

THE CALIFORNIA CHAPARRAL PRESERVATION PLAN

**Time to Celebrate and Protect
a National Treasure**



**Securing the Preservation of
Southern California's
Chaparral Wildlands**

The California Chaparral Institute

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THE CALIFORNIA CHAPARRAL PRESERVATION PLAN

Executive Summary

In a remarkable display of foresight and political courage, President Theodore Roosevelt withdrew millions of acres of federal land from unregulated commercial development and protected them for future citizens. Roosevelt's Forest Reserve system demonstrated a rejection of the old model of resource exploitation and created instead the world's largest public land protectorate to be held in trust for every single American.

Referring to this land trust, Jack Ward Thomas, Chief Emeritus of the US Forest Service, wrote, "These forests were all different but, in one critical sense, they were all the same. They belonged to me, to my children, and to all the American people for today, tomorrow, and forever – unless somehow, we allow this incredible birthright to be stolen or frittered away."

There is a distinct possibility that this birthright may indeed be frittered away in the four National Forests of Southern California (the Cleveland, San Bernardino, Angeles, and Los Padres) because of inappropriate management objectives. These four federal land trusts are different from all the others in the National Forest System because they are almost exclusively used for recreation by a growing population. In addition, **these lands are not typically covered by forests at all but by unique shrubland ecosystems, especially chaparral.**

Since the passing of the Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960, the guiding principle behind National Forest policy has been "to achieve quality land management under the sustainable *multiple-use* management concept to meet the diverse needs of people." This includes grazing, timber production, hydroelectric dams, landfills, utility corridors, and other invasive activities. While the multiple-use doctrine may be a workable management strategy in some National Forests far from major cities, it is becoming an increasingly unsuccessful and contentious model for the four National Forests in Southern California, all heavily impacted by a rapidly growing population.

These four forests need to be viewed and managed for what they are: urban parks that provide citizens opportunities to renew their enthusiasm for life as well as land preserves that protect the valuable wildlands found within. By continuing the current forest management model of multiple-use there is a significant danger these lands will be lost by *multiple-degradation* as they are exploited for a wide range of consumptive uses.

Many US Forest Service personnel within the four National Forests of Southern California have strived to protect the chaparral ecosystem from improper management priorities, but they are often frustrated by the commodity-based, "forest-focus" perspective driven by regional and national offices. New policies changing the management focus of these four National Forests are needed to protect California's valuable chaparral ecosystems and ensure that our families and

future generations will always have a place to enjoy nature. We offer four proposals to facilitate such action:

1. Create **Waheto National Park** and the **Grizzly Bear National Monument** from lands within and adjacent to the Cleveland National Forest. These national preserves would be administered by the National Park Service.
2. Designate the Cleveland, Angeles, San Bernardino, and Los Padres National Forests as **National Chaparral Recreation Areas (NCRAs)**.
3. Develop sustainable, **ecologically based resource and fire management plans** in order to protect surrounding communities, preserve old-growth stands of chaparral, and prevent further type-conversion of native plant communities within the four NCRAs.
4. Create **Natural History Education/Recreation Districts** adjoining the new National Chaparral Recreation Areas.

Revised Sept. 14, 2021. For additional copies of this document and more information, please visit the California Chaparral Institute's website:

<https://www.californiachaparral.org/chaparral/chap-preservation-plan/>

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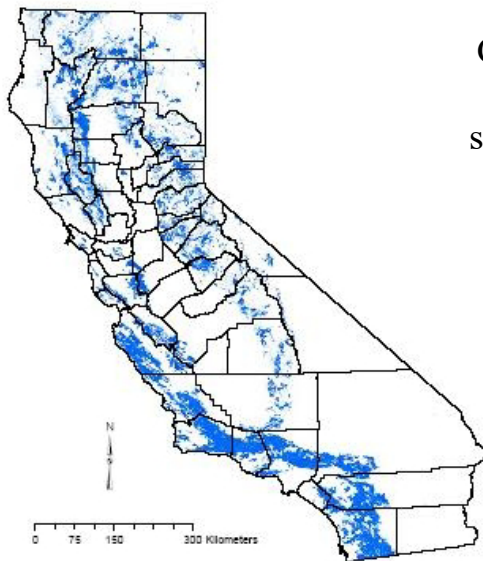


Chaparral Defines California



What's chaparral?

Chaparral is a special plant community dominated by drought-hardy shrubs, shaped by a Mediterranean-type climate (summer drought, winter rain), and infrequent wildfire.



**Chaparral is found
in every county in
the state.**

Blue represents areas covered by the chaparral plant community. From Keeley, J.E. and F.W. Davis. 2006. Chaparral. In M.G. Barbour (ed), Terrestrial vegetation of California. University of California Press, Los Angeles.

Threats to Old-Growth Chaparral

Reality vs. Misconceptions

Fire suppression has protected California's shrubland ecosystems. It has *not* led to an “unnatural” accumulation of chaparral or to unnaturally large fires.

Chaparral is sensitive to particular fire patterns. It is *not* adapted to fire per se.

Old-growth chaparral is a beautiful, healthy ecosystem. It does *not* “need” to burn.



Old-growth chaparral in the Cleveland National Forest.

Misunderstanding wildfire risk

There's no *one answer* to reducing fire risk. It requires addressing *the entire* fire-risk reduction triad: building location, design, and proper defensible space.

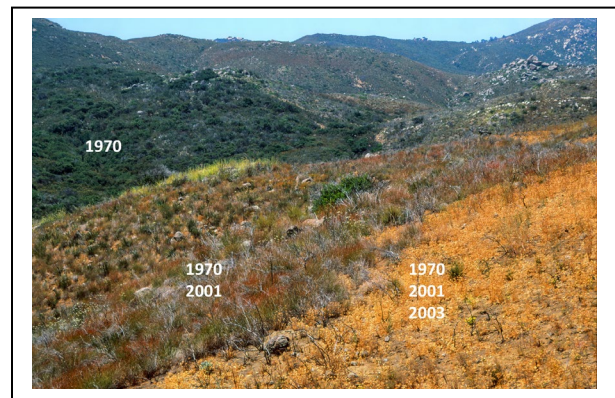
Viewing wildland vegetation as fuel, not the valuable natural resource it is, fosters hostility towards nature.

Too many fires

Fires less than 15 to 20 years apart prevent chaparral from recovering, eventually leading to its conversion to nonnative grassland. Old-growth chaparral is being lost to fire.

