

# KENNETH HAHN STATE RECREATION AREA General Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Report



*Recirculated Draft*

June 2002

*State of California - The Resources Agency*  
**DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION**





Recirculated Draft  
Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area General Plan Amendment and  
Environmental Impact Report

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**Lead Agency: California Department of Parks and Recreation**

**ABSTRACT**

This *Recirculated Draft Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area General Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Report* (General Plan Amendment) was prepared by the California Department of Parks and Recreation (Department) to satisfy the requirements of the California Public Resources Code Section 5002.2. The Department received and reviewed seventeen letters of public comment on the September 2001 *Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area General Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Report*. A range of issues and concerns were identified, many of which have been incorporated into this General Plan Amendment. This General Plan Amendment revises the September 2001 *Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area General Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Report*, updates the 1985 *Baldwin Hills State Recreation Area General Plan*, and is consistent with the Master Plan proposed for the larger Baldwin Hills area prepared by Community Conservancy International.

Since the beginning of the new year, the Department has worked to modify the 2001 *Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area General Plan Amendment* and its environmental impact report to improve the overall clarity, quality, depth, and level of detail in this General Plan Amendment. We incorporated concerns regarding:

- **Park Boundaries.** Areas under consideration in this General Plan Amendment are now limited to a total of 387 acres. This includes the 319 acres of the existing Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area, the 50 acre state-owned Vista Pacifica Scenic Site, and two small parcels (18 acres total) owned by the County of Los Angeles that are immediately adjacent to the Vista Pacifica Scenic Site. All other public and private lands previously analyzed have been removed from this planning document.
- **Proposed Facilities, Visitor Experience, and Resource Protection.** The purpose of this General Plan Amendment is to serve as a guide for future natural open space and parkland improvements, facility development and habitat restoration within the park, and for connections to trails, parks and other public facilities. It is conceptual by nature, setting forth an overall vision for the park that balances the recreational and cultural needs of surrounding communities with protection of sensitive native plants and animals and their habitats. As such, site-specific planning and facility siting has been removed from the General Plan Amendment and replaced by management zoning which prescribes future desired facilities, resource conditions, and visitor experience. Consistent with the new management zones, the Goals and Guidelines also have been updated.
- **Existing Conditions and Environmental Analysis.** Data provided in the Existing Conditions and Environmental Analysis sections have been modified based on revisions to The Plan section of the document and in response to public comment. For example, analysis of cumulative impacts and project alternatives have been revised and additional mitigation measures have been proposed.

Following a 30-day comment period, the Department will review and respond to public comments on this General Plan Amendment and prepare a final environmental impact report. If you have questions regarding this document, you may contact:

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**KENNETH HAHN  
STATE RECREATION AREA  
General Plan Amendment and  
Environmental Impact Report**

*Recirculated Draft*

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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	<b>Page</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1-1</b>
Park Location and Setting	1-1
Purpose Acquired	1-5
Spirit of Place	1-5
Purpose of This General Plan Amendment	1-6
Orientation to Park Planning and this Document	1-7
Planning Hierarchy	1-8
Regional Planning Context	1-8
<b>EXISTING CONDITIONS AND ISSUES</b>	<b>2-1</b>
Unit Summary	2-1
Existing Land Uses	2-1
Significant Resource Values	2-6
Existing Facilities	2-44
Park Support	2-52
Planning Influences	2-52
System-wide Planning	2-52
Regional Planning	2-53
Zone of Primary Interest	2-57
Demographics	2-57
Public Concern	2-57
Issues and Analysis	2-60
Site Constraints and Limitation	2-60
Site Opportunities and Potential	2-64
<b>THE PLAN</b>	<b>3-1</b>
Overview	3-1
Unit Purpose and Vision	3-1
General Unit Management Goals and Guidelines	3-3
Area Goals and Guidelines	3-28
Issue Resolution	3-30

	<u>Page</u>
<b>ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS</b>	<b>4-1</b>
Index	4-1
Summary	4-1
Project Description	4-7
Environmental Setting	4-8
Environmental Impact	4-15
Unavoidable Significant Environmental Effects	4-41
Significant Irreversible Environmental Changes	4-41
Growth-Inducing Impacts	4-42
Mitigation Measures Proposed to Minimize Significant Effects	4-42
Alternatives to the Proposed Action	4-64
Cumulative Impacts	4-68
Effects Found Not To Be Significant	4-69
Organizations and Persons Consulted	4-74
Comments Received	4-74
 <b>APPENDICES</b>	
A. Baldwin Hills Advisory Committee	A-1
B. List of Public Workshops Associated with this Planning Effort	B-1
C. List of Preparers	C-1
D. Literature and Sources Consulted	D-1
E. Summary History of the Baldwin Hills Area	E-1
 <b>FIGURES</b>	
1 Location Map	1-2
2 Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area	1-3
3 Neighborhoods of Baldwin Hills	1-3
4 City Jurisdictions and Unincorporated Areas	2-2
5 Oil Drilling Facilities	2-4
6 Land Uses	2-5
7 Shaded Relief Map	2-7
8 Slope Analysis	2-8
9 Watersheds of Los Angeles County	2-10
10 Baldwin Hills Fault Map	2-14
11 Ecological Areas of Los Angeles County	2-17
12 Detailed Vegetation Types	2-19
13 Habitat Restoration Priorities	2-22
14 Existing Facilities	2-34
15 Panoramic Views	2-38
16 Open Space Deficit	2-41
17 Ballona Creek Trail and Bikeway Connections	2-43

	<u>Page</u>
<b>FIGURES (Continued)</b>	
18 Demographic – Ethnicity	2-58
19 Demographics – Income Level, Households with Children	2-59
20 Site Limitations Diagram	2-61
21 Site Potential Diagram	2-62
22 Proposed Management Zones	3-5

**TABLES**

2-1 Level of Service Definitions	2-49
2-2 2001 CMP Arterial and Freeway Mainline Peak Hour Levels of Service	2-50
4-1 Project Area Air Pollutant Summary, 1996-2001	4-10
4-2 SCAQMD Air Pollution Significance Criteria	4-33
4-3 Typical Construction Noise Levels	4-38

# INTRODUCTION

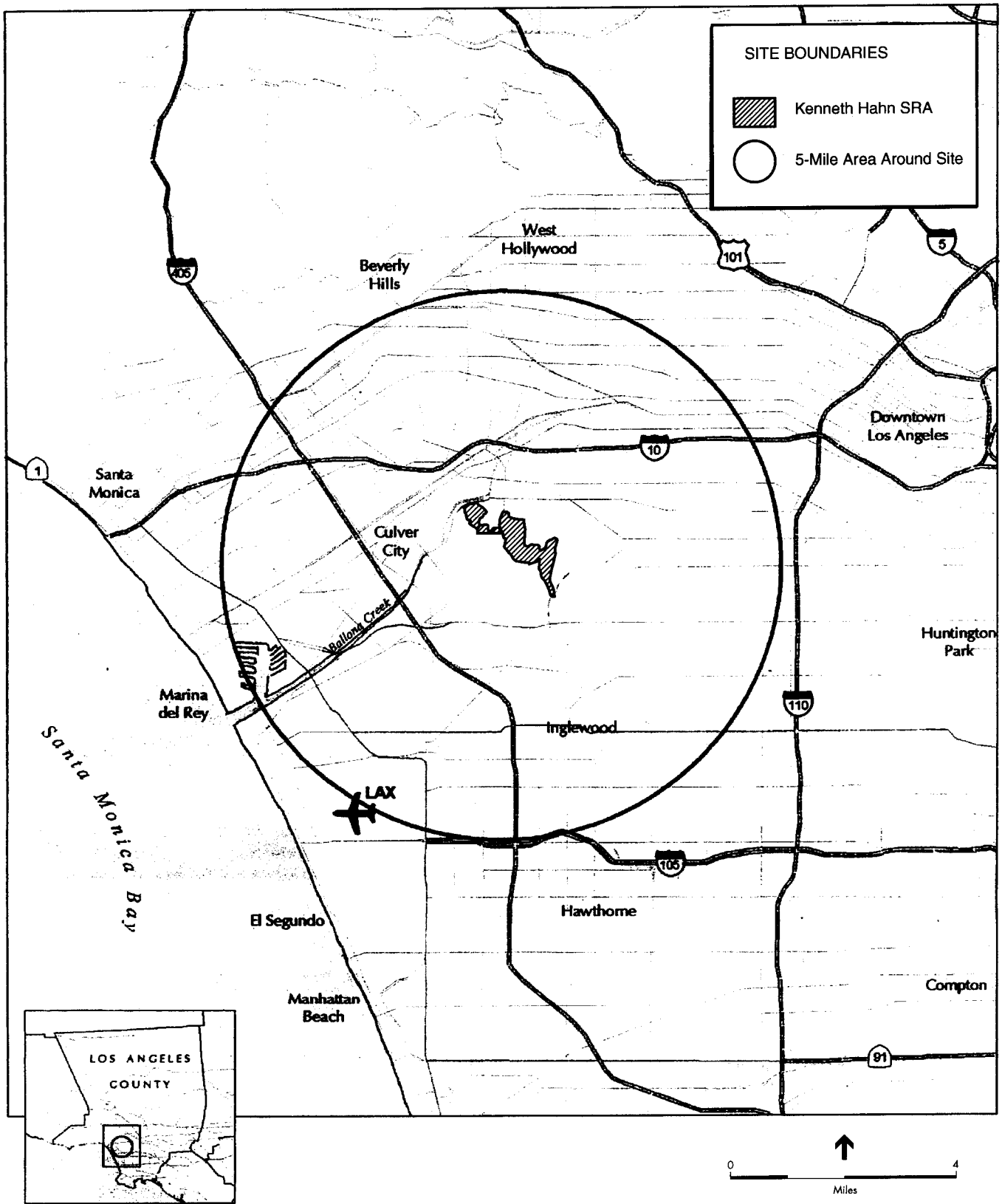
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## PARK LOCATION AND SETTING

Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area (KHSRA or the park) is located within the Baldwin Hills portion of southwest Los Angeles County (See Figure 1). The park includes 387 acres of protected parkland, including the existing KHSRA and the newly acquired Vista Pacifica Scenic Site and county-owned parkland (Figure 2). Four miles from Santa Monica Bay and the beach and six miles from downtown Los Angeles, the park is bordered by the City of Los Angeles on the north and east, the City of Inglewood on the south and the City of Culver City on the west. The majority of the park is within unincorporated Los Angeles County; the northwest section lies in Culver City. The park is easily accessible via La Cienega and La Brea Avenues, Slauson Avenue and Stocker Street. Three major freeways provide additional access: Interstate Highway 405 one and a half miles to the west, Interstate Highway 10 two miles to the north and Interstate Highway 110 three miles to the east.

The Baldwin Hills, including KHSRA, are the last, large undeveloped area in the 127 square mile Ballona Creek Watershed in urban Los Angeles County, covering over two square miles of dramatic ridgelines and steep canyons. The park is a natural oasis in the middle of a densely urbanized area, providing a refuge for both wildlife and people. The park is part of both an intricate ecological system and also part of a complex human environment. Home to hundreds of species of native plants and animals, the park provides important natural habitats, an example of the vast system of scrub and grassland habitats that once made up this area. Part of the Ballona Creek Watershed, water from the hills drain into adjacent Ballona and Centinela creeks, which join the Pacific Ocean four miles downstream. Ballona Creek flows through the Cities of Los Angeles and Culver City, and the last 4.5 miles includes a developed bicycle trail from National Boulevard to the Ballona Wetlands, where the creek flows into Santa Monica Bay. The Vista Pacifica Scenic Site is adjacent to Ballona Creek and the Ballona Creek Trail.

Close to both downtown Los Angeles and the Pacific Ocean, the park is easily accessible to millions of residents, and provides unparalleled opportunities for outdoor recreation in a natural setting. With barely one acre of parkland per 1,000 people, this is one of the most park-poor regions in California. The park is surrounded by over 30 different communities (See Figure 3), 55 schools and 60 churches within a five mile radius. There are dozens of community organizations, including 11 major youth groups, six chambers of commerce and four senior organizations. The park and the larger Baldwin Hills area are the only large, natural open space area within more than ten miles, and are heavily used. Walkers and joggers come from miles away to exercise in the fresh air and on the trails of the park, and on spring and summer

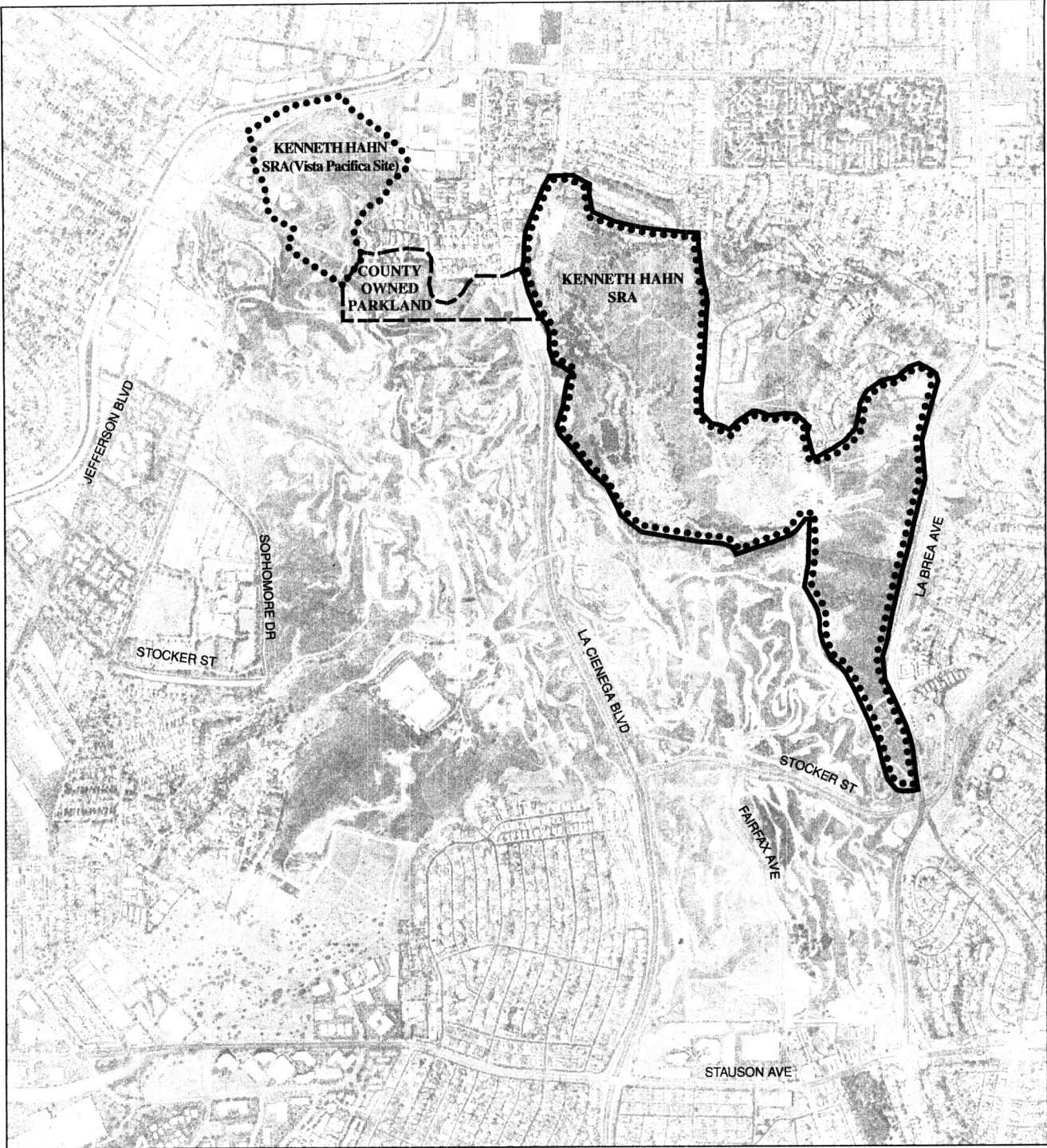


SOURCE: Community Conservancy International; GreenInfo Network

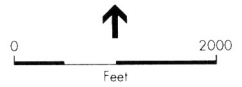
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**Figure 1**  
Location Map





- Existing Kenneth Hahn SRA Boundary
- Proposed Kenneth Hahn SRA Boundary
- - - County-Owned Parkland

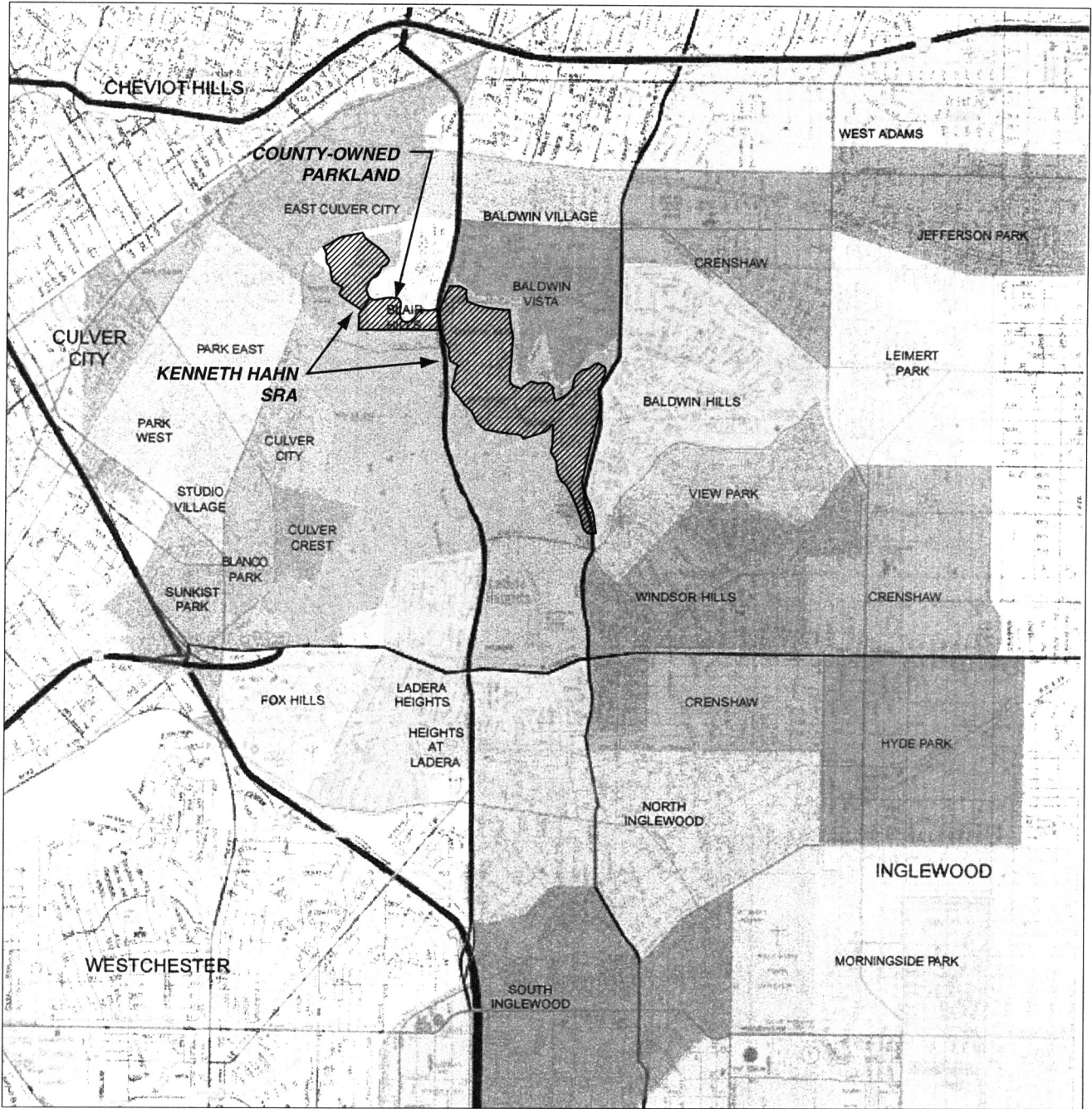


SOURCE: Community Conservancy International: GreenInfo Network

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**Figure 2**

Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area



SOURCE: Community Conservancy International

Kenneth Hahn SRA Recirculated General Plan Amendment and EIR / 202310 ■

**Figure 3**  
Neighborhoods of Baldwin Hills

weekends, would-be picnickers are turned away by mid-day due to a lack of parking. Scouts hold their annual Jamboree in the park, and nearby schools are developing science curricula based on the natural history of the area

The park and the larger Baldwin Hills area have been used for oil and gas development since the early 1900s, and numerous roads, oil wells, processing units and other oil and gas infrastructure cover approximately 950 acres of land adjacent to the park. The oil production operations are expected to remain as long as they are economically feasible. After the oil extraction operations cease, the land in the Baldwin Hills may become available for park purposes, or developed consistent with applicable local, state, and federal regulations

## **PURPOSE ACQUIRED**

The park was classified as a state recreation area (SRA) in February 1983 by the State Park and Recreation Commission on land purchased with federal, state and county funds, with the intention of creating a wilderness park in the heart of Los Angeles. At that time, the California Department of Parks and Recreation (Department) developed the Baldwin Hills State Recreation Area General Plan (1985) which remains in effect today. The park's name was later changed to the Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area, and further expanded in the 1990s. In 2001, the state purchased the Vista Pacifica Scenic Site on the western ridgeline, the most dramatic scenic point in the Baldwin Hills. Since that purchase, the county has acquired two additional parcels, connecting the Vista Pacifica Scenic Site to La Cienega Blvd.

## **SPIRIT OF PLACE**

The park and the larger Baldwin Hills area are the last large swath of natural open space left in urban Los Angeles County. Rising 500 feet above the Los Angeles Basin floor and visible for many miles, the hills are a natural jewel – an oasis in the heart of one of the most densely-populated areas in California. The park provides a quiet, tranquil place where people can escape the city's noise and urban congestion, with significant expanses of native vegetation and wildlife habitat. The park showcases large areas of Southern California's unique coastal scrub habitat and wildlife associated with the plants of this biological community, recalling an era when the land was untouched by human intrusion. In the midst of roads and neighborhoods, oil derricks and pipelines, traffic and concrete, the park is a testimony to the power of nature to endure, providing a source of refuge, replenishment and quiet inspiration.

This is a place to see a hawk perch on an arroyo willow and then take wing, its cry carrying across the hillsides as it rides an updraft. A place to catch the fresh scent of sagebrush dampened by a recent winter rain, its wet leaves gleaming silver against the darker green of the canyons. A place to pause on the trail as a desert cottontail emerges, sniffs the air and then disappears into the underbrush. The park captures the sense of being a part of the larger scheme of Los Angeles' natural landmarks – a place to stand on the top of a ridge and look at the 10,000-foot peaks of the San Gabriel Mountains, to the sweeping expanse of the Santa Monica Mountains, and out to the vast curve of the blue Pacific on the western horizon, encompassing all of Santa Monica Bay.

Winter rains bring verdant green to the park ridges and canyons, as plants take advantage of the water and put forth-new growth. California bush sunflower comes to life in the spring with bursts of brilliant yellow, and wild lupine and other wildflowers bring hues of lavender, pink, orange and red to the park's trails and hillsides. Water drains from the park into Ballona and Centinela Creeks, maintaining the link this area historically shared with the coastal marshes of the Ballona Wetlands where Ballona Creek flows into the ocean.

Oil production has been a part of the surrounding landscape for over 75 years, dominating the physical appearance of the majority of the land visible from the park and major streets. Driving down busy La Cienega Boulevard between the park's two ridgelines with views of oil derricks, tanks and pipelines, it is hard to see that these ridges are part of a 40 mile long series of hills ranging from Cheviot Hills in the north to Newport Mesa in the south. But as soon as visitors enter the park they enter another world. With spectacular panoramic views, winding trails, a fishing lake, lotus pond and expanses of lawn and picnic areas, the park provides thousands of visitors a place to gather, enjoy the quiet and a sense of belonging to an important place.

The park stretches to meet the demands of outdoor enthusiasts throughout the region. Weekday mornings and evenings are filled with walkers, hikers and joggers who use the five miles of trails and roads that wind through the passive use areas. Afternoons are punctuated with school buses carrying students on field trips or to conduct outdoor sports activities. Weekends are the most vibrant with picnics, barbecues, fishing and family gatherings filling the grounds to capacity throughout much of the year.

This is the magic of KHSRA – that within minutes of the cacophony that is urban Los Angeles, another world exists – one where the delicate balance of plants and wildlife is maintained, where a tranquil recreational experience is easily accessible, and where people can go to enjoy the natural world that is an important part of protecting the health and quality of life in urban communities.

Nearly a quarter of a century has passed since KHSRA was first created to protect the natural features of the Baldwin Hills and to provide a regional natural, open space park in the heart of urban Los Angeles. With increasing population growth, demands for high-quality outdoor recreation in natural settings has intensified, as has the focus on converting industrial areas in urban communities to recreational uses and the need to protect and restore the native habitat of the Baldwin Hills.

## **PURPOSE OF THIS GENERAL PLAN AMENDMENT**

This General Plan Amendment<sup>1</sup> was prepared by the California Department of Parks and Recreation to satisfy the requirements of the California Public Resources Code (PRC) Section

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<sup>1</sup> The general plan is the primary management document for a unit of the State Park System, establishing its purpose and a management direction for the future by providing a defined framework for a unit's development, ongoing management, and public use. Thereafter, this framework assists in guiding daily decision-making and serves as the basis for developing more detailed management and site-specific project plans.

5002.<sup>22</sup> This Re-circulated Draft KHSRA General Plan Amendment revises the September 2001 *Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area General Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Report*, updates the 1985 *Baldwin Hills State Recreation Area General Plan*, and is consistent with the Master Plan proposed for the larger Baldwin Hills area prepared by Community Conservancy International (CCI). The purpose of the KHSRA General Plan Amendment is to serve as a guide for future natural open space and parkland improvements, facility development and habitat restoration within the park, and for connections to trails, parks and other public facilities. This plan is conceptual by nature, setting forth an overall vision for the park that balances the recreational and cultural needs of surrounding communities with protection of sensitive native plants and animals and their habitats.

This General Plan Amendment reflects the many changes in surrounding neighborhoods, a better understanding of the role of uplands in managing watersheds and coastal water quality, the current knowledge of the park's biological resources, and current recreation and community needs. It culminates nearly three years of comprehensive research, technical site analysis and ecological assessment, and reflects an extensive public planning process led by CCI and guided by the Baldwin Hills Park Advisory Committee. This process included the numerous community organizations, public agencies and other stakeholders within five miles of the park.

## **ORIENTATION TO PARK PLANNING AND THIS DOCUMENT**

General plans provide guidance rather than definitive proposals. General plans create an ultimate purpose and vision for unit management, while management and project plans are developed to provide the necessary details for specific actions, such as the definition of specific methodologies, objectives, and designs. This General Plan Amendment incorporates by reference the September 2001 "*Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area General Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Report*", "*The Biota of the Baldwin Hills – An Ecological Assessment*" prepared by the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County Foundation and the "*Draft Baldwin Hills Park Master Plan Environmental Analysis: Narrative Initial Study and Baseline Conditions*" prepared by the law office of J. William Yeates and the law office of Remy, Thomas and Moose LLP. Future specific park and facility projects would need to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as well as all other applicable laws and statutes. This may include additional environmental and other site studies to assess the potential impacts of future proposals.

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<sup>22</sup> The PRC specifies that a general plan will be prepared prior to development of any new facilities and shall consist of elements of discussion that will evaluate and define the proposed management of resources, land uses, facilities, concessions, operation of the unit, and any environmental impacts. The KHSRA General Plan Amendment must be submitted to the State Park and Recreation Commission for approval.

## PLANNING HIERARCHY

The following planning hierarchy provides direction for the future of KHSRA.

**Department Mission:** For all units of the California State Park System, *“The Mission of the California Department of Parks and Recreation is to provide for the health, inspiration, and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state’s extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.”*

**Classification:** Along with all units that have been designated as “state recreation areas”, KHSRA is managed under the direction of Public Resources Code Section 5019.56a.

**Declaration of Purpose:** A broad statement of direction, unique to KHSRA, (The Plan, page 3-2).

**Management Zones:** A land-use zoning plan for the park that links general levels of desired resource conditions and visitor experience to geographic areas depicted on a map (The Plan, page 3-4).

**Park-wide Management Goals and Guidelines:** Topical guidance whose scope is relevant for the entire park (The Plan, page 3-9)

**Specific Area Goals and Guidelines:** Management goals and guidelines that clarify goals for a specific area (The Plan, page 3-28).

## REGIONAL PLANNING CONTEXT

This Re-circulated Draft KHSRA General Plan Amendment is consistent with the Master Plan proposed for the larger Baldwin Hills area prepared by CCI, a three-year effort to develop the long-term vision for the larger Baldwin Hills area. The location of the Baldwin Hills, in the heart

of a densely populated and highly diverse urban area, required a community-based approach to the Master Plan. Beginning in 1998, CCI combined public and private funds to create a community-based planning effort for state parks located in urban areas. Working with the landscape architectural team of Mia Lehrer + Associates and Hood Design, CCI held over 200 individual meetings with a broad range of organizations, community leaders, elected officials, public agencies and other stakeholders. Over 700 people attended public workshops held between 2000 and 2001. An 85-member Baldwin Hills Park Advisory Committee was formed to provide community guidance for the planning process. This committee and its Executive Committee met regularly in 2000-2001, and provided critical direction and input.

There are currently over 30 different public agencies involved in the regional Baldwin Hills planning effort. Those with primary responsibility include California Department of Parks and Recreation, Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation, the Baldwin Hills Conservancy, the County of Los Angeles and the Baldwin Hills Regional Conservation Authority. Much of the land in public ownership is owned by the State of California and managed by the County of Los Angeles under a long-term operating agreement. California State Parks manages the Vista Pacifica Scenic Site, while the County manages the Ladera Ball Fields and KHSRA. The California State Coastal Conservancy plays a role as well, as the Baldwin Hills is a critical portion of the Ballona Creek watershed. All of these agencies were involved in the regional Baldwin Hills Master Plan process, as were the many cities and the park, human services, public works, transportation, public safety and law enforcement agencies that have jurisdiction within the area.

