fall we established “Action Teams” to take the identified priority items and suggest ways to addressing them. The teams worked through 1996 to research their assigned issue, prepare findings, and develop recommendations. In spring of 1996, a progress report was mailed to over 1,100 people to fill them in on the project and progress made to date. In early 1997, the Action Teams completed draft reports which were compiled into the *Draft Summary Report*. This report was distributed to approximately 1,300 individuals and organizations. Executive summaries were provided to approximately another 500 organizations and media outlets. Copies were made available in several local libraries and at the offices of the National Park Service, California Department of Parks and Recreation and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy.

Two public open houses were held in May to inform the public of the Action Teams’ draft recommendations and to receive input. Over 100 written comments were received and were considered by the Action Teams in revising their reports (excerpts from the comments are included in the Public Comments section of this report). This final report, released in the fall of 1997, is being presented to the public land management agencies and local governments for review and implementation.

Project Scope

The first step undertaken by SMMART participants was to identify priority items that could benefit from some regional coordination among agencies, trail-related organizations, and citizens. The following list was developed by participants in March 1995:

- Developing an inventory of trails
- Identifying locations for trail camp facilities, particularly on the Backbone Trail
- Renewing a commitment to working with volunteers
- Developing common standards for multiple-use trails
- Improving signage for trail uses, wildlife, and degree of difficulty
- Compile information on historical use of trails
- Encouraging agencies to commit to cooperating

- Establishing a multi-agency trail crew
- Sharing equipment across agencies and among volunteers
- Determining access for mountain bicycles
- Establishing priorities for missing trail segments within the trail system

This list was used to identify the scope of the project and to determine issues to be addressed by subcommittees known as “Action Teams”.

Action Teams

Action Teams focused on suggesting improvements related to trails that could be implemented by public trail managing agencies and local governments. The teams were designed to be small, working groups, with balanced representation of agencies and trail users. They were responsible for taking the identified priority items and developing more detailed recommendations. Members of Action Teams came from within the participants attending SMMART meetings. Members were self-nominated. Two teams relating to multiple trail use issues did not accept new members once established in order to preserve a smaller, working group atmosphere and to promote continuity. They were also organized to have balanced representation of trail user interests, although there was some attrition over time.

The Action Teams periodically provided updates at SMMART meetings and presented early working drafts of recommendations for review, comment and guidance. Six of the original Action Teams brought their work to the stage of being presented to the wider public and to the trail managing agencies. Included in this document are reports from the Trails Inventory, Missing Links, Trail Camps, Signage, Multiple Use Trail Guidelines, and Trail System teams.

Several additional Action Teams were established early on but did not complete their work. Included in Appendix A are summaries of the issue, vision, and suggested actions identified by SMMART participants for the following issues: volunteers, historic trail use, multi-agency trail crew, equipment sharing, and agency cooperation. By including this early work, we hope these issues can be addressed in some future trail planning or coordination process.

Action Team Reports

Each Action Team was responsible for preparing their report in accordance with a given format. The larger SMMART group heard from the teams on a regular basis and provided some direction and input to the team as they went about their work. It was the responsibility of the Action Teams to incorporate public comments into this final report. Below is a summary of the issues addressed and recommendations put forth by each Action Team:

Trails Inventory Team

This report describes the inventory undertaken of trails in the Santa Monica Mountains, the trail features noted, and the progress made towards completion of a regional trails map. It recommends annually sharing Geographic Information System (GIS) data to ensure an up-to-date inventory of trails. The report begins on page 21.

Missing Links Team

This report identifies 50 trail segments as “missing links within the Santa Monica Mountains trail system. For each segment, the team described the general route of the trail, actions needed to complete the linkage, the jurisdiction(s) with responsibility for implementing these actions. A regional map

of the missing links is also provided. The report begins on page 25.

Trail Camps Team

This report identifies locations for 12 trail camps along the Backbone Trail, providing trail users an overnight, backcountry camping experience while using this 65-mile trail. The report also recommends location and operational guidelines for trail camps. The report begins on page 39.

Signage Team

This report identifies signage needs and encourages agencies to undertake a thorough analysis of existing signage to move towards greater consistency in the “look and feel” of signs and in the provision of information needed by trail users. The report begins on page 47.

