



MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY
Los Angeles River Center and Gardens
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Los Angeles, California 90065

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority Awarded \$3 Million for the Liberty Canyon Wildlife Crossing over the US-101 Freeway

Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy grants Proposition 68 funds to engineer the state-of-the-art bridge which will protect the genetic diversity of the ecosystem

LOS ANGELES (October 24, 2018) – The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) announced today that the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy had awarded the agency up to \$3 million in matching funds from the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68) for the Liberty Canyon Wildlife Crossing over the US-101 Freeway in Agoura Hills. The MRCA will use the funds to contribute to the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) initial Plans, Specifications, and Engineering (PS&E) design phase of the project—the final phase before construction of the long-anticipated habitat linkage bridge.

The California Wildlife Conservation Board and the National Wildlife Federation will also contribute matching funds for a total of \$8 million for this phase of the project.

“The Conservancy’s Proposition 68 grant will turn the concept of a Liberty Canyon Wildlife Crossing into a reality,” said Joseph T. Edmiston, Executive Director of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. “This structure--which will be the largest and best designed of its kind in the world--will ensure that wildlife movement back and forth between the Santa Monica Mountains, Simi Hills, and Santa Susanas, and the two National Forests to the north, can continue unimpeded for the future. The long-term health of the ecosystem and persistence of wildlife populations depend on it.”

The Conservancy funded Caltrans’ initial study which established the feasibility of the Liberty Canyon Wildlife Crossing as a safe and effective wildlife passage across the eight-lane freeway. Since that time, the National Wildlife Federation has raised millions of dollars to propel the project forward. Caltrans completed its required environmental review of the project earlier this year. With funding secured, it can now proceed with the actual engineering and design of the bridge. A start time is planned for early 2019; design and engineering are estimated to take approximately one year.

US-101 is a formidable barrier for many wildlife species including mountain lions, bobcats, gray foxes, and mule deer that have historically traveled between these mountain ranges.

In particular, populations of mammals with large home ranges such as mountain lions and bobcats need expansive areas in which to hunt, breed, and survive. The original construction of the freeway divided this previously continuous habitat range into isolated fragments. For mountain lions, this restriction has resulted in significant inbreeding, territorial fighting, and low genetic diversity within the Santa Monica Mountains.

National Park Service (NPS) researchers have documented serious threats to the long-term viability of the mountain lions if a structure is not constructed. Scientists have long identified Liberty Canyon as the optimum location to construct a wildlife crossing because of the large swaths of protected public land extending into the mountain ranges on either side of the freeway. The two outposts of the crossing will be on protected open space owned by the MRCA.

The National Wildlife Federation and the Santa Monica Mountains Fund have established a fundraising initiative at www.savelacougars.org to raise funds for the engineering design and construction expenses.

In addition to the MRCA, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and Caltrans, partners include California State Senator Henry Stern, former California State Senator Fran Pavley, California State Assemblymember Richard Bloom, U.S. Congressman Ted Lieu, Los Angeles County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl, Ventura County Supervisor Linda Parks, the National Park Service Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, the National Wildlife Federation, The Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains, and the City of Agoura Hills.

The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority is a local public park agency
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dedicated to the preservation and management of open space, urban parkland, watershed lands, trails, and wildlife habitat. The MRCA manages more than 75,000 acres of public parkland and provides natural resources and scientific expertise, critical regional planning services, operations, fire prevention and ranger services, as well as education and leadership programs for thousands of youth each year. It is one of the lead agencies revitalizing the Los Angeles River and its tributaries.

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