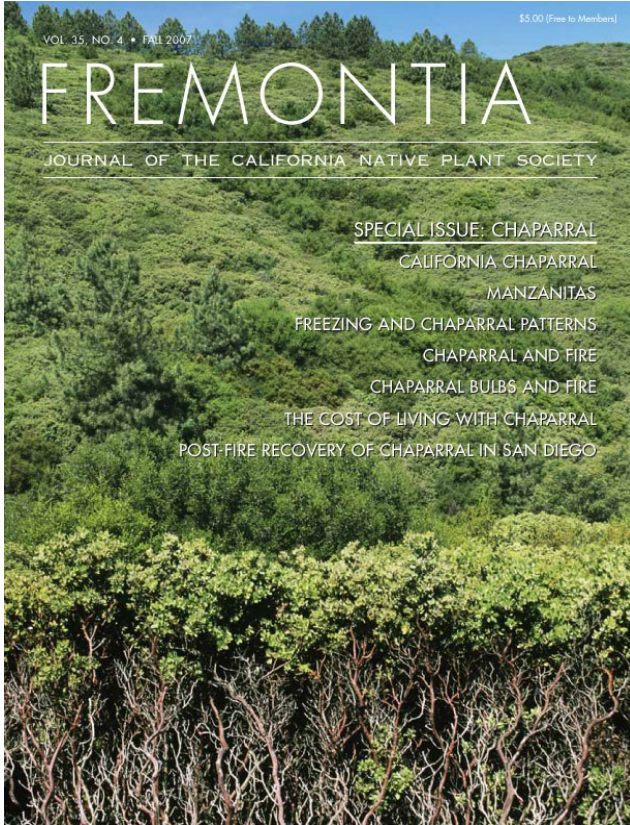
Invisibility

The region's four National Forests are mostly decorated by a wonderful collection of hardy shrubs, not trees. Without being aware of the chaparral's significance, many consider it unimportant.



Recovering chaparral from 2001 (middle) converting to a weedy grassland (right) due to the same area being burned again in 2003.

Viewing Chaparral as Fuel - *The Consequence of Tree Myopia*



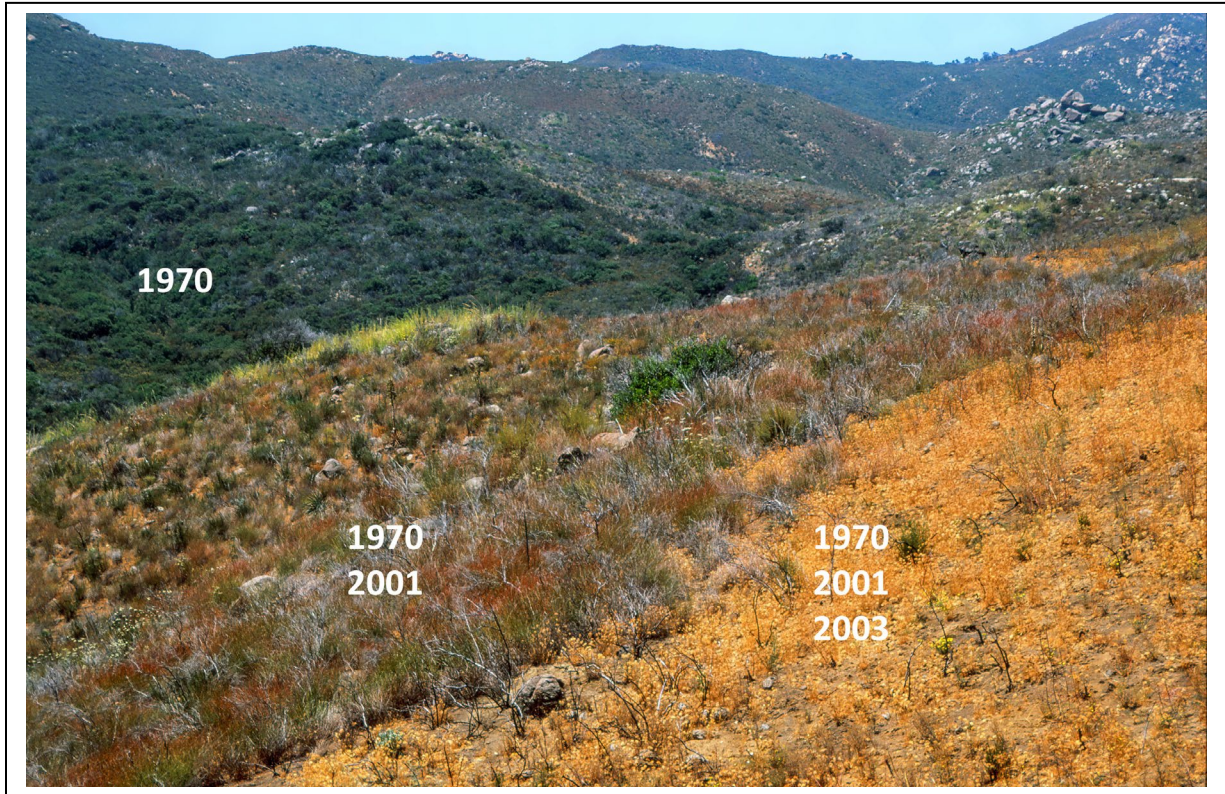
When chaparral is viewed primarily as fuel and not as a valued ecosystem, it is threatened by poor land management practices. On the cover of the fall 2007 issue of *Fremontia*, the quarterly journal of the California Native Plant Society, a remarkable stand of manzanita chaparral in the Cleveland National Forest was featured. The area was clear-cut by the US Forest Service (USFS) shortly thereafter in an attempt to reduce “fuel” around an artificial tree plantation. The plantation was established in 1956 with a mix of Coulter pines and a hybrid between Monterey and knobcone pines. Coulters are native to the area and have adapted to living within the chaparral plant community by having serotinous cones, which open when exposed to fire.

Being surrounded by chaparral is the natural condition for the native pines.

