

Aesthetic Resource Summary

Introduction

The aesthetic experience of an environment is as complex and multi-dimensional as the environment itself. It evolved, along with the rest of our humanness, primarily in natural environments. Topanga State Park's 11,525 acres are a wonderful composite of such environments. In one park-place we can experience the sublime vastness of the Pacific Ocean; the steep magnificence of mountainsides covered in thick, blue-green sheets of chaparral; we can walk through ancestral oak woodlands and shady, stream-fed canyon bottoms; we can view layer upon layer of scenic canyon and ridgelines; and we can come "home" to the rolling grassland-savannah.

Landscape Character

Canyons and ridgelines define the landscape, and exposed bedrock, representing many geologic formations, is found throughout the park. Canyon corridors are important passageways for water, air flow, people, and wildlife. The deeper canyons shelter flowing stream courses and riparian woodlands of various compositions. Chaparral typically covers the steep canyon walls and wraps protective layers of leaves, branches, and roots over much of the mountains' most vulnerable terrain. Layered peaks and ridgelines offer characteristic views from many of the park's trails, and sudden windows open to worlds beyond. Grassland and coastal sage scrub create supporting habitat for many resident plant and wildlife species. These are usually the areas favored for human settlement as well, and park lands have a long and varied history of human use. Fire brings a natural, violent, and unsettling means of renewal for this land. The destructive, life-threatening, and unpredictable nature of modern wildfires casts subtle, but ever-present shadows of unease over life in these mountains.

Park Access, Orientation and Circulation

Topanga State Park is idiosyncratic when it comes to orientation and access. It lacks a single entry point and internal circulation is primarily trails and fire roads. Approaches to the park are numerous, generally relating to whichever of the surrounding communities one is coming from or through and which major arterial carries traffic on that side of the park. For planning purposes the following general approaches are used to convey collected information. Each approach has a string of entrance points.

- Northern Approach [Dirt Mulholland and the San Fernando Valley Communities]
- Southern Approach [Sunset & PCH and Pacific Palisades]
- Eastern Approach [Westridge Area]
- Western Approach [Topanga Canyon Road]

Canyon names are essential references, and creeks, roads, and neighborhoods are related to local canyons. At least seventeen canyons relate in some way to the park. There are around 60 entrances to Topanga State Park. Few people know all of them. The primary park entrances are:

- Trippet Ranch
- Temescal Canyon Park
- Will Rogers State Historic Park
- Los Liones Canyon Road
- Top of Reseda

Special Features and Landscapes

Visitors come to Topanga State Park for many reasons. Often they choose specific trails and areas of the park based on what they expect to experience. Many come just to be outdoors and enjoy the scenic natural landscape, while others seek peace and quiet or pay close attention to the details of native flora and fauna. The pace of movement through the park affects observations. On a trail, recognizable features and landscapes help us to orient ourselves. They are “place-making” components. They also reward our desire for exploration and discovery. The following categories were selected to be mapped as Topanga State Park’s special features and landscapes.

Viewsheds & Vantage Points	Canyons and Creeks	Rock Features
Historic Sites & Structures	Major Trail Junctions	Arterials
Significant Cultural Areas	Distinctive Vegetation	Water Features
Fire Roads & Ranch Roads	Gateways	Trails

Topanga State Park has a number of what could be called “Special Study Areas.” These are primary destination points, as well as candidates for future study and development. These areas include the Trippet Ranch Area, Lower Topanga, Los Liones Canyon and Will Rogers State Historic Park (which is adjacent to and often used in conjunction with Topanga State Park.) A series of photo essays is underway which attempts to capture some of their unique character and aesthetic qualities.

Conclusion

The *1977 General Development Plan* proposed intensive recreational uses in the peripheral areas of the park and less intensive uses in the interior portions of the park. This “clustered” development concept acknowledged the natural limitations of the park’s topography and the imperative of natural and cultural resource protection over significant acreage. Although many of the plan’s proposed recreational developments have not been implemented, the resource protection goals provided well for the park’s future. As we re-evaluate the park in terms of current and future social values, it is hoped that this legacy will continue forward.

Exhibits:

1 page: **[Map Showing Special Features and Landscapes]**