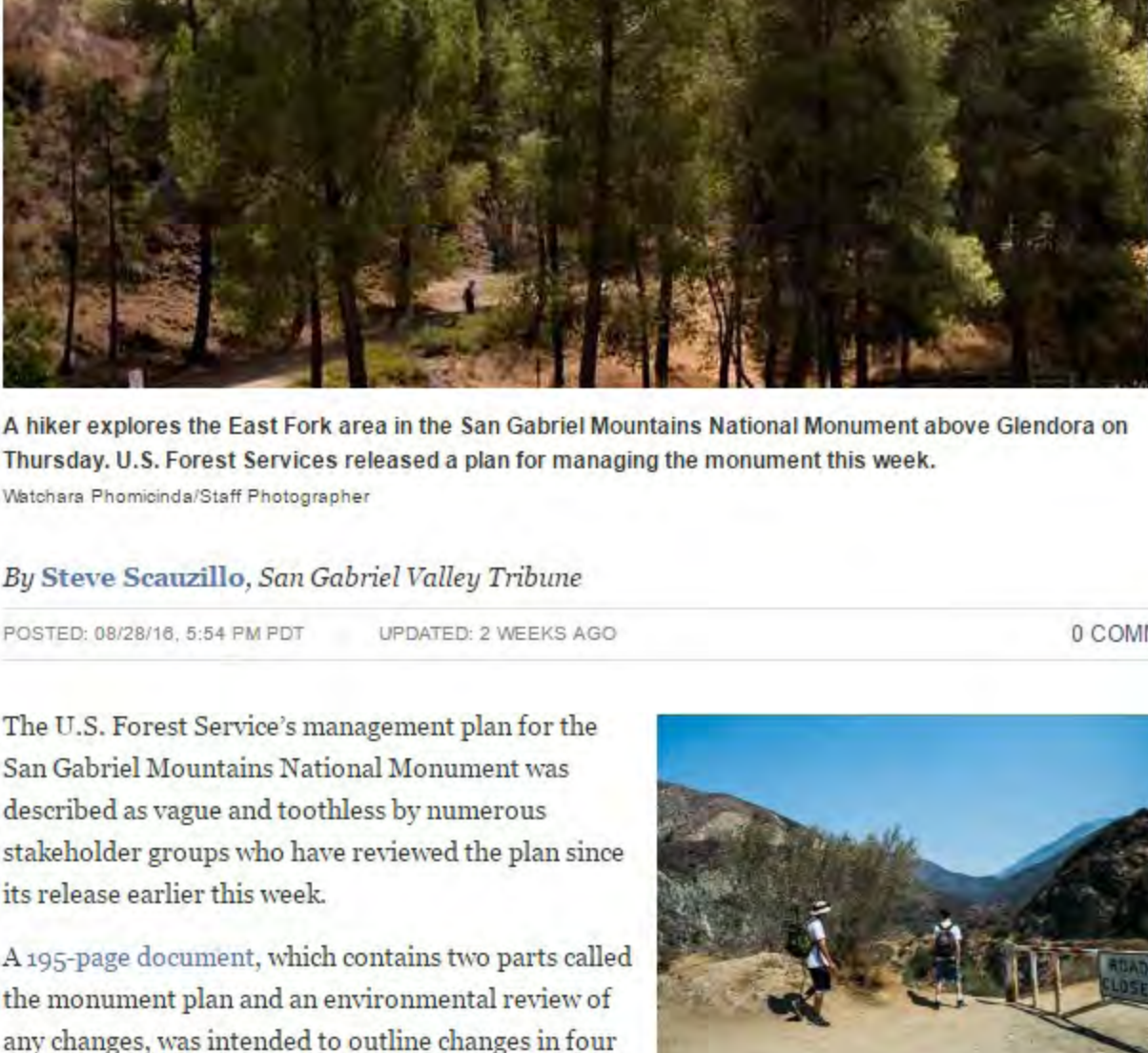




Why some environmental activists say the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument plan is toothless



A hiker explores the East Fork area in the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument above Glendora on Thursday. U.S. Forest Services released a plan for managing the monument this week.

Watchara Phomvinda/Staff Photographer

By **Steve Scauzillo**, San Gabriel Valley Tribune

POSTED: 08/28/16, 5:54 PM PDT UPDATED: 2 WEEKS AGO 0 COMMENTS

The U.S. Forest Service's management plan for the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument was described as vague and toothless by numerous stakeholder groups who have reviewed the plan since its release earlier this week.

A 195-page document, which contains two parts called the monument plan and an environmental review of any changes, was intended to outline changes in four areas: transportation/access, wilderness zones/protected species, mining and recreation.