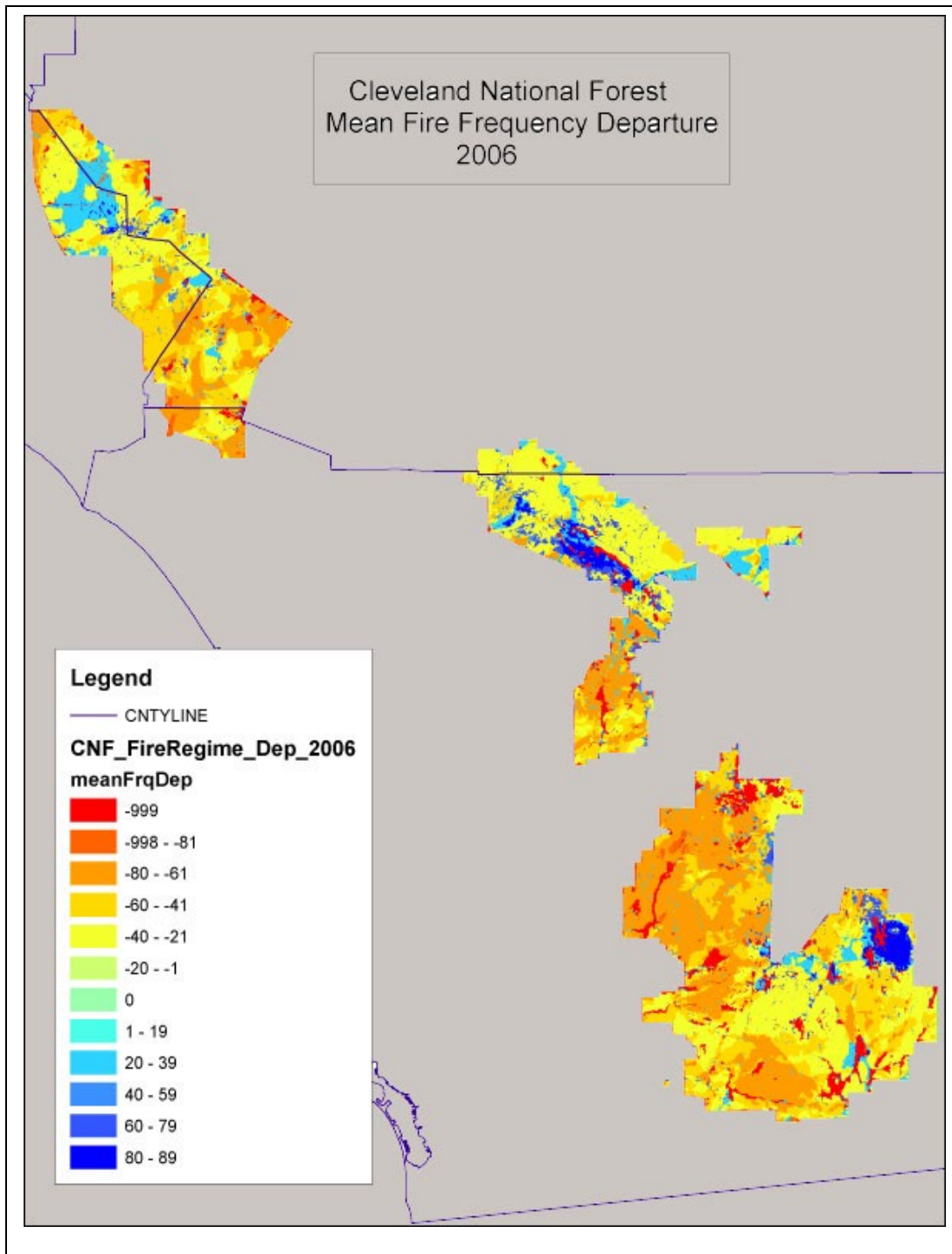
The recent USFS land management plans for Southern California carefully distinguished forest types and offered management strategies for each. Silvicultural methods were detailed for seven forest types. Yet when it came to chaparral, types were neither distinguished nor was a vegetation management plan developed. It’s time to start treating chaparral as a valued ecosystem, not as an afterthought to trees.



Too Many Fires, No Chaparral



Chaparral being type-converted to weedy, nonnative grassland. This site is east of Alpine off Interstate 8 in San Diego County. The upper left shows chaparral that was last burned during the 1970 Laguna Fire. The middle of the picture shows chaparral recovering normally after the 2001 Viejas Fire. It is composed primarily of chamise, deerweed, and several other native shrub species. To the right is a portion of the Viejas Fire scar re-burned in the 2003 Cedar Fire. This area is now filled with nonnative grasses. The majority of the resprouting shrubs have been killed and no obligate seeding species, such as ceanothus, are present. The interval between the two fires was too short, causing the elimination of the chaparral plant community.



Most of the land within the National Forests in Southern California is threatened by too much fire. Areas in the Cleveland National Forest that are experiencing *more* fire today than during the pre-European settlement period are shown in red to yellow. These areas have been or are in danger of being replaced by nonnative weeds due to excessive fire. Areas that are experiencing *less* fire today than during the pre-settlement period are shown in shades of blue (mostly mixed conifer forests). The map shows percentage departure of current mean fire return interval (1910-2006) from the reference mean fire return interval (pre-settlement period). Source: USFS, Safford and Schmidt (2008).

What's at risk?

Native Chaparral and Sage Scrub Ecosystems.



Chaparral and sage scrub ecosystems (above) are type-converted to nonnative, weedy grasslands (below) through short fire return intervals and other unnatural disturbances. Photo below was taken east of Escondido, along CA State Highway 78.



Chaparral



It's time chaparral is recognized for what it is, a beautiful ecosystem that deserves protection.



Rationale for Change

I. Not Forests

Unlike other forests in the National Forest System, the Cleveland, San Bernardino, Angeles, and Los Padres National Forests were originally set aside to protect watershed values, not regulate timber production. Although some areas do contain remarkable assemblages of conifers, **shrubland systems, especially chaparral**, are what characterize the landscape (Table 1).

National Forest	Total acres	Acres in chaparral and other shrubland	Percent shrubland
Los Padres	1,774,520	1,149,277	64%
Angeles	662,409	474,506	71%
San Bernardino	664,830	346,940	52%
Cleveland	420,245	370,654	88%

Table 1: Percentage of Shrubland in Southern California National Forests. Data source USFS (prior to the 2003 and 2007 firestorms).

Chaparral is a semi-arid shrub-dominated association of woody plants shaped by summer drought, mild, wet winters, and *infrequent* fires (before humans entered the scene, the natural fire return interval likely ranged from 30 to 150 years). Due to its protection within the National Forest System, California chaparral is the most pristine example of a Mediterranean-type shrubland ecosystem on the planet.

Many of the conifers, such as knobcone pine, big-cone Douglas fir, and endemic populations of various cypress species, are especially adapted to the chaparral's natural fire regime. The dominance of chaparral over timber makes the four National Forests truly distinct from any other forest unit in the federal system. However, because of an institutional and cultural bias toward trees and the fact that chaparral does not have value as a commodity, land managers have typically had a difficult time treating shrublands as an important natural resource and appreciating their value as nature preserves for local communities.

Consequently, **chaparral** is seen more as a fuel than **a native plant community worthy of preservation** and detailed resource management planning. This perspective has frustrated many Southern California Forest Service employees and private citizens who have come to appreciate shrubland ecosystems and must contend with government policies designed to deal primarily with forests and trees. California's unique chaparral ecosystems are not forests and do not fit well within prevailing Forest Service land management objectives.

Placing an emphasis on properly managing and recognizing chaparral is crucial because it represents California's priceless natural heritage like no other native plant community. More importantly, **chaparral is the closest natural environment most Southern Californians have the opportunity to experience**; it surrounds nearly every community within the region.

