



MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

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

DATE: December 2, 2020

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item VII: Consideration of resolution authorizing acceptance of conditional donation of APNs 648-0-270-325, 648-0-121-210, 648-0-121-440 and 648-0-121-540 (119.11 acres) by Chatsworth Peak, Simi Hills, unincorporated Ventura County.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing acceptance of a conditional donation of APNs 648-0-270-325, 648-0-121-210, 648-0-121-440 and 648-0-121-540 (119.11 acres) by Chatsworth Peak, Simi Hills, unincorporated Ventura County.

Background: The ownership of the assemblage of four lots in Ventura County has offered to donate the properties provided some simple conditions are met. The largest property APN 648-0-270-325 has long been a high priority acquisition as a fundamental property in Santa Susana Mountains to Simi Hills inter-mountain range habitat linkage both from Rocky Peak north of the 118 freeway and from Santa Susana Pass State Historic Park south of the freeway. Fortunately the current non-profit ownership acquired the properties approximately five years ago to ensure their protection. The properties had a few existing trails and the current owners made some new ones to promote trail connectivity and to take hikers away from a couple of surrounding residences. They now would like to pass ownership and management duties to a public agency.

All but the smallest of the parcels contain high quality chaparral, sage scrub, oak woodland, and rocky outcrop vegetation. The north slope large rocky slab vegetation on the large parcel is incredibly unique. In the wet season it comes alive with mosses, bryophytes, ferns and wildflowers. In general the whole Ventura County Simi Hills small lot subdivision area that stretches from Santa Susana Pass State Historic Park westward to Woolsey Canyon Road is an area that warrants preservation. It is all both ecologically and recreationally significant.

The principle conditions of the donation are as follows. The MRCA shall name the large parcel after the ownership's leader Rex Frankel. The park signage would

read something akin to the Rex Frankel Nature Preserve. Said signage would be placed along Santa Susana Pass Road at a specific location where a trail leads into the property. This location corresponds moderately well for a connection to a Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District trail on the opposing side of the road. This would serve as the main public trail portal into the property. The MRCA would also refer to the two peaks on the land by a name given by Rex Frankel.

On the three smaller properties clustered in the Los Angeles River watershed side of the property there are two basic donation requirements. The first is to do the existing 100 feet of Ventura County Fire Department required brushing around one house that the non-profit owns and rents. The second is to put up less than 200 feet of inexpensive chain link fencing to separate the house from any public access to the other two small properties from Mesa Drive. The ownership has created trails that use a combination of the subject three properties and a plethora of publically-owned paper streets to connect the large property to public Mesa Drive. In one of these parcels where there currently is brush clearance in a flat area could be a future parking area. There is no required time table to create public access on these three parcels because of the pandemic and related budgetary issues.

Acceptance of the 118-acre parcel would be regionally significant. Staff also recommends acceptance of the three small parcels both because they create a strong toehold to secure many more parcels over time and to relieve some burden on the non-profit that purchased the property and is so generously offering to donate it with minimal conditions to the MRCA. The small amount of fuel modification rights on the 118-acre parcel will be assigned to the one adjacent private owner. The fuel modification on the small parcels is less than a quarter-acre and is all now disturbed grassland in a perennially cleared area.