

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: January 7, 2013

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 16: Consideration of resolution authorizing submission of joint application with the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority to the California Coastal Commission for a coastal development permit for construction of two supervised, ADA-accessible campsites to be closed annually between September 15 and January 15, a portion of the Coastal Slope Trail, and related improvements in Ramirez Canyon Park and adjacent public parkland; all such improvements to be located in unincorporated Los Angeles County.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing submission of joint application with the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority to the California Coastal Commission for a coastal development permit for construction of two supervised, ADA-accessible campsites to be closed annually between September 15 and January 15, a portion of the Coastal Slope Trail, and related improvements in Ramirez Canyon Park and adjacent public parkland with all such improvements to be located in unincorporated Los Angeles County.

Legislative Authority: Sections 33211(c) and 33211.5 of the Public Resources Code.

Background: The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy owns 21.8-acre Ramirez Canyon Park in the Coastal Zone portion of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA). A northern 3.9-acre portion of the park is located in unincorporated Los Angeles County and is bounded by National Park Service land on three sides. Ramirez Creek with year-round surface water courses through the park. The subject 3.9 acres contain extensive riparian woodland, oak woodland, chaparral and coastal sage scrub vegetation. This unincorporated portion of State-owned Conservancy parkland is also critical to the completion of the Coastal Slope Trail between Topanga and Point Mugu State Parks.

The 3.9-acre unincorporated portion of Ramirez Canyon Park also contains unique resources