Chaparral holds our best chance to help Californians connect with nature in its pure, native form, a rejuvenating activity that is becoming increasingly difficult to enjoy in a rapidly growing state. Establishing a special emphasis on chaparral is also important because it remains, for most Americans, an unknown wilderness - a serious lapse in awareness that will have significant consequences in the future. Without a recognizable identity, individuals, places, and hidden treasures have a way of vanishing before anyone fully appreciates their value.

II. Growing Threats

Wildfires over the last several years have created a culture of fear toward native wildlands, especially the chaparral. Wildlands are seen more as fuel than valuable components of a healthy environment. Demands for the removal of native vegetation across the landscape are based on emotion rather than science. Instead of focusing fire-risk management dollars on creating fire-safe neighborhoods, money is spent damaging or eliminating native habitat in the backcountry. National Forest land is being increasingly seen as the default space for community infrastructure projects. Increasing fire frequency has resulted in the conversion of chaparral-covered hillsides to highly flammable nonnative grasslands.

Forest management plans within the National Forests do not adequately address these problems because the multiple-use doctrine does not place an emphasis on long-term preservation. Instead, Forest Service managers are continually forced to focus on immediate demands such as support of infrastructure development for surrounding communities, accepting the use of public land for destructive uses by large commercial entities, and mitigating fire risk for poorly designed communities adjacent to or within the forest. Problems involving Forest Service land include:

- **Viewing chaparral as fuel instead of a valuable ecosystem.** The 2004 Forest Plan detailed vegetation management plans for every tree-dominated plant community, but it failed to do so for chaparral. Without guidance from a clear resource management plan focusing on preservation, chaparral is subject to questionable landscape-scale fuel modification projects that can seriously compromise the ecosystem's health. Although there has not been sufficient scientific research demonstrating the efficacy of such large projects, they are frequently proposed. For example, more than 158 miles of fuel breaks have been planned in the Los Padres National Forest. Some of these breaks within the Ojai Community Defense Zone project were planned to be up to 2,000 feet wide. Vegetation removal 1,000 feet around dwellings was also proposed. Such enormous amounts of habitat destruction are unjustified from both scientific and resource/fire management perspectives. For references please see our webpage: <https://www.californiachaparral.org/threats/>
- **Dams.** The 2004 Forest Plan rejected designating Morrell Canyon in the Cleveland National Forest as wilderness because the canyon is the site of a proposed hydroelectric dam. This small canyon is a logical extension of an existing wilderness area because it contains remarkable, and increasingly rare, old-growth oak woodland and chaparral plant communities. It was originally recommended by local Forest Service staff to be added to

the San Mateo Canyon Wilderness Area. Unfortunately, due to political pressure, the final Forest Plan recommended a Backcountry Motorized Use Restricted designation instead. This opens up the small parcel to the development of “renewable energy resources” which is an accommodation to particular vested interests.

- **Power lines.** The Cleveland National Forest is being considered as the route of the Sunrise Powerlink, a huge power line that is proposed to transfer electrical power across San Diego County. By cutting through the National Forest, the power line will seriously compromise the ecological health of the chaparral, increase fire risk, and prove once again that National Forests are vulnerable to destructive land use practices.
- **Landfills.** In the 1990s a solid waste management facility was proposed for Elsmere Canyon in the Angeles National Forest. Fortunately, due to intense public pressure, the landfill was not approved. The multi-use doctrine forces Forest Service managers to accommodate the needs of narrow economic interests instead of protecting the public’s land trust, a direct violation of the Forest Service’s own guiding principle of using an “ecological approach to the multiple-use management of the National Forests.”
- **Oil and gas drilling.** In 2001 the Forest Service released a plan that would allow new oil and gas leasing in roadless areas in the Los Padres National Forest that have been proposed for permanent protection in the California Wild Heritage Act. In addition, the plan would allow new drilling in the watersheds of the Upper Sespe Creek and Piru Creek, both proposed for protection as National Wild and Scenic Rivers.

Based on future demands for natural open space, **Southern Californians cannot afford to lose any more protected public wildland.**

III. Changing Use

The Cleveland, San Bernardino, Angeles, and Los Padres National Forests have become urban parks. Citizens in surrounding communities use (and increasingly abuse) these landscapes as they attempt to escape from urban pressures. A tremendous amount of Forest Service staff time is being consumed by demands to satisfy the multiple-use doctrine, rather than focusing on wildland preservation, natural resource management, and recreation.

In recognition of the need for change in how Southern California’s National Forests are managed, the National Park Service has established the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study to examine different management approaches. One such approach is to incorporate a large portion of the Angeles National Forest into a jointly administered San Gabriel Mountains National Recreation Area. This approach is a model that could be used to establish the National Chaparral Recreation Areas (page 18).

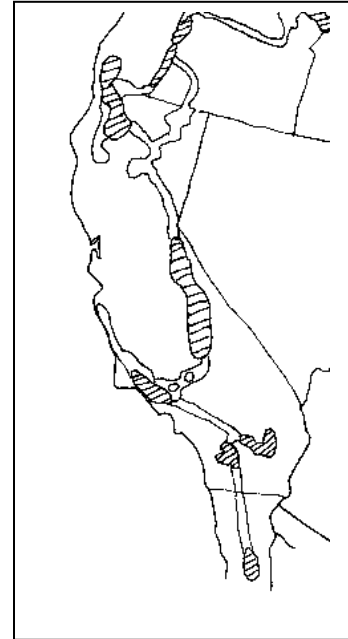
IV. Climate Change and Threats to Biodiversity

Under various climate change scenarios, it is predicted that up to 50% of the shrublands in Southern California are threatened with conversion to arid grasslands. Such a loss will have a dramatically negative impact on California's rich biodiversity. This possibility alone demands a concerted effort to protect what's left of the region's chaparral plant communities.

A key to protecting California's biodiversity is to create large, connected wild complexes of native shrublands with minimal habitat fragmentation allowing predators to thrive and move freely. By providing linkages between the four National Forests in Southern California, genetic flow is maintained between animal populations, a vital process that helps prevent extinction and maintains the health of the region's ecosystems.

Thus, recognizing the value of native shrublands is important in establishing viable habitat linkages. For more information on habitat connectivity, please see the SC Wildlands website: <http://www.scwildlands.org/>

Map: California wildlife corridors. Crosshatching represents wild areas of 500,000 acres or more. From Dave Foreman, *Rewilding North America: A Vision for Conservation in the 21st Century* (2004).



