



MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY
Los Angeles River Center and Gardens
570 West Avenue Twenty-six, Suite 100
Los Angeles, California 90065

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority Awarded \$1.2 Million to Restore and Protect Urban Parkland in Northeast Los Angeles, Upper Santa Clara River, and the Antelope Valleys

California State Parks Off-Highway Vehicle Grant will help MRCA prevent illegal off-roading with increased ranger patrol, barriers, and community outreach.

LOS ANGELES (August 15, 2023) – The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) announced today that it had been awarded \$1.2 Million in funding from the California State Parks Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division to restore three of its parks that have been heavily impacted by illegal Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use. The parks include Elephant Hill Open Space in the El Sereno community of Northeast Los Angeles, Ritter Ranch in the Upper Santa Clara River and Antelope Valleys, and Plum Canyon Open Space near the Santa Clara River.

“Safely managing sensitive public open space in one of the largest metropolitan areas in the nation is a team effort,” said George Lange, Chair of the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority Governing Board, “Our partners at California State Parks are sharing their expertise and their funding to help mitigate the damage of illegal Off-Highway Vehicles in our parks.”

As part of its restoration efforts at these locations, the MRCA will install fire gates, boulders, railings, and signage, and increase ranger patrol using site-specific off-road equipment. The aim is to reduce the impact of off-highway vehicles on sensitive areas and preserve the natural habitat for the local community to enjoy safely. Off roading activities create high wildfire ignition risk and this grant will help protect the land and communities adjacent to these open spaces. The proposed projects include areas designated by CAL FIRE as Very High Fire Severity Zones, the most severe wildfire risk designation.

Elephant Hill Open Space is part of a natural hilltop area, considered an island of habitat, in the historic Northeast Los Angeles community of El Sereno. The MRCA manages eight acres including a heavily used trail along with property owned by the cities of Los Angeles and South Pasadena. “In the past few years there has been a huge increase in illegal Off-highway Vehicle use at Elephant Hill, which is in the middle of a neighborhood,” said Deputy Executive Officer Fernando Gomez, Chief Ranger of the MRCA. Illegal off-road vehicles put the park users and the vehicle drivers in danger, while causing close-in erosion and killing the habitat. This activity increases the risk of brushfire, which could be devastating to all the homes around it.”

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The nonprofit Save Elephant Hill will receive \$150,000 to provide community education on the social and environmental impacts of illegal OHV activities and highlight the MRCA's restoration efforts.

"We're very grateful to the California Off Highway Vehicle Motor Vehicle Division for providing MRCA and Save Elephant Hill an amazing opportunity to address unauthorized off-roading on Elephant Hill," said Elva Yañez, Board President of Save Elephant Hill. "This grant allows us to partner with other community-based groups concerned about land use and the environment to increase community awareness about the damage caused by people riding trucks, motorcycles, and other vehicles on the Elephant Hill Open Space Area managed by MRCA. Our goal is to educate residents and other stakeholders about the common goal of protecting Elephant Hill's habitat – the soil, native plants and trees, and the many species of animals and birds that make their homes here—from off-roading."

Ritter Ranch Park is an over 4,000-acre open space park perched at the eastern end of the Sierra Pelona Mountains. The town of Acton and the upper Santa Clara River lie to the south. The Antelope Valley lies to the north and the Angeles National Forest continues westward for miles. With elevations ranging from 3,000 to 5,000 feet, this unique natural area contains plant communities indicative of a convergence of desert, mountain, and coastal influences. A system of ranch roads provide access and hiking trails throughout the park. Road access is available from both the Palmdale and Acton sides of the range.

"Illegal OHVs at Ritter Ranch destroy habitat for animals such as mountain lion and deer," said Chief Gomez. "These new resources will help prevent soil degradation and erosion and reduce the risk of wildfire in this remote area."

The Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Division of California State Parks manages an annual grant program to support well managed off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation in the State of California. The program provides financial assistance to develop and maintain OHV recreation, as well as to responsibly maintain the wildlife, soils, and habitat of areas impacted by OHV use.

The Regional Forest and Fire Capacity (RFFC) Program, funded by the California Department of Conservation and California Natural Resources Agency was leveraged to create the capacity for MRCA to apply for this grant.

The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) is a local government public entity exercising joint powers of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, the Conejo Recreation and Park District and the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District. The MRCA is dedicated to the preservation and management of local open space and parkland, wildlife habitat, coastal access, watershed lands, and trails in both wilderness and urban settings, and

to ensuring access to public parkland and coastal resources. The MRCA works in cooperation with the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and other local government partners to acquire parkland, participate in vital planning processes, work towards wildfire resilience, and connect wildlife habitat. The MRCA manages more than 75,000 acres of parkland that it owns and that are owned by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. It is one of the lead agencies revitalizing the Los Angeles River.

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Contact:

Dash Stolarz

Director of Public Affairs

(323) 221-9944 x198

Dash.stolarz@mrca.ca.gov