



# MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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## MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

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

DATE: November 6, 2013

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item XII: Consideration of resolution opposing the proposed Hidden Creeks Estates Project (CPC-2005-6656-AD-GPA-ZC-CU-DA-ZAD/VTT-68724/ENV-2005-6657-EIR), and, in the event that a project is approved, conditionally authorizing the acceptance of trail easements, conservation easements, and fee simple open space related to the project, Browns Canyon watershed, Chatsworth and Porter Ranch areas.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution opposing the proposed Hidden Creeks Estates Project (CPC-2005-6656-AD-GPA-ZC-CU-DA-ZAD/VTT-68724/ENV-2005-6657-EIR), and, in the event that a project is approved, conditionally authorizing the acceptance of trail easements, conservation easements, and fee simple open space related to the project, Browns Canyon watershed, Chatsworth and Porter Ranch areas.

Background: The Hidden Creeks Estates project, if approved, would result in unmitigated, regionally significant adverse impacts to the ecology of the southeastern Santa Monica Mountains. The Environmental Impact Report (EIR) fails to address these impacts in any effective way. Staff has described the EIR for this project as “abomination of professional standards”.

The Hidden Creeks Estates Project is a proposed 188-unit residential tract housing and gated community development that would be located on an approximately 285-acre property in the heart of the Browns Canyon and Mormon Canyon watershed, in the County of Los Angeles. The project site abuts Michael D. Antonovich Regional Park at Joughin Ranch to the west, and a future open space dedication (from the Porter Ranch Development to the City of Los Angeles) to the east. The site includes portions of both Browns and Mormon Creeks.

The applicant has described the project, which requires that over 150 acres of ancient landslide be graded and re-compacted, as “an extension of Porter Ranch”. The proposed development would extend a four-lane Mason Avenue north-westward from Porter Ranch, through Southern California Gas Company property,

across Mormon Creek to the project site. The subject project also calls for the improvement and widening of Browns Canyon Road in several locations that would adversely impact MRCA-owned parkland. The project as a whole would require the annexation of the subject property, currently within the unincorporated County of Los Angeles, by the City of Los Angeles.

Significant public resources would be jeopardized if all available trail and open space dedications are not held in perpetuity by a public agency. As currently proposed, maintenance of the trails and dedicated open space proposed as part of this project would be the responsibility of a yet-to-be-formed homeowners association. The proposed trails on the project site would not connect to trails in the adjacent MRCA parkland.

The proposed action, which includes formal opposition to the Hidden Creeks Estates Project, would allow the MRCA to ensure that there is some means of effective damage control if the project is approved. Staff recommends that the MRCA offer to accept dedications of trails and open space related to the project on the condition that long-term maintenance funding is assured through either a Landscape Maintenance District or Community Facilities District. Funding from either type of District could be also be used for the maintenance of the proposed Los Angeles City park and softball fields, per a future agreement with the City.

The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (Conservancy) will have voted on a new letter to the City regarding this project on November 4, 2013. The November 4, 2013 Conservancy agenda language includes opposition to the project. The Conservancy has previously commented on the faults of the subject project in prior letters to the City and United States Army Corps of Engineers dated March 27, 2006, May 12, 2008, September 22, 2011, and September 23, 2013 respectively.