Action

In order to better protect Southern California's National Forest lands, ensure the integrity of their native ecosystems, and create a proper identity for and interest in California's chaparral dominated landscapes for the benefit of current and future generations, we are proposing the following four actions:

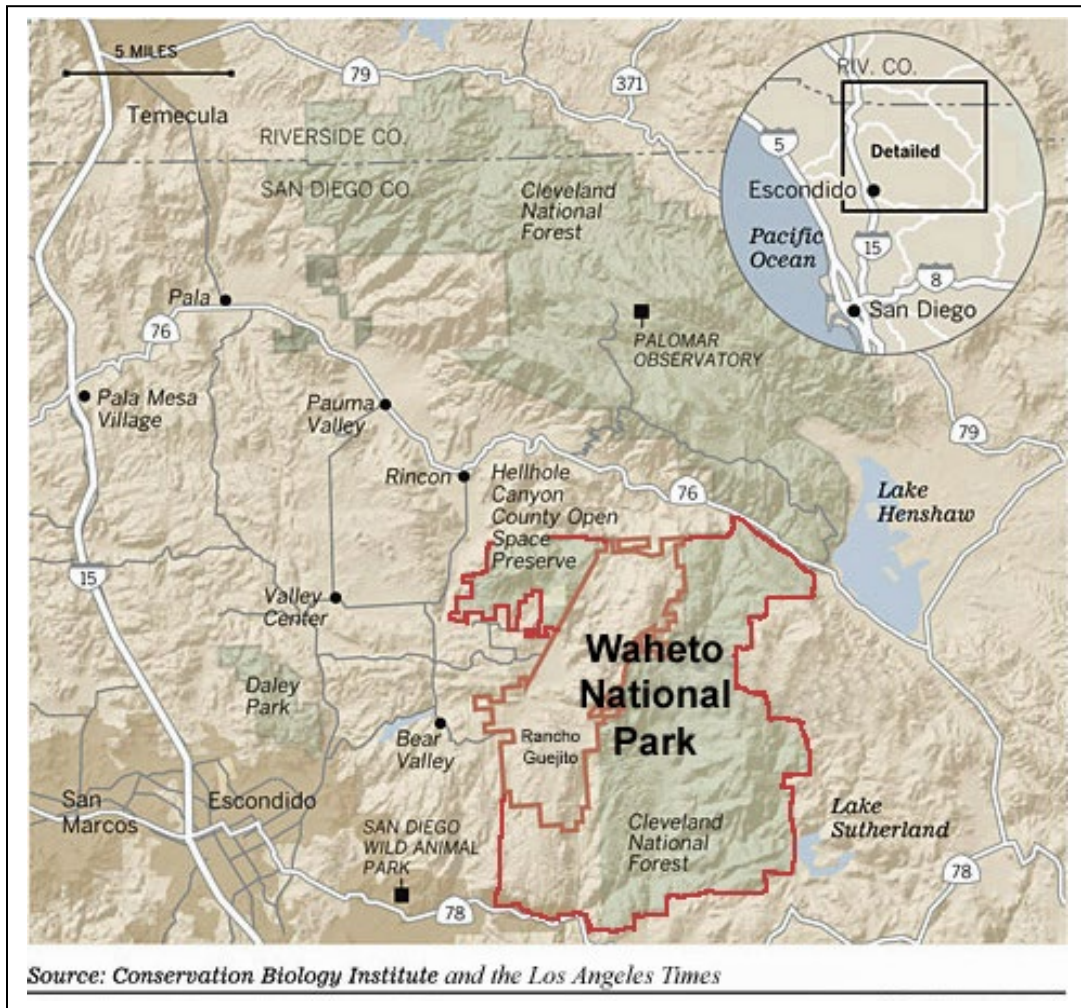
1. Create Waheto National Park and the Grizzly Bear National Monument from lands within and adjacent to the Cleveland National Forest. These national preserves would be administered by the National Park Service.

Nothing calls attention more to a priceless natural resource than designating it as a National Park. Although other native ecosystems are recognized in special preserves, such as National Grasslands, National Forests, and desert parks, the chaparral ecosystem remains ignored.

We propose transferring two areas in Southern California to the National Park System in order to preserve pristine portions of the region’s chaparral ecosystem and to help the public identify and recognize the irreplaceable value of shrubland plant communities. The National Park Service’s mission, to preserve “unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations,” is perfectly suited to accomplish these goals.

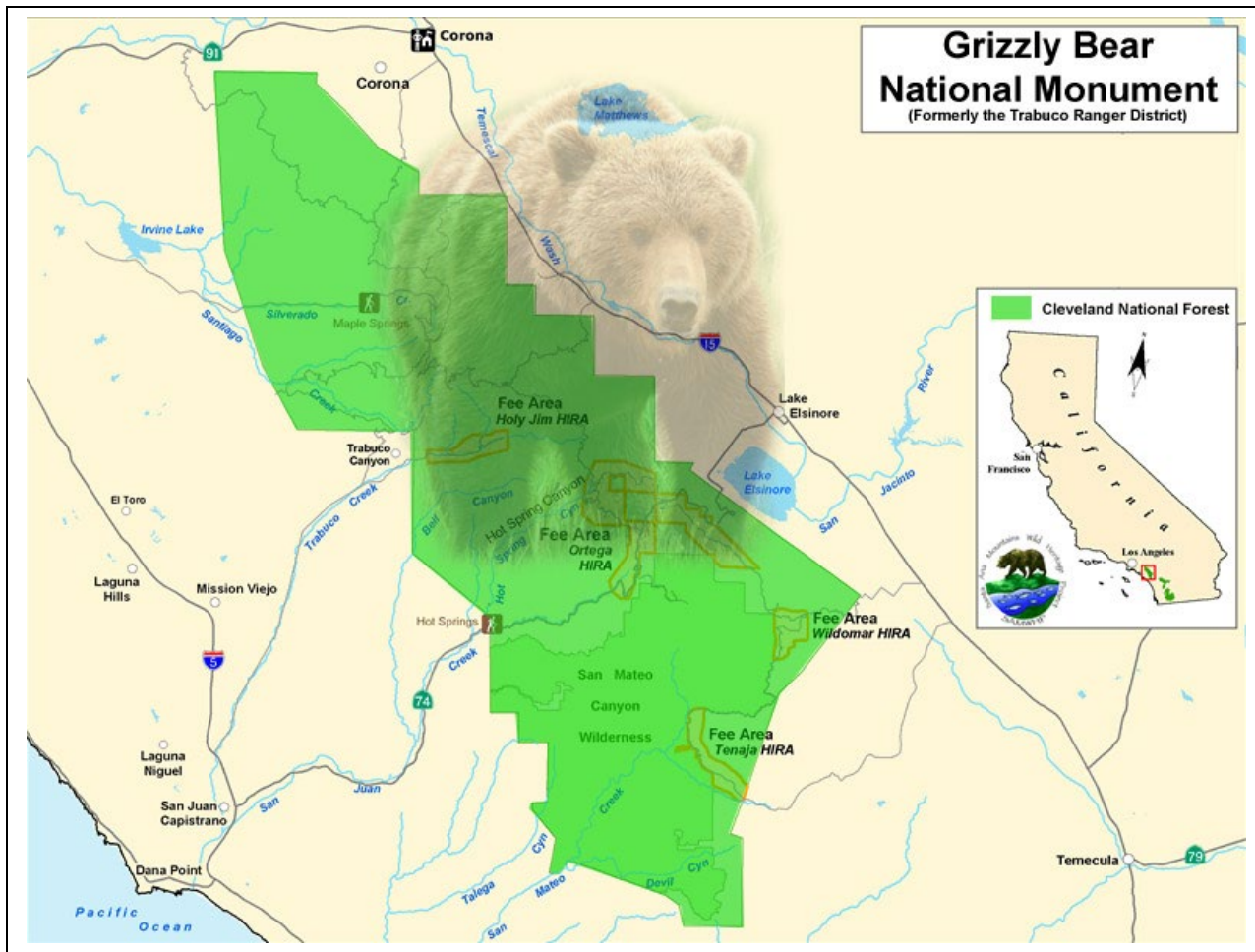
Waheto National Park would be formed from public lands including the southern portion of the Palomar Ranger District in the Cleveland National Forest and a public purchase of Rancho Guejito, a 21,000-acre landscape filled with natural treasures found nowhere else in California. Old Engelmann oak groves, vast stands of beautiful chaparral, and seemingly endless native grasslands provide habitat for a remarkable variety of animals, including mountain lions, bobcats, deer, and the endangered Stephens’ kangaroo rat. It also holds a vast store of Native American tradition and history. Both the Payomkowishum and Kumeyaay called the area home for thousands of years. For more information, please see our Waheto National Park webpage:

<https://www.californiachaparral.org/chaparral/rancho-guejito/>



The **Grizzly Bear National Monument** would be formed from the current Trabuco Ranger District of the Cleveland National Forest to celebrate the chaparral's most famous but now extinct resident, the California grizzly bear. It was within this area that the last grizzly bear in Southern California was killed on January 5, 1908. With a National Monument dedicated to the California grizzly bear, the public will always remember the bear's importance in the state's history and recognize the value in protecting native habitat. For additional information, please see our Grizzly Bear National Monument webpage:

<https://www.californiachaparral.org/chaparral/grizzly-bear-national-monument/>



2. Designate the four Southern California National Forests as National Chaparral Recreation Areas (NCRAs).

The current mission of the USFS of sustaining “the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations” is not particularly relevant to Southern California. In addition, the USFS *multiple-use* doctrine for National Forests sets forth too many conflicting demands that guarantee confusion and litigation in an attempt to please every special interest. It also ensures that consumptive land use has the same priority as preservation. This is no longer an acceptable policy for the lands within the four Southern California National Forests. The Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act needs to be modified to exclude Southern California’s four National Forests. A **Chaparral Protection Act**, emphasizing preservation, would become the new management document for these lands.

The Act would designate the four National Forests in Southern California as National Chaparral Recreation Areas (NCRAs), managed in partnership by the USFS and the National Park Service. This would replace the traditional multiple use/commodity model currently used for these lands to one that more accurately reflects the recreational, educational, and inspirational needs of surrounding urban populations. This new designation will require a new land management style emphasizing four basic components: **preservation, non-invasive recreation, education, and ecologically based fire management.**

The Santa Rosa/San Jacinto Mountains National Monument within the San Bernardino National Forest, established on October 24, 2000 (PL 106-351), provides an excellent example of the type of land management objective needed within the new NCRAs. Congress stated the Monument’s purpose is to:

...preserve the nationally significant biological, cultural, recreational, geological, educational, and scientific values found in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains and **to secure now and for future generations the opportunity to experience and enjoy** the magnificent vistas, wildlife, land forms, and natural and cultural resources in these mountains and to recreate therein...

3. Develop sustainable, ecologically based resource and fire management plans in order to protect surrounding communities, preserve old-growth stands of chaparral, and prevent further type-conversion of native plant communities within the four NCRAs.

A common view of fire management in California is that any amount of chaparral is fuel that needs to be abated. The current forest-biased model emphasizes the elimination of “undergrowth.” Since “undergrowth” is a pejorative term for chaparral, the current model encourages the removal of the very plant community that is supposed to be protected by land management agencies. Such perspectives are no longer consistent with the future needs of a growing population for natural open space.

Chaparral is distinct from forest and requires unique wildfire management procedures. For example, the current focus on “fuel reduction” by the federal (Healthy) Forests Restoration Act is inappropriate for California shrubland systems, reinforces pejorative viewpoints of the region’s dominant plant community, and is not supported by the most recent scientific research on Southern California wildfires (please see <https://www.californiachaparral.org/fire/> for references). Improper management techniques, such as cool season prescribed burning and attempting to create landscaped level mixed-aged “mosaics,” can eliminate shrubland ecosystems through type-conversion (replacing chaparral with nonnative weeds).

A much more sustainable and productive approach can be found in the General Management Plan for the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area from 2003:

It is the policy of Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area to manage natural areas in a manner that maintains and enhances ecological values while at the same time assuring public safety. **The goal is to implement a fire management program that helps to maintain a fire regime that sustains natural biotic associations and ecosystem functions while providing effective and strategic defenses against wildfire.**

One of the most critical fire management decisions facing land management agencies in Southern California today involves how to prevent the gradual degradation and possible elimination of chaparral by type-conversion to nonnative, weedy grassland induced through increased fire frequency. While past fire suppression may have negatively impacted certain conifer forests by allowing growth of excess vegetation, such is not the case for chaparral ecosystems. In fact, *there are too many fires* in Southern California shrublands. A comprehensive plan must be developed to decrease the number of ignitions that occur in wildlands, improve their detection, and increase our ability to respond with appropriate fire suppression efforts.

Immediate action must also be taken to protect the region’s remaining stands of old-growth chaparral that are over 50 years old. Very few of these “redwoods of the chaparral” exist in Southern California anymore. **Some contain manzanita specimens nearly twenty feet tall.** A survey needs to be taken to locate and identify these stands and a management plan developed to protect them from fire and other threats.

Fire risk reduction for homes and communities within and adjacent to the new NCRAs needs to consider the *total* fire environment: building/community location, fire-safe building design, and appropriate fuel management. The emphasis must be on making communities fire adapted themselves rather than on depending upon firefighters and natural areas to bear the brunt of fire risk mitigation. Not only will this approach improve community and firefighter safety, but it will also better protect our communities and wildlands.

The most effective strategy to reduce fire risk as suggested by the California Fire Plan is shifting the fire management focus toward the wildland/urban interface and away from the backcountry. Concentrating efforts directly where most loss of life and property occur will produce the greatest and most effective benefits.

4. Create Natural History Education/Recreation Districts adjoining the new National Chaparral Recreation Areas.

Currently, no central visitor center exists in any of the four Southern California National Forests with the goal of educating the public about the chaparral ecosystem and its importance in the region. Consequently, the public is left with confusion over what exactly the region's National Forests really are: mostly chaparral.

