

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: May 21, 2012

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 15: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 84 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for interpretation of the Los Angeles River and Santa Monica Bay Watersheds, including visitor serving amenities and naturalist led interpretive programs for the public as well as programs specifically designed for disadvantaged youth.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 84 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for interpretation of the Los Angeles River and Santa Monica Bay Watersheds, including visitor serving amenities and naturalist led interpretive programs for the public as well as programs specifically designed for disadvantaged youth.

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

Background:

Parkland is preserved to protect the resources found therein and to provide access to the disappearing natural world for generations to come. The challenge then is to both protect and care for those resources while providing access to public lands to the millions of urban residents who have had little or not exposure to the nature.

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)) The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) has a long history of providing relevant and meaningful interpretation and education programs that not only enhance the visitor experience but promote stewardship and protection of the resources. Though interpretive signage and materials, naturalist led programs and special seminars and events, park visitors to parkland owned or managed by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy in the Los Angeles River and Santa Monica Bay Watersheds.

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 focus will be on amenities and programs which serve disadvantaged communities. This includes programs at Vista Hermosa Park and along the Los Angeles River, as well as ensuring that disadvantaged youth have access to the mountains through transportation, education and interpretive programs and overnight camping in the Santa Monica Mountains. The measure defines a disadvantaged community to be a community with a median household income less than 80% of the statewide average. 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)) In addition to MRCA programs, the grant includes contracts with community based organizations to assist and enhance the MRCA’s abilities to reach out and organize programs for such disadvantaged communities.

This grant of \$600,000 will fund interpretation of the Los Angeles River and Santa Monica Bay Watersheds, including visitor serving amenities and naturalist led interpretive programs for the public as well as programs specifically designed for disadvantaged youth, \$430,000 in the Los Angeles River Watershed and \$170,000 in the Santa Monica Bay Watershed.

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.

Partial funding of an interpretive newsletter, "Symbiosis" which is printed quarterly and distributed to over 2,000 addresses as well as being available at all park locations;

Campfire programs at multiple locations, featuring presentations that increase the understanding and enjoyment of the outdoors, and watershed resources;

Interpretive materials, including site specific materials, program schedules, safety information and self guided interpretation that are designed and implemented to increase visitors enjoyment and understanding of the watershed;

Camping programs for disadvantaged youth ensuring that they enjoy the access to parklands;

Transit to Trails Program providing staffing and programs for families from disadvantaged communities to parklands of the watershed. Transportation funds for this program are provided by a separate funding source;

This grant includes staffing at the Anthony C. Belenson Visitor Center in Calabasas, which will include interpreting parks and park resources throughout both watersheds by providing visitor amenities such as maps, program guides and interpretive information about specific sites in both watersheds.

The Los Angeles River Watershed grant supports the guiding principles of the Common Ground report including improving access to public open space for all communities, promoting stewardship of the landscape, and involving the public

through education and outreach programs.

Budget - Santa Monica Bay Watershed

Salaries/Benefits/Overhead	\$155,580
Clerical/Technical	\$ 3,500
Interpretive supplies and Expenses	\$ 2,250
Grants - Community Partners	\$ 7,500
Vehicles	\$ 1,170
Expenses Total	\$ 170,000

Budget - Los Angeles River Watershed

Salaries/Benefits/Overhead	\$ 372,500
Interpretive supplies and Expenses	\$ 5,000
Grants - Community Partners	\$ 50,000
Vehicles	\$ 2,500
Expenses Total	\$ 430,000

The scope of the Upper Los Angeles River Watershed component of the proposed project is consistent with the San Gabriel and Los Angeles River Watershed and Open Space Plan (Common Ground) . Specifically, these programs support the plan's guiding principles, including: Improve access to public open space and recreation for all communities; Promote stewardship of the landscape; and, Involve the public through education and outreach efforts.