The 346,177-acre monument in the northern and eastern portions of the Angeles National Forest as designated by President Barack Obama during his visit in October 2014 requires a new approach to managing the monument and the forest, which attracts 4 million visitors a year.

While the plan mentions issues raised during public hearings and in the 1,545 comments received, it labels them as "desired conditions" or things the Forest Service would like to see happen, not what will happen. Much of the plan states the conditions, such as overcrowding in the East Fork of the San Gabriel River — where families crowd into picnic areas and build rock dams in the river that can kill the endangered Santa Ana sucker fish — but doesn't prescribe solutions.

"Nowhere in the plan does the Forest Service actually commit to doing anything," summed up John Monsen, a Sierra Club consultant and Pasadena resident who closely follows issues of open space, the Angeles and the national monument. "Nowhere (in the plan) do they say we are going to do something about it," he added.

The Forest Service anticipated that criticism, said Justin Seastrand, environmental coordinator. The plan does not include "objectives" with specific end results and completion dates, he said. "We didn't think they were necessary to meet the monument proclamation and the planning rules," he said. "But remember, this is a draft. We are very open to reconsidering that."

The lack of benchmarks is making some leaders nervous.



Hikers explore the East Fork trail in the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument above Glendora on Thursday. U.S. Forest Services released a plan for managing the monument this week.

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Glendora City Councilwoman Judy Nelson, a member of the San Gabriel Mountains Community Collaborative, said the group had a lot of questions about the plan, which she said was described to her by City Manager Chris Jeffers as a "high level review without many specifics."

In 2014, Nelson opposed the creation of the monument by Obama and protested the president's visit. She has expressed deep concerns about the monument status as an extra layer of federal bureaucracy, blocking access to the San Gabriel River and the three county dams that provide drinking water to San Gabriel Valley residents.

On issues of water supply, she said: "I am worried about it." But she said she hoped to get those issues clarified. The Collaborative met Thursday with Jeffrey Vail, supervisor of the Angeles National Forest, and others in an effort to explain what the plan will accomplish. The Forest Service will hold five public hearings from Sept. 10 through Oct. 4 to collect comments.



"We are asking for more details. Everyone hopes to see specifics," Nelson said.

The monument stretches from near Santa Clarita to Mount San Antonio, nicknamed Mount Baldy, the highest point in the Angeles and the monument at 10,040 feet. The monument does not include Chantry Flat or most front range hiking areas such as Eaton Canyon in Pasadena or Cucamonga Canyon in Rancho Cucamonga.

The plan addresses Obama's request for greater access for low-income communities. The USFS would coordinate with Caltrans and "the Gold Line" as ways to bring people to nature who don't have access to cars, according to the plan.

"Nothing in previous planning documents really spoke to that broader concept of how do people get to the national forest," Seastrand said.

Many in the environmental community praised this effort but said it didn't go far enough. "The strongest part of the plan is the transportation and access section," Monsen said. "Again, they need to say exactly what they are going to do."

Belinda Faustinos, who represents the group EnviroMetro, said she is working with the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) to come up with train, bus and city shuttle routes from all parts of Los Angeles into the monument.

She said the Forest Service made great strides mentioning the need for providing car-less access. While it mentioned the Southern California Association of Governments, it left out the biggest transportation agency in the county, LA Metro.

"There are no specific objectives in the plan. That is a little problematic," she said. "We can all have lofty goals but it is the milestones that we need to benchmark."

As far as improving the trash-strewn picnic grounds along the East Fork of the San Gabriel River, the plan talks of goals for better trails, more parking and even a bus turn-around area. "Some of that is dependent on financing and I'm sure that is part of their hesitation," she said.

First-time monument visitors Daniel Lopez, 18; Benjie Armendarez, 18; and Marcus Landmesser, 18, drove Thursday from Fontana to Cattle Canyon/East Fork Trail to hike to the Bridge to Nowhere, an arch bridge overlooking the river that never was connected to a roadway. Today, it's where a private company offers bungee jumping experiences.

The friends said there were no markers indicating the location of the Bridge To Nowhere nor the old mines they wanted to explore. "Why not point stuff out so we know exactly where the tourist attractions are, so we can enjoy them and not spend hours finding them," Landmesser said.

Rep. Judy Chu, D-Pasadena, whose bill to turn a large portion of the Angeles and Puente Hills into a national recreation area morphed into the president's smaller but significant designation, said so far the monument label has added \$6.5 million in federal funding, including two visitor information specialists, a trash truck driver and three new field rangers.

"This draft is a good starting point that reflects the efforts and ambitions of the community at large. However, it is clear that much work remains to be done to achieve our goals," Chu said in an emailed response.

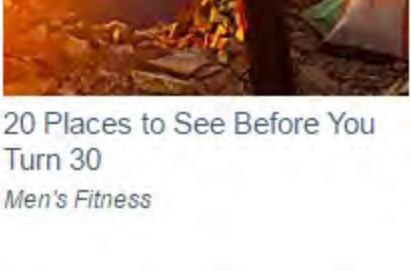
Daniel Rossman, senior regional representative with The Wilderness Society, saying the plan expresses a vision of a forest offering a better visitor experience, with protected wilderness, interpretive signs and better access, but nothing concrete.

"Where they are falling short is holding themselves accountable in achieving that vision," Rossman said.

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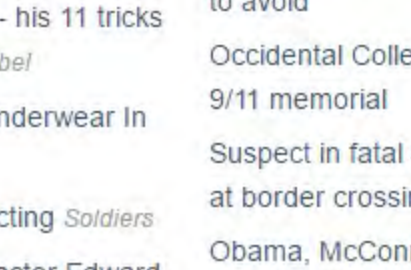
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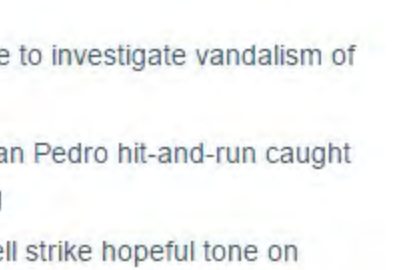
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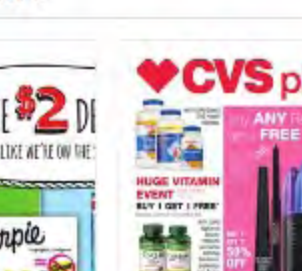
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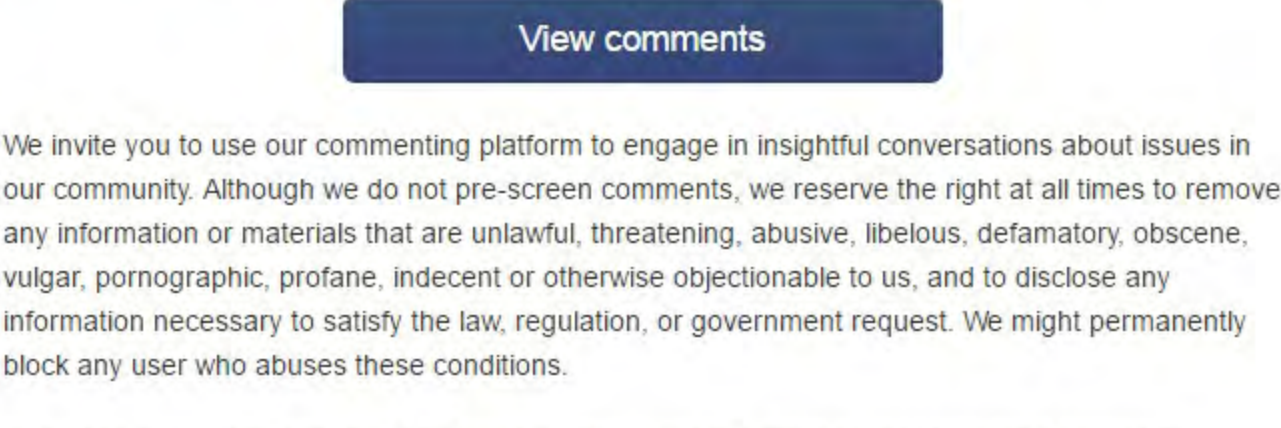


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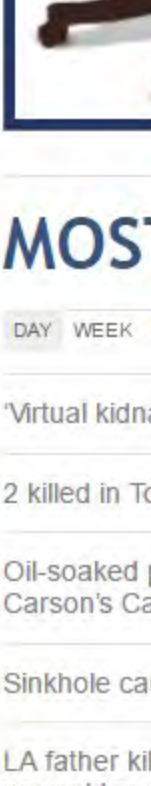


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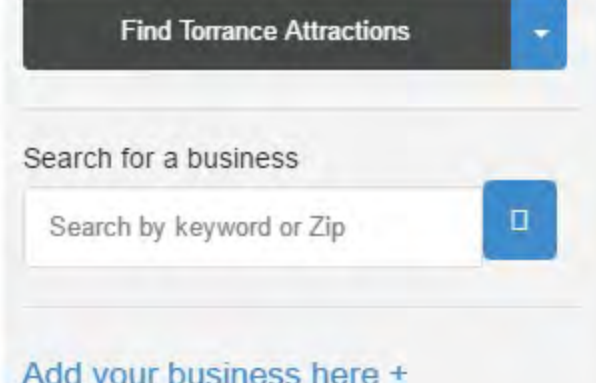


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