Therefore, a critical component to the NCRA designation would be a comprehensive effort by the USFS and National Park Service to identify at least one Special Interest Area within each of the four NCRA's for the purpose of developing a staffed interpretive center to educate the public about the chaparral ecosystem and its importance to Southern California.

Why is such an effort important? Public wildlands have been established to protect scarce natural resources for all Americans. If citizens do not know of or experience these places they will never develop the commitment necessary to preserve them for future generations. They will forget they exist. Natural resources without watchful constituencies have a tendency to disappear.

There are currently dozens of community groups that utilize current National Forest land and surrounding wild areas as sources of inspiration and education. In order to expand participation in such experiences, local communities themselves need to feel more connected to the natural landscape around them. The most logical step to facilitate such a goal is for the new NCRA's to form Natural History Education/Recreation Districts, organized in a collaborative manner by interpretive centers and local conservation and education entities. These districts would help local schools adopt portions of the NCRA's and other public wildlands for the purpose of incorporating primary experiences in nature for the surrounding community, creating a sense of ownership for public lands, and developing an understanding of and greater appreciation for the natural world.

An excellent model to examine for developing the foundation of a Natural History Education/Recreation District is Orange County Wild, a coalition of wildland land managers including the Trabuco Ranger District in the current Cleveland National Forest, California State Parks, Department of Fish and Game, nature conservancies and local municipalities. Docents from these groups already lead and coordinate educational programs. It would be relatively simple to add a mechanism in which participating public and private schools could adopt a portion of a nearby wildland within their local Natural History Education/Recreation District. Organizations like Bay Keeper and Riverkeeper already have citizen watch groups that monitor water quality in local waterways. Student "Chaparralkeepers" could volunteer to keep an eye on their own patch of "California wild."

Nature provides an outstanding learning environment. For the most part it is free. Nature offers experiences in which children (and adults) can directly touch, see, smell, and hear for themselves the world around them in ways that are not possible without the presence of a protected wildland nearby. Both the National Park Service and the USFS can play a critical role in securing such wildlands by managing California's new National Chaparral Recreation Areas. The National

Park Service can provide the educational opportunities necessary for the public to appreciate and enjoy the chaparral by administering the new Waheto National Park and the Grizzly Bear National Monument.

“To a person uninstructed in natural history, his country or seaside stroll is a walk through a gallery filled with wonderful works of art, nine-tenths of which have their faces turned to the wall.” - *Thomas Huxley*

The Future

Consumptive use of natural resources does not create positive, long-lasting legacies. Unselfishly acting to limit indefinitely financial gain and the loss of unspoiled landscapes for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations truly represents a universal value: **concern for those who do not yet have a voice**. Theodore Roosevelt’s establishment of the National Forests and numerous National Parks helped to establish him as one of America’s great leaders. Millions of people today enjoy the benefits of his vision from over a century ago.

We are asking all Americans to follow a similar path now in order to protect Southern California’s shrubland ecosystems.

The overriding management objective for state and federal wildlands today is to ensure their protection so Americans **will still be able to enjoy them hundreds of years in the future**. As is clearly stated in the 2004 USFS Forest Management Plan’s Environmental Impact Report,

“Projected human population growth throughout all of southern California is expected to bring major increases in pressure upon National Forest resources, including requests to develop and use resources to support community growth (such as water, energy and transportation)... As the resident population continues to increase, so too will the desire to conserve these remaining vestiges of regional open space and scenic heritage in a natural-appearing intact condition.”

While it may be difficult to make decisions that restrict current usage of natural open space in order to protect it into the future, especially when trying to balance competing interests, a fundamental fact needs to be constantly remembered: *once disturbed, the pristine value of a natural resource is gone forever*.

With the prospect of future development and exploding population growth clearly in our minds, **it is critical we permanently secure more wild, natural space than we currently feel is needed today**. This is the vision that drove Theodore Roosevelt to establish the National Forests and is even more relevant now. This is the vision that inspires us to reevaluate how we view the unique chaparral wildlands currently held within the four National Forests in Southern California.

Consumptive uses of protected federal land in Southern California can no longer be justified. This perspective is reflected in California’s decision to appeal the 2004 USFS management plan

for the four Southern California National Forests. “California’s roadless areas are few and far between, but they are extremely important for the health and well-being of our state,” said Mike Chrisman, secretary of the state Resources Agency.

The time has come to shift our focus away from serving immediate self-interests and toward protecting our children’s inheritance and what’s left of California’s chaparral wildlands.

For additional copies of this document or more information, please visit the California Chaparral Institute’s website: <https://www.californiachaparral.org/chaparral/chap-preservation-plan/>



Waheto National Park



Appendix: The Problem

Although written several years ago, this article provides an excellent description of the threats facing the National Forests in Southern California.

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Big Proposals Target a Small U.S. Forest

The Cleveland National could see power lines, a pipeline and a major highway.

By Janet Wilson, *Times* Staff Writer

Los Angeles Times

March 17, 2003

It is a patchwork wilderness tucked among fast-growing California counties, and everybody wants a piece.

As the Cleveland National Forest undergoes a 15-year management plan update, all kinds of ideas are on the map. They include blasting a highway through the mountains, draping a 500,000-volt power line along its eastern flank, and generating power -- and profits -- by pumping water up its slopes.

All national forests are increasingly under pressure to balance competing demands, such as the need for oil and the protection of endangered species. But the Cleveland forest, already cut into three pieces and hemmed in by the suburbs of Orange, Riverside and San Diego counties, is one of the nation's smallest. There is more at stake here because there is so little left, and everyone from the Bush administration to backwoods residents has a vision of what should or should not be done.

"It's a very high-pressure zone of urban development," said Anne Fege, Cleveland's supervisor.

To some, that makes water, power and road projects a necessity.

"The jobs are in Orange County, and the houses are in Riverside [County]," said John Licata, public works director for commuter-clogged Corona. He and other officials say the only answer is a road or tunnel through the forest to siphon off traffic. "You either have to go through it, over it or under it -- but it's got to go through the Cleveland National Forest." To others, however, population growth makes the forest all the more precious.

"It's the tiniest national forest in California, and it's surrounded by millions of people," said Elin Motherhead, member of a Riverside County group battling the power line and dam

projects. "Any change allowing development is a horrid idea.... Where else are all these people going to go when they want to hike, or bike, or just stand there and say, 'Wow, this is what it looked like before there were people here?' "

Individual projects will not be approved during the forest management plan update, which is scheduled to be finished in late 2004 along with plans for the larger Angeles, San Bernardino and Los Padres national forests. But zoning to allow those projects could be included -- and with six alternate maps being considered, many predict that any decision will be challenged in court.

