



MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

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

DATE: March 6, 2019

SUBJECT: Agenda Item X: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant application to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy for Proposition 1 funds for vegetation management, fire prevention and resilience activities.

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing a grant application to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy for Proposition 1 funds for vegetation management, fire prevention and resilience activities.

Background: The Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014 (Proposition 1) was approved by voters in November of 2014. Proposition 1 authorizes \$7.545 billion in general obligation bonds for State water projects including surface and groundwater storage, ecosystems and watershed protection and restoration, and drinking water production. Proposition 1 allocated funding to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (Conservancy) for multiple benefit ecosystem and watershed protection and restoration projects (Water Code Section 79731(h)) and for projects to protect and enhance an urban creek (Water Code Section 79735(a)).

The MRCA operates and manages dozens of developed park sites, hundreds of individual stand-alone parcels, and thousands of acres of open space located throughout the Los Angeles and Ventura Counties. Many of these parcels are adjacent to residential development, and were acquired in part to halt the negative impacts of development from spreading further into wildlands. A large percentage of MRCA-managed properties are thus on the wildland-urban interface, resulting in a huge burden of fuel removal and vegetation management each year. The systematic reduction of flash fuel vegetation directly reduces wildfire risk, protects watersheds, and promotes watershed health.

Proper vegetation management gives firefighters spaces to defend structures and other resources, and has a long term benefit in making these lands more resilient

after a fire. A history of such proper vegetation management was essential during the recent Woolsey Fire, where crews were able to defend numerous buildings and park residences.

The task of protection and restoration covered under this grant application will be performed by both MRCA staff and multiple contractors, which will allow a large amount of work to be performed in a short period of time. The cost of vegetation management continues to rise each year, for reasons including minimum wage hikes and herbicide prohibitions in some jurisdictions. Specialized suppression materials and equipment to be purchased will include, but is not limited to, chainsaws, trimmers, mowers, sprayers, and herbicides, as well as fuel for the equipment and consumable parts.

The grant proposal will also include capital improvements to the Fire Division headquarters to support the scope of work. Staff are in the process of determining which improvements will provide the most benefit over time. Each year there are a number of large trees that require specialized arborist work to prevent structure damage and remove public safety hazards, and this work is included as well. This task is expected to be increased as a result of damage from the Woolsey Fire and other recent events. Furthermore, there is an increased risk from erosion after a fire that only begins to diminish after five years, and so activities to mitigate erosion will also be conducted.

Consideration: The grant budget is still being developed by staff, but it is expected that the application to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy will be within the range of \$1,500,000-\$2,000,000 of Proposition 1 funds. The intent is that the subject request would cover vegetation management until approximately June 30, 2020.

Fiscal Impact: If awarded, the subject reimbursable grant will need to be added to the final budget for fiscal year 2018-19. If not awarded, the necessary activities will need to be funded by the general fund and other limited maintenance funds.