



## MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** The Governing Board

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

**DATE:** February 1, 2017

**SUBJECT:** **Agenda Item IV: Consideration of resolution authorizing (a) acquisition of APN's 3210-009-013, 014, Stickleback Ranch, approximately 41 acres, Soledad Canyon, unincorporated Los Angeles County, (b) entering into an agreement with public agencies for mitigation funds.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing (a) acquisition of APN's 3210-009-013, 014, Stickleback Ranch, approximately 41 acres, and (b) entering into agreements with public agencies for mitigation funds in Soledad Canyon.

Background: The subject 41-acre ownership was a long time recreational vehicle park on the Santa Clara River call Oasis. Flooding from over ten years ago washed out an access bridge over the river from Soledad Canyon Road. The primary use of the site since then has been as a filming ranch with an access over culverts in the riverbed. However the ranch has struggled as of late with Los Angeles County Conditional Use Permit issues. The property is now known as the Stickleback Movie Ranch. The unarmored three spine stickleback (UTS) is a small Federal and State listed endangered species. The property straddles the Santa Clara River and the Metro rail tracks. Property owned by both the Santa Clarita Watershed Recreation and Conservation Authority (SCWRCA) and the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) are located just north of the tracks. The Angeles National Forest is situated just across Soledad Canyon Road to the south.

The property contains well over 1,000 feet of perennial stream with native fish. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) considers the site critical to supporting a genetically distinct (not-hybridized) population of the UTS. Although 85 percent burned in the July 2016 Sand fire, the site supports a substantial willow-cottonwood flood plain fed by the high water table.

In the fall of 2016 the MRCA applied to the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) for a Proposition 1 Stream Flow grant to partially fund acquisition of the property. The remainder funding is proposed from an existing Proposition A grant that includes the

subject parcels as eligible. The WCB grant awards will be announced the last week in February this year. The property is an excellent match for the grant criteria and the CDFW is acutely aware of the property's importance to the UTS population's survival and the importance of its public ownership. Other native fish on the property include Arroyo chub and the Santa Ana sucker. Part of the draw of the property both for conservation and commercial purposes are high yielding wells and storage tanks paired with water rights. The property has potentially ten acres of riparian habitat that would qualify for mitigation funding.

Staff had the property appraised, and this week was able to get the property under contract at the appraised value. One of the requirements in the contract is that the MRCA Governing Board approve acquisition of the property on or by February 8, 2017, hence the need for a Special MRCA meeting. The exact funding mix is not known. The key pivot point is if the MRCA receives the WCB grant. The alternative is to work with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works and the Metropolitan Water District to put together a mitigation acquisition package that also provides for habitat mitigation rights. Staff is actively working with both agencies. Both need UTS habitat related mitigation credits. The proposed action authorizes entering into agreements with public agencies.

If escrow does not close by March 17, 2017, the contract can be extended to June 30<sup>th</sup> with a non-refundable payment. Most likely, staff will come back to the Governing Board at its March meeting with a plan of action including the means to make the non-refundable deposit.

The proposed action authorizes acquisition of the property. However the offer is contingent on the availability of public funding, title approval, and third party appraisal review. The ranger staff has inspected the property. It will require substantial clean up of the burned RV park over time. Fortunately metal scavengers are improving that condition dramatically as time goes on. The one residence on the property was not affected by the fire and is habitable and commodious. There are many acres of flat open land.