



MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

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

DATE: August 3, 2016

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item XII: Consideration of resolution authorizing: (a) advancing funds to the Los Angeles County Flood Control District to allow the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy to acquire APN 2840-009-900 in the Santa Clara River watershed; (b) acquisition of said parcel using Proposition A funding; and (c) acceptance of advanced funds reimbursement.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing: (a) advancing up to \$65,000 to the Los Angeles County Flood Control District to allow the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy to acquire APN 2840-009-900 in the Santa Clara River watershed; (b) acquisition of said parcel using Proposition A funding; and (c) acceptance of advanced funds reimbursement

Background: In October 2014 the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy exercised its first right of refusal with the Los Angeles County Flood Control District (District) on the subject one acre parcel located essentially at the confluence of Oak Springs Canyon and the Santa Clara River (see attached map). The importance of the property is described below.

Initially the District agreed to allow the Conservancy to conditionally waive its first right of refusal and allow the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) to be the acquiring agency. The MRCA authorized acquisition of a portion of the property using mitigation funding on August 5, 2015.

However the District now insists that it transfer title directly to the Conservancy. The arrangement is complicated by the fact that the funding source is Proposition A controlled by the MRCA; and the MRCA must buy the property from a seller to use said funds. The time and expense of the State process of buying the property from the Conservancy is prohibitive. The proposed list of MRCA actions paves the way to solve this impasse.

The first action authorizes advancing up to \$65,000 into escrow between the Conservancy and the District. The Conservancy authorized acquisition in November

2015. The Conservancy would then transfer the property to the Desert and Mountain Conservation Authority (DMCA). The DMCA would then sell the property to the MRCA for the price the Conservancy paid the District. The DMCA would then fully reimburse the MRCA to close the loop and leave the title vested with the MRCA. The DMCA authorized these actions at its June 2016 meeting. The District staff this week emailed staff that expected purchase price will be approximately \$60,000. The District has proof that it paid \$45,360 for the property in 1983 and so far its best calculation of subsequent administrative costs is approximately \$11,500.

The property's contribution to habitat connectivity between the San Gabriel Mountains and the Santa Clara River is near unparalleled. The railroad tracks that run along the south side of the Santa Clara River from the Sand Canyon and SR 14 overcrossing area to a location miles up Soledad Canyon, provide just one or two under-crossing for animals over a distance of approximately five miles. One of those two under-crossing is at Oak Springs Canyon. The protection of such under-crossings is paramount to maintain wildlife movement between the Santa Clara River and regional upland habitats.

Pure alluvial habitat and one Arizona crossing remain between the subject parcel and City of Santa Clarita open space in the Santa Clara River. To the south beyond the elevated railroad tracks, Oak Springs Creeks courses up through horse properties, private open space, and then Sand Canyon golf course for a total of 1.25 miles to reach the Angeles National Forest. This is also an important trail route desired by the City of Santa Clarita.

The property is regionally significant for habitat connectivity. It currently supports limited alluvial scrub vegetation at the margins of the active channel and not where vehicles drive to go up Oak Springs Canyon Road.