Multiple Use Trail Guidelines Team

This report recommends trail construction design features for new trails that would accommodate multiple types of users on a common trail, providing a safe and enjoyable trail experience. Definitions and visual examples of these features are provided. The report begins on page 57.

Trail System Team

This team addressed guidance to land managers on how to accommodate multiple types of users within the mountain trail system. This report describes the options reviewed and criteria considered by the team. It includes user statements that describe different perspectives on the issue of multiple use of trails. No recommendations are provided by the team. The report begins on page 73.

Public Involvement

In addition to two years of regular meetings attended by approximately 130 people from government officials, agency representatives, members of trails organizations, and the general public, two public open houses were held in May, 1997. These were attended by about 100 people over the two nights.

Additionally, many written comments were received by people not attending the meetings. Copies of the comments and a description of how the team reports were revised from the draft report are included in a final section of the report, beginning on page 97.

Implementation Recommendations

This summary report describes the work that many dedicated individuals produced together through the SMMART project. Much of the report is in the form of recommendations to be implemented by public agencies. These recommendations come from the Action Teams, based on consensus reached among team members. Not all the recommendations here received unanimous agreement among the wider group of SMMART participants. This group was made up of diverse interests and tackled, in some cases, what are complicated issues. Where there was not agreement, team reports note differences. We hope this approach will provide implementing agencies a broader understanding of the range of views about issues tackled by SMMART Action Teams. This, in turn, will help ensure implementation takes place with greater sensitivity to the range of interests, views, and positions.

Implementation recommendations made by Action Teams are summarized below. Further information about the recommendations are included in the team reports.

From the Trails Inventory Team

I-1. Agencies should meet annually and share resources to update the Geographic Information System trail map and database. This will ensure that the map is kept current for planning, maintenance and visitor information purposes.

From the Missing Links Team

I-2. Federal, state and local agencies should implement the needed actions for the 50 identified missing links.

I-3. Local agencies should identify and incorporate existing and proposed trails (those included here as well as others) into their local coastal plans and general plans. A comprehensive trail plan should be created by each local jurisdiction in the Santa Monica Mountains, including an update of the Los Angeles County Trails Master Plan.

I-4. Local agencies can use the permit and land use planning process to reserve sites and secure trail easements. Local agencies should work with the Coastal Commission to accept trail easements secured as “offers-to-dedicate” through the development process.

I-5. The National Park Service and California Department of Parks and Recreation should assist local governments by informing local governments of funding opportunities for trail construction and right-of-way acquisition.

I-6. The National Park Service, California Department of Parks and Recreation and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy should help ensure trail segments are linked between jurisdictions to form a continuous trail system.

I-7. While this list of missing links provides a good base of information, there may be many more trails that should be identified by local agencies for public protection.

I-8. The National Park Service should identify priorities for completing these missing links as part of their update of the Land Protection Plan.

From the Trails Camps Team

I-9. Park agencies should provide trail camps along the Backbone Trail approximately every 8 to 10 miles.

I-10. Park agencies should take the necessary steps to implement the needed trail camps along the Backbone Trail, including following the recommended location and operational guidelines.

I-11. Upon completion of the Backbone Trail, park agencies should consider the impact of the trail design, construction standards, facilities, access points, feeder trails, and ancillary camps and campgrounds on the proposed trail camp locations.

I-12. Park agencies should undertake a resource and archeological study on the proposed trail camp

sites and modify the proposed locations accordingly, should a negative impact on such resources be identified.

From the Signage Team

I-13. Park agencies should carry out a thorough analysis of existing signs to address consistent signage conventions, coordination among jurisdictions.

I-14. Park agencies should include recommended elements contained in the report in their trail, regulatory and services identification signage.

From the Multiple Use Trail Guidelines Team

I-15. For new trails planned for multiple use, agencies should follow the recommended trail guidelines and design criteria to provide a safe and enjoyable trail experience to anticipated trail users.

I-16. At trailheads, access points, and areas of major use, agencies should construct wider and more accessible trails for the physically challenged and multi-users. Additionally, this should be an area where there is clear signage with information and guidelines for trail users. At a distance for trailheads, where fewer users can be anticipated, agencies could apply the guidelines contained in the team report for multiple use trails.

From the Trail System Team

No implementation recommendations are provided by the team.