



MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

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

DATE: May 7, 2014

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item XV: Consideration of resolution authorizing the use of mitigation funds to acquire APN 648-0-270-325 comprised of approximately 118 acres on the north slope of Chatsworth Peak, unincorporated Ventura County.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing the use of mitigation funds to acquire APN 648-0-270-325 comprised of approximately 118 acres on the north slope of Chatsworth Peak.

Background: The subject parcel located on the north slope of Chatsworth Peak has long been a priority acquisition for the Santa Susana Pass habitat linkage that connects the Simi Hills with the Santa Susana Mountains both over and under the 118 freeway. An alternative route for the Rim of the Valley Trail also pass through the property. A CEQA mitigation measure for the expansion of the Rocky Peak Road interchange at the top of the pass provided \$236,000 to the MRCA to acquire any or all of nine specific properties in the habitat linkage along Box Canyon Road and Santa Susana Pass Road including the subject parcel. One 10-acre trail and conservation easement was acquired with the fund approximately two years ago. Caltrans is eager to see the remainder of the funding expended. To date other owners have not been willing to sell at the appraised value.

A conservation minded entity acquired the subject 118-acre property earlier this year. They have offered to sell the property to the MRCA for the approximate amount left in the mitigation fund. Their intent is to parlay that funding to another conservation parcel in that same area within the northeast corner of the Simi Hills. Their acquisition price was substantially greater than the price offered to the MRCA. Staff has not yet had the property appraised but most likely it will be a substantial bargain sale.

The proposed deal is straightforward with two exceptions. The Seller wants to retain some naming rights and potentially reserve out an easement for a special visitation area. Neither of those requests are expected to diminish the habitat value

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or visitor experience. Any decrease in value would be reflected in the pending appraisal. The second issue is a driveway and pipeline encroachment on the eastern side of the parcel. That is an issue to address at some point. The property has been inspected by MRCA staff.

Many factors lead to staff's recommendation to acquire the subject property as soon as possible.