

Summary of Recreational Resources at Topanga State Park

Introduction

Outdoor recreation has long been a part of the Topanga landscape. The area's rustic and dramatic, mountains-to-the-sea scenery and its proximity to Santa Monica and Los Angeles made it a natural location for popular recreational activities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Subsistence hunting, trapping, and fishing gave way to sport hunting and sport fishing. Subsistence ranching made way for the gentleman's pleasure ranch. Private clubs acquired land holdings to provide social and recreational privileges to its members. Park acreage was acquired during the 1960s and 1970s primarily to provide open space and recreational opportunities for the heavily populated Los Angeles area.

Regional Recreation

Topanga State Park is one of the four original cornerstone parks of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area [SMMNRA]. The SMMNRA was created by Act of Congress in 1978 as an inter-linked system of parklands and open spaces co-operatively managed by federal and state park agencies, as well as local governments and private landowners. Topanga State Park is located near the eastern edge of the national recreation area.

Trails

Trail use is the predominant recreational use of Topanga State Park. The park offers 50.8 miles of trails and hosts high number of trail users. This extensive network includes over 30 named trails and connectors and at least 60 trailheads and park entrance points. In addition to the perimeter entrances, there are notable trail junctions in the park's interior, including "Hub Junction" and "The Latitude." Important features, overlooks, and destination points include Eagle Rock, Eagle Springs, Skull Rock, the Santa Ynez Waterfall, Will Rogers Cabin Site, the Josepho Barn, Chicken Ridge, Parker Mesa Overlook and Musch Camp.

The coastal canyon landscape determines much about how the trails lay out. Ridgelines provide advantageous locations for fire roads, fuel breaks, and trails with extraordinary views and vantage points. Canyon bottom trails offer steep canyon walls, delightful creeks, and shady riparian canopies, as well as some interesting sites to discover along the way.

Many types of trail-users frequent the park. Hiking alone or in groups, riding bikes and horses---they come for many reasons—to exercise, explore, enjoy the outdoors, take in fresh air, and view beautiful scenery. Fire roads are considered multi-purpose recreation routes. Single track trails host hikers and sometimes horses. Trail camps are currently located only at Musch Camp, and these were associated with an established alignment of the cross-country Backbone Trail.

Topanga State Park trails function in relationship to many trails and trailheads located beyond the park's boundaries. Temescal Canyon, the Nike Missile Site (and Overlook), and Top of Reseda (and Overlook) are notable off-site trailheads. Important regional trails cross through the park, using, where possible, existing trail segments to complete their course. These include the Backbone Trail, "Dirt Mulholland" and the proposed Coastal Slope Trail.

The Backbone Trail was initiated by State Parks in 1978. In 2009, some 30 years later, it is within 5 miles of completion. The trail (currently 60 miles in length) extends from Point Mugu in Ventura County to Will Rogers State Historic Park (Los Angeles).

“Dirt Mulholland” is an unpaved section of Mulholland Drive that functions as a fire road and an important east-west ridge-top trail that collects and connects numerous north-south trails. Dirt Mulholland runs in proximity to the park’s northern boundary, roughly following the crest of the mountains above the San Fernando Valley.

The Coastal Slope Trail is proposed to run along coastal slope areas from its western terminus in Pt. Mugu State Park to its eastern terminus at Los Liones Canyon in Topanga State Park. This regional trail will “maintain stunning views of the coast as much as possible” [NPS] and can be used as an alternate route for the California Coastal Trail when tides prevent passage.

Camping

Recreation at Topanga State Park is primarily day-use. The *1977 General Development Plan*, in accord with the property’s original acquisition goals, proposed many camping and lodging facilities for the park, but currently only Musch Camp in Upper Topanga has overnight facilities. This hike-in trail camp has 10 sites and 4 corrals, along with a small restroom and 6 picnic tables.

The 1977 plan proposals included the following to be variously located at Upper Topanga [Musch Camp], Lower Topanga, and Rustic Canyon. The trail camps were to be located along the Rogers Trail, Fire Road 30, and Temescal Ridge Trail.

- 4 units of Hike-In Multi-Use Areas
- 2 Possible Hostels
- 20-Rider Equestrian Camp
- 50-Site Tent Campground
- 25-Site Campground
- 3 Trail Camps

Visitor Support

In addition to trails, visitor support includes facilities like visitor centers, restrooms, parking, and picnic areas. Such facilities serve the needs of park visitors and enhance their experience in the park setting. The 1977 GDP recommended that clustered development of facilities should occur near the park’s periphery, and development within the park’s interior should be dispersed, so that its natural, open space characteristics would not be compromised. Interior development was to be primarily trails. The park’s steep topography and difficult general access favored this approach as well. Over the past 35 years of park development a number of visitor-serving facilities were developed, although not to the extent proposed in the 1977 plan.

- Trippet Ranch offers parking, picnic tables, restrooms, and serves as a major trail hub. Skeet Lodge serves as a visitor center. All other ranch buildings are used for operational purposes.
- Los Liones Canyon facilities were developed over the last ten years. They include an outdoor amphitheatre/classroom, restrooms, several picnic ramadas, and small parking lots. The area serves as a popular trailhead and day-use area. Planned future improvements include an additional restroom, parking modifications, and interpretive elements. Future use of this area is expected to increase as the regional Coastal Slope Trail is developed.
- Will Rogers State Historic Park is located adjacent to TSP and is a portal to the TSP back country, providing parking, restrooms, and equestrian staging. This historic park offers a small visitor center, house museum, polo field, and other historic ranch features. It is the eastern terminus of the Backbone Trail.

- Lower Topanga is in transition from commercial and residential land uses to park land and open space. Interim facilities include parking, small picnic area, a local trail and scenic overlook, and portable restrooms.
- Parkwide, a variety of TSP trailheads and trail junction points offer limited facilities, which may include some combination of restrooms, parking , picnic tables, viewpoint seating, and interpretive or trail signage. Hub Junction and the Dead Horse Trailhead are examples of such areas.
- Visitor-serving facilities are also provided in nearby gateway parks operated by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and other public agencies. These include Temescal Canyon Gateway Park, Marvin Braude Mulholland Gateway Park (Top of Reseda), San Vicente Mountain Park (Nike Missile Site), and Summit Valley-Ed Edelman Park (Top of Topanga Overlook).

Exhibits or Appendixes:

1 page:

[Map Showing General Locations of Visitor-Support Facilities]

[Buildout Summary of 1977 General Development Plan]

1 page:

[Existing Trail Map for Topanga State Park]