

Nestled in the **Santa Clarita Valley** at the base of the San Gabriel Mountains, Placerita Canyon Natural Area invites visitors to explore its rich blend of history, wildlife, and scenic beauty. This foundation document celebrates the park's unique role in preserving California's first gold discovery site and its vibrant natural ecosystems for future generations.

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### **Park Purpose and Significance: Why was this land purchased?**

Placerita Canyon Natural Area was purchased by the State of California in 1950 from the homesteading Walker Family to establish Placerita Canyon State Park. The purpose of the purchase was to:

- Preserve the site of California's first documented gold discovery, made by Francisco López in 1842, a moment of great historical importance.
  - Protect the natural beauty and biological diversity of the canyon for public enjoyment, recreation, and education.
  - Provide opportunities for visitors to explore, learn, and connect with nature while safeguarding the area's historic and ecological integrity.
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### **Special Mandates**

#### **Ownership and Management:**

The property is owned by the State of California and designated as an official California State Park. It is operated by the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation under a long-term management agreement.

#### **Management History:**

Los Angeles County DPR has managed and operated the park for over three decades. In 2012, the County renewed a 50-year operating agreement with the State to continue management.

#### **Regulatory Compliance:**

Park operations must comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and County policies related to:

- Land use and planning
- Habitat restoration and protection
- Cultural and historical resource preservation

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## **Park Features**

### **Size and Location:**

Placerita is a 333-acre park located in the Santa Clarita Valley, on the northwest slope of the San Gabriel Mountains, surrounded by the Angeles National Forest.

### **Habitats and Plant Communities:**

- **Oak Woodland:** Home to mature coast live oaks that provide shade, acorns, and nesting habitat for countless wildlife species.
- **Chaparral:** Dense, drought-tolerant shrublands that support specialized animal communities adapted to California's Mediterranean climate.
- **Riparian Corridor:** Seasonal creeks lined with willows, sycamores, and mule fat that sustain amphibians, birds, and pollinators.

### **Wildlife:**

The park supports a wide variety of native species, including songbirds, raptors, reptiles, deer, coyotes, bobcats, and numerous insects essential to pollination and soil health.

### **Trails:**

- Eight scenic trails totaling over 12 miles, offering a variety of hiking experiences and difficulty levels.
- The Canyon Trail was the first multi-use trail in the Los Angeles County Park System.
- A Braille Trail is currently under development to enhance accessibility for all visitors.

### **Facilities:**

- A remodeled Nature Center, classroom, and gift shop.
  - Outdoor amphitheater, picnic area, and interpretive exhibits located throughout the park.
  - **Volunteers and Education:**
    - The Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates (PCNCA) is an active volunteer organization that:
      - Offers 10+ nature programs weekly.
      - Provides school tours for public, private, and homeschool groups.
      - Supports community outreach, interpretive events, and park stewardship projects.
  - **Annual Special Events:**
    - Placerita Open House – held the second Saturday in May.
    - Holiday Crafts Fair – held the first weekend in December.
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## **Fundamental Resources and Values**

These resources are essential to achieving the park's mission and maintaining its ecological, cultural, and educational significance.

- Nature Center & Interpretive Programs:
    - Live animal presentations and exhibits featuring native birds, mammals, and reptiles.
    - Weekend programs led by trained live bird handlers and volunteer naturalists.
    - Environmental education programs emphasize the importance of native ecosystems such as oak woodland, chaparral, and riparian habitats, highlighting the interdependence of local flora and fauna.
  - Endangered Species Habitat:
    - The Spotted Owl (*Strix occidentalis*) inhabits the upper canyon near the Waterfall Trail, representing one of the park's most sensitive ecological areas.
  - Historic & Cultural Features:
    - California Historical Landmark: *Oak of the Golden Dream*, site of the 1842 gold discovery by Francisco López.
    - Walker Cabin, Historic Mural, and remnants of natural oil seepage reflecting early settlement and resource history.
    - Cultural Programs:
      - *Indigenous Peoples Day Celebration*
      - *LGBTQ+ Night Hike and Community Event*
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