



MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

Los Angeles River Center & Gardens
570 West Avenue Twenty-six, Suite 100
Los Angeles, California 90065
Phone (323) 221-9944

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

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

DATE: September 4, 2013

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item IX: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant application to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy for Los Angeles River Recreation Zone planning.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing a grant application to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy for Los Angeles river Recreation Zone planning in an amount not to exceed \$25,000.

Background: On May 27, 2013, the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority welcomed the public to kayak, walk and fish in a 2.5-mile stretch of the Los Angeles River for the first time since the late 1930s. Until September 2, 2013, MRCA, in cooperation with the City and County of Los Angeles, the Los Angeles County Flood Control District, and the Army Corps of Engineers, administered the pilot program to increase safe public access to the Los Angeles River and to promote the goal of river revitalization. The recreation zone included the river channel and five feet of adjacent riverbank. MRCA Rangers regulated usage and promoted public safety in the Recreation Zone with rules established by the MRCA ordinance.

Groundwork for this historic event was accomplished by many over several years, but a key act occurred in August 2012, when legislation was enacted to amend the Los Angeles Flood Control Act "to provide for public use of navigable waterways under the district's control that are suitable for recreational and educational purposes, when these purposes are not inconsistent with the use thereof by the district for flood control and water conservation." Prior to this, public access to the water was not allowed.

The pilot program during 2013 proved that there is significant demand for recreation on the water. Except for when the zone was occasionally closed by wet weather (and once by a fire caused by an 8,500-gallon gasoline tanker truck overturned at the 2 and 5 freeways), there were visitors in the water each day. Guided tours run by private operators and MRCA proved to be quite popular, as well as group

reservations and individuals on their own. The success of the 2013 pilot program demonstrates that there is significant public demand for this type of recreation in urban Los Angeles, and that it can be accommodated safely. Momentum is at a high point and can be used at this time to lay the groundwork for a permanent program in 2014.

In addition to documenting the lessons learned during the pilot program, it is advisable to perform a more detailed study to identify the capital investments (fee acquisition and improvements), interpretive opportunities, and other aspects that will make a permanent program successful. As the agency that managed the pilot program, providing ranger services, issuing permits to vendors, and leading tours, MRCA staff have a great deal of experience with implementation of the program and are best suited to develop recommendations for future seasons. MRCA's staff work during the pilot program was funded through the agency's unrestricted funds, but that allotment was fully spent.

The proposed grant would allow MRCA to make a analysis of the pilot program, including cost, logistics, public experiences, and impacts, and use that information to craft an ongoing program. Focuses of the analysis will be identifying the fee acquisitions and capital improvement projects that could facilitate public use of the river, and interpretive guidelines to increase the public's understanding of this natural resource.

Consideration: Staff has not completed refining the tasks and budget projections, but the grant proposal is expected to not exceed \$25,000.