



MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

Los Angeles River Center & Gardens
570 West Avenue Twenty-six, Suite 100
Los Angeles, California 90065
Phone (323) 221-8900

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

FROM:  Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Hon. ASLA, Executive Officer

DATE: April 6, 2011

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item V(j): Consideration of resolution authorizing entering into a management agreement and contract with Desert and Mountain Conservation Authority for property management of approximately 187 acres bordering Elizabeth Lake Road, from the Joshua Ranch project, City of Palmdale.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing entering into a management agreement and contract with Desert and Mountain Conservation Authority for property management of approximately 187 acres bordering Elizabeth Lake Road, from the Joshua Ranch project, City of Palmdale.

Background: At its August 9, 2006 meeting, the Desert and Mountain Conservation Authority (DMCA) authorized a) the acceptance of an approximately 187-acre open space donation from J.P. Eliopoulos (Lot 48 of Tract No. 52200-01) bordering Elizabeth Lake Road; b) entering into agreements to expend permanent maintenance funding; and c) the acceptance of maintenance funding, City of Palmdale. Today's action would authorize the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) to enter into a management agreement and contract with DMCA to manage the DMCA-owned property.

The DMCA is an authority created by the Joint Powers Authority (JPA) Agreement signed on August 9, 2006 between the Antelope Valley Resource Conservation District (RCD) and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. That agreement can be found online at <http://www.dmca.ca.gov>. The DMCA was established to help acquire, identify, and manage areas that will preserve open space habitat located in the more northern portion of Los Angeles County. The RCD is the fiscal agent of the DMCA. The protection of habitat linkages between the Sierra Pelona and San Gabriel mountains ranges and the Upper Santa Clara River watershed is critical to maintain large scale regional ecological connectivity. There are numerous Los Angeles County-designated Significant Ecological Areas in this transition area between the Santa Clara River watershed and Antelope Valley.

Representatives of J.P. Eliopulos Company contacted the RCD regarding the possible donation of hundreds of acres of open space that is remainder to the 800-unit Joshua Ranch project towards the western edge of Palmdale. The northern boundary of the project borders California State Aqueduct property. DMCA staff toured the property extensively in 2006. Maps of the property and vicinity are attached. All permits have been obtained. Mass grading had started; however, the company has gone bankrupt, and it appears that the project has stalled or has been abandoned.

The property contains exceptionally high quality juniper woodland habitat intermixed with other desert scrub plant communities. Ample topographic relief provides significant vistas particularly to the south. As shown on the attached maps, open space owned by the Bureau of Land Management and the City of Palmdale abuts various sections of Joshua Ranch open space. Across Elizabeth Lake Road to the south, the Joshua Ranch project area remains connected to the greater Sierra Pelona Mountains ecosystem via several routes. The width and quality of those habitat linkages will decline dramatically with the construction of the Ritter Ranch and City Ranch projects located between the Joshua Ranch project and Ritter Ranch open space dedicated to the MRCA over approximately 11 years ago.

J.P. Eliopulos desired to donate approximately 350 acres over time. This first stage donation is for a 187-acre contiguous parcel located in the southeast corner of project. DMCA now owns this property. It is uncertain how any future open space donations may transpire, since the company has gone bankrupt.

A wide established trail courses along a ridgeline through this 187-acre parcel. The trail is currently closed. The City of Palmdale had signed the trail in the past, but all of the improvements are deteriorating. To staff's knowledge this trail on the City's trail plan was voluntarily allowed on the property, not with a trail easement.

J.P. Eliopulos had agreed to set the Homeowners Association CC&Rs up with a permanent open space maintenance funding source for the DMCA. The funding was to cover minimum monthly ranger/park maintenance personnel visits and light maintenance as necessary, such as trash pick-up, trail maintenance, and addressing security issues. The agreed upon amount was \$8,500 annually. However, due to the bankruptcy, there is currently only one payment of \$8,500.

The company had also agreed to provide an initial payment of \$4,000 to cover the design and production of rules signs and other trail/park signage. This additional funding is important for an initial park opening. However, it is uncertain whether this money is available.

If the proposed action is approved, the contract between DMCA and MRCA would be on a time and materials basis. The cost of MRCA hourly staff labor includes cost allocation and vehicle allocation amounts rolled into one number.