



MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

FROM: 
Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Executive Officer

DATE: March 1, 2006

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item VIII: Consideration of resolution authorizing acceptance of an approximately 230-acre open space dedication in lower Violin Canyon west of Interstate 5 and acceptance of a maintenance endowment, unincorporated Castaic area.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing acceptance of an approximately 230-acre open space dedication in lower Violin Canyon west of Interstate 5 and acceptance of a maintenance endowment.

Background: For the past year, staff has been in discussion with the owners of a large land holding in the upper Santa Clara River watershed west of Interstate 5 and north of Castaic Junction. Those owners have also been in discussion with the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) about using portions of the property as mitigation for streambed impacts elsewhere in the upper Santa Clara River watershed. The majority of the riparian habitat on the subject 230-acre parcel in the main stem of Violin Canyon is already protected by a prior CDFG conservation easement. However, a portion of a USGS blue line tributary to the south is not protected. How or whether the owners are using the subject property does not affect the dedication or donation value of the subject 230 acres for open space purposes. The subject landowners also own over 400 additional acres to the west that appear to have no road access and also may one day end up as public open space.

The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority accepted a 200-plus acre dedication that abuts the 230-acre subject property's southern boundary over three years ago (Larwin dedication). Collectively, the two holdings would provide almost 500 acres of protected open space with an access point at the terminus of a paved residential street.

Staff toured the property last year amidst the record rainfall. Violin Creek had enough flow to be raftable at that time. A dirt road leading up the canyon was washed out. The property has high habitat value and is part of the eastern edge of the many hundred-thousand-acre core habitat of the Los Padres National Forest and the Sierra Madre Mountains.

Fortunately the lot lines are drawn to eliminate any brushing requirements on the subject dedication property. One place where houses do come within 200 feet of the open space along the southern boundary, that portion of the open space possesses near vertical terrain and is impossible to brush, yet alone burn. The other house-open space contact areas are separated by either debris basins or other flood control infrastructure. The Los Angeles County Watershed Management Division (Flood Control) has easements over the lower 2,000 feet of the creek where it maintains various infrastructure.

The owners have generously agreed to provide a one time \$50,000 maintenance endowment transferable with the title. The interest generated from that endowment should be able to provide the minimum level of maintenance necessary for the property. Staff sees only strong up sides to this action.