



MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

FROM: 
Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Executive Officer

DATE: July 12, 2006

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item XIV: Consideration of resolution authorizing the acquisition of APN 2074-039-029 along Dry Creek using funds from Santa Monica Mountains Open Space Preservation District No. 2 and authorizing the acceptance of private funds for the acquisition and maintenance of said property, Woodland Hills.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing the acquisition of APN 2074-039-029 along Dry Creek using funds from Santa Monica Mountains Open Space Preservation District No. 2 and authorizing the acceptance of private funds for the acquisition and maintenance of said property in Woodland Hills.

Background: The subject 2.2-acre property in Woodland Hills includes many hundreds of feet of a perennial reach of Dry Creek, a tributary of Calabasas Creek and the Los Angeles River. Without question it contains the most abundant surface water source of any property within the boundary of Santa Monica Mountains Open Space Preservation Assessment District No. 2. The Creek is lined with valley oaks, coast live oaks, California black walnuts, and several species of non-native trees. A couple of permanent pools exceed four feet in depth. Upstream, the stream goes into a culvert under Mulholland Drive and then runs unchannelized to its headwaters in the Mulwood, Old Topanga (south), and Cold Creek divide areas. This riparian system is thus connected to the core habitat of the Santa Monica Mountains and provides unparalleled ecological and scenic resources on the floor of the San Fernando Valley. Water fowl and fish are found in the pools.

The Citizens Oversight Committee for District No. 2 approved the project in August of 2004. An individual is attempting to develop the parcel using two means of access and is attempting to acquire adjoining properties for lot line adjustments. Staff had the property appraised over a year ago but the owner would not sell at the appraised value. A source of private funds has become available to permit an offer greater than the appraised value and to provide a reasonable maintenance endowment. The unique physical attributes of the site, the considerable contribution of private funds, the good public access, and ability to spread special assessment district benefit to the northwestern corner of the district area warrant

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acquisition of the subject property. Staff anticipates still being able to make three additional substantial acquisitions in Area F after the subject transaction.

The owner is a willing seller who continues to spend money processing plans and permits. The sooner the property can be put under contract the better.

The property has access from a culdesac to the east and from Mulholland Drive. A trail could lead in from Mulholland Drive that would permit walking about half the length of the property. That trail entrance currently has a fence and gate system that could be used to close the property after sunset. The entire area is fully shaded by the riparian canopy. Wildlife would then have full use of the northern (downstream) section of the property. The maintenance endowment would cover minimal brushing required on the site. The principle management deficiency is the spread of fast growth non-native trees (tree of heaven). It is probable that in riparian in lieu mitigation fees could be used to eliminate exotic vegetation and foster more native riparian understory.

The appraisal amount, acquisition price, and amount of assessment district funds proposed to be used will be provided in closed session.