

# Memorandum

To : The Conservancy  
The Advisory Committee

Date: October 29, 2012

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 12 Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant application to the Wildlife Conservation Board for the acquisition of Liberty Canyon wildlife corridor expansion parcels on the north and south side of the 101 Freeway, unincorporated Los Angeles County.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing a grant application to the Wildlife Conservation Board for the acquisition of Liberty Canyon wildlife corridor expansion parcels on the north and south side of the 101 Freeway, unincorporated Los Angeles County.

Background: The Liberty Canyon cross-101-Freeway wildlife corridor is the most ecologically significant habitat linkage between the Santa Monica Mountains and the Simi Hills. No additional protected land has been added to this regional inter-mountain range wildlife corridor since approximately 2004 with the acquisition of the Abrams property on the south side of Agoura Road. The land acquisition program through 2004 created excellent conditions for a future freeway wildlife underpass and for clearly sub-optimal use of animal crossings using the Liberty Canyon Road freeway underpass. The current extent of public lands in the wildlife corridor on both sides of the 101 Freeway are shown on the attached figure.

Because a new wildlife tunnel may take many years to be funded, it makes great sense to expand the amount of protected land that works in concert with the existing Liberty Canyon Road underpass. Until earlier this year, as a compromise solution to ensure that animals could make their way from the south side of the Liberty Canyon Road underpass to public land located between Agoura Road and the freeway, park agencies worked with the City of Agoura Hills and the subject corner lot owner to provide for open and enhanced wildlife movement between the existing office building and the Caltrans freeway right-of-way. That property recently was foreclosed on leaving some uncertainty. The opportunity is ripe to acquire all or some of the undeveloped property surrounding this office building. Preservation of all five undeveloped parcels around the office building would provide exceptional connectivity both to the MRCA's Abram's property and to public open space on the southeast corner of Agoura Road and Liberty Canyon Road. The attached figure shows the APNs of the subject parcels.

There are also three important unprotected parcels on the north side of the freeway (APNs 2052-009-270, 2052-013-040, and 2052-013-041) that, if acquired, each individually would add

to the capacity of the Liberty Canyon wildlife corridor to safely convey the maximum number of species and animals. The attached figure shows the locations of these parcels.

APN 2052-009-270 abuts the north side of the freeway in the southwest corner of the habitat linkage. Permanent protection of this large parcel would guarantee near-core habitat conditions down to the freeway. Such conditions increase the probability of more species and individuals using the corridor over decades. This parcel is currently subject to litigation.

APN 2052-013-040 is situated in close proximity to the Liberty Canyon Road underpass and contains a section of blueline stream. This small parcel provides both prime buffer to the underpass area and quality riparian habitat.

APN 2052-013-041 is situated in close proximity to the Liberty Canyon Road underpass and contains a section of blueline stream with riparian scrub. This large parcel provides both prime buffer to the underpass area and would protect the entire ridgeline on the eastside of the corridor.

Bond funds sources are dwindling and the ability to get funding from the Wildlife Conservation Board becomes more competitive each month. The importance of the Liberty Canyon wildlife corridor is well-documented by the National Park Service staffs' animal tracking studies. The value of the corridor to the 100,000 acres of protected land in the Santa Monica Mountains and the Simi Hills is clear.

If authorized, staff would begin working to identify a staff sponsor with the California Department of Fish and to prepare a Land Acquisition Evaluation, willing seller status, and Department of General Services approved appraisals, all requirements to receive funding from the Wildlife Conservation Board.