

## Memorandum

To : The Conservancy  
The Advisory Committee

Date: May 23, 2011

From :   
Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Hon. ASLA, Executive Director

Subject: **Agenda Item 13: Consideration of resolution authorizing an augmentation of grant SMM-0839 to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for interpretive program development and delivery for ranger led public programs and ranger-led interpretive programs specifically designed for disadvantaged youth.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing an augmentation of grant SMM-0839 to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for interpretive program development and delivery for ranger led public programs and ranger-led interpretive programs specifically designed for disadvantaged youth.

Legislative Authority: Sections 33204.2, 33204.27(a), 75005, 75050(g)(2) and 75060(d)(1) of the Public Resources Code.

Background: In May 2008 the Conservancy authorized a grant to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) for ranger led-interpretive programs. This motion is to authorize an augmentation of that grant to continue funded programming. Interpretation has historically been an important element of the job duties of the MRCA generalist park ranger. These programs are in addition to those offered by the Division of Interpretation and will not duplicate those efforts. While all programs will feature the interpretation of the natural and cultural resources of Los Angeles River and Santa Monica Bay watersheds they will also include stories, hands-on demonstration and park specific scenarios from the field.

Research demonstrates that interpretation is an effective management tool leading to protection of resources. Educating visitors and inspiring the emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the visitor and the meanings inherent in the resources leads to greater understanding of and commitment to protection of those resources. People care for what they value and value comes from the “interpretive continuum” that starts with awareness and understanding and ends with stewardship. In the case of Proposition 84, “protection” is defined as “those actions necessary to prevent harm or damage to persons, property or natural resources or those actions necessary to allow the continued use and enjoyment of property or natural resources” and includes interpretation as a means of doing so. Section 75005(m).

Interpretation, as defined in the measure, includes but is not limited to, “a visitor serving amenity that educates and communicates the significance and value of natural, historical, and cultural resources in a way that increases the understanding and enjoyment of these resources and that may utilize the expertise of a naturalist or other specialist skilled at educational interpretation.” (Public Resources Code Section 75005(i)) A park ranger is certainly one such specialist. All MRCA park rangers have completed the 40 hours of interpretive training required by the Park Rangers of California as part of a generalist ranger certification. Many have also been certified by the National Association for Interpretation as Certified Interpretive Guides.

Programs specifically designed for urban communities is also an important focus of this grant. The Conservancy statute, Section 33204.5 of the Public Resource Code, says “The Conservancy shall implement a program to provide recreational access from downtown Los Angeles and the inner city. . . in order to provide recreational opportunities for all income and ethnic groups wishing to enjoy the Santa Monica Mountains.” Los Angeles has fewer acres of accessible parks per person than any major U.S. city, and poor neighborhoods suffer the most. Only 30 percent of Angelenos live within a quarter mile of a park, compared with between 80 percent and 90 percent in Boston and New York.

In addition to the programs and materials developed for the general public, specific ranger interpretive programs will focus on programs which serve disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged communities. This includes programs at Vista Hermosa Park and along the Los Angeles River, as well as programs for disadvantaged youth from both watersheds. A “Severely disadvantaged community” means a community with a median household income less than 60% of the statewide average. (Public Resources Code Section 75005(g))

Lastly, this grant will allow the addition of an interpretive element to the MRCA’s youth leadership programs such as the Ranger Explorers and the Wildland Fire Volunteers. The addition of these elements will broaden the expertise and abilities of participants by giving them the skills needed for program development and delivery as well as increase the interpretive amenities offered to the public by creating a new core group of interpreters.

The specific scope of services that will be provided, includes:

Guided interpretive programs, including program development and implementation, directly relating to the watershed’s rich natural, cultural and historic resources. Programming will focus on interpretation of the site's endangered species, ecology, importance in the watershed, conservation, biodiversity, Mediterranean ecosystems,

wildlife corridors, and fire ecology.

Interpretive materials that support ranger interpretive programs, including site specific materials, safety information and other supplemental materials that are designed and implemented to increase visitors enjoyment and understanding of the watershed;

Development of specific interpretive elements to the Ranger Explorer program to enhance the services provided by these young, urban adults. Such elements will include the addition of curriculum on interpretation, program development and delivery under the guidance of a park ranger supervisor. Matching funds are available for this program to cover non-interpretive elements

Development of specific interpretive elements, including program development and delivery, to the wildland fire volunteer program to enhance the services provided by these volunteers. Such elements will include the addition of curriculum on interpretation of fire - a significant element in both the natural and cultural history of Santa Monica Mountain Parkland. Volunteers will then provide public programs, under the supervision of a park ranger. Matching funds are available for this program to cover non-interpretive elements

The total requested for this grant is \$135,000 from the Los Angeles River Watershed and \$65,000 for the Santa Monica Bay Watershed.