"I really sympathize with the Forest Service," said Mike Boeck, a longtime forest resident on the Orange County side. "People want to build hydroelectric dams. People want to build roads. People want to go motocrossing. People want wilderness areas. They're smack dab in the middle of this, and no matter what they do, I guarantee you some group will sue." Formed in 1908 by President Theodore Roosevelt as a 2-million-acre reserve stretching southeast of Anaheim all the way to Mexico, the forest has since been whittled down to about 427,000 acres hopscotching over freeways, military bases and towns. More than 830,000 visitors use it for recreation each year.

The Cleveland National Forest, like all others, wasn't originally intended to be a park. It was designed to provide clean water and a steady supply of timber. But over the years, recreation and wildlife protection have been added to the missions of the forest -- labeled "Land of many uses" by the federal government.

The forest's northern third is the focus of most proposals, thanks to suburban sprawl on both sides. Orange County's housing tracts are nibbling at the western edge. On the east side, Inland Empire commuters fume in heavy traffic on the Riverside Freeway in the shadow of the imposing Santa Ana Mountains, which block easy passage to coastal jobs.

Lush With Life

The forest today is a rumpled green blanket of stony peaks and plunging clefts. Golden eagles, mountain lions and scores of other species -- including 22 that are endangered -- roam the chaparral-covered mountains.

Like any urban oasis, the Cleveland forest bears harsh signs of civilization in spots. Graffiti is scrawled on the rocks above the scenic Ortega waterfalls. The body of Samantha Runnion, the 5-year-old Stanton girl abducted and killed in July, was found on the forest's South Main Divide Road last summer.

Retired firefighter Mike Palmer owns a 30-acre ranch in the heart of the forest. His mother is buried next to an ancient Indian cooking site there. "This is the only thing the Indians did to the Earth -- made a few holes in the granite," he said, showing stones smoothed by hands hundreds of years ago.

Now, the Palmers shoo brightly clad Ninja motorcyclists off their land. Recreational vehicle

drivers have emptied waste tanks at their front gate. When the Palmers head to town, they dodge tractor-trailers roaring down the tortuous two-lane Ortega Highway loaded with construction materials blasted out of the foothills.

But for Mike Palmer, nothing is worse than what could rise from the valley below. Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District has hooked up with Nevada Hydro, a Vista-based energy investment company, to propose pumping the water of Lake Elsinore up the steep mountain slopes. The water would be stored at night, then released downhill during daylight to drive energy-producing turbines. The process would consume more energy than it would create, but because of differences in day and night power prices, the profits could be substantial.

Electrical Opportunity

In a related project, a 28-mile transmission line would link San Diego Gas & Electric lines in the south with Southern California Edison lines in the north, making it possible to sell and move power in either direction. In addition, a canyon high in the forest would be dammed and filled with 300 feet of water.

Environmentalists say Lake Elsinore's murky, algae-choked waters would seep out of the reservoir and ruin one of Orange County's last pristine watersheds, San Juan Creek. Residents in lower, remote canyon communities fret that if the dam ever broke, there wouldn't be time to evacuate safely. Back-country views would also be marred by the concrete dam.

"I don't think anyone should be able to take a big chop out of the forest," Palmer said. Palmer, who fought fires for the Orange County Fire Authority and the California Department of Forestry, also fears that a wildfire started by high-voltage lines in the forest would sweep into Mission Viejo, San Clemente or other communities.

The Santa Anas, fierce easterly winds that can catch a stray spark and turn it into an inferno, accelerate through these mountains. Half a dozen canyons overlooking Lake Elsinore are named for firefighters who died in 1959 trying to outrun wind-fed flames.

Water district and Nevada Hydro officials say technology has greatly reduced the risk of a blaze being sparked by the wires. Firefighting helicopters could use reservoir water, and a path under the transmission line could serve as a firebreak, they say.

"The district's perspective is: 'We're not building houses or office buildings,' " said water district spokesman Greg Morrison. "We're talking about a power line that would run along the very edge of the forest."

The district has spent \$1 million since 1991 to advance the proposal, and is now paying \$20,000 a month to Washington lobbying firms. They have made some progress, although the project is not a done deal.

The Forest Service ostensibly has final say on the power line, but two local congressmen on

Wednesday introduced legislation to require designation of a power-line corridor. Forest supervisor Fege said top officials of the Department of Agriculture, which oversees the Forest Service, are carefully watching the power-line proposal, though she declined to say what position they have taken.

"We've had a lot of interest from the department," she said. "They are very aware of what we're doing."

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission would have to license the hydroelectric pump and dam portion, but forest officials would perform environmental reviews.

Bill Vardoulis, an Orange County engineer, says he has a one-stop solution to everyone's needs -- a \$3-billion tunnel through the mountains that could handle water pipes, electricity lines and 120,000 commuters a day, with no harm to the forest above.

China and several European countries all have earthquake-proof, environmentally sensitive tunnels that vent exhaust at both ends, Vardoulis says. And he has supporters, including Rep. Ken Calvert (R-Corona).

Tunnel's Tough Prospect

Now if only he could get environmental groups and the Irvine Co., whose land would be needed to build the tunnel, to see it his way. So far, company executives have rejected the idea, instead pushing for a second highway on top of railroad tracks that parallel the Riverside Freeway.

Activist Boeck doesn't like the tunnel idea either and says the billions in needed financing mean that it will never happen. He is more worried about a push by Riverside transportation planners to put a highway through the forest, with one possible route going through the sylvan canyon where he has lived for 16 years.

"They should double-deck the 91 Freeway, not further fragment the forest," he said. "We need wildlife corridors, not highways."

Riverside County officials have proposed four options for a 15- to 20-mile corridor that would cross the highest reaches of the Santa Ana Mountains.

The Opposite Vision

Environmental groups plan to resist all the proposals. The Sierra Club, the Center for Biological Diversity and others have another idea for the forest update: designate at least three new wilderness areas in or near the path of possible projects.

"The whole thing ought to be wilderness," said Paul Carlton, co-chairman of the Santa Ana Mountains Task Force, a Sierra Club offshoot. "Wilderness to us is an area that is going to be safe from a reservoir, or a profit-making hydroelectric scheme, or a road. The most important thing is to preserve biodiversity."

U.S. Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) included Cleveland forest lands in a bill to add more wilderness areas to national forests, but they were removed after objections from congressional Republicans who support the hydroelectric and road ideas, Forest Service officials and environmentalists said.

On a recent weekday, Nicolai Billy, an artist who lives in the forest, explained why he wants it left alone. He picked a handful of buckwheat from the edge of bucolic Morrell Canyon, the preferred dam site, then stepped onto a forest access road and placed the scrap of green on the sun-baked pavement.

"Take this road; this is the rest of California. Take this little bit of green right here, that's all that's left of the forest. We have a sacrosanct duty to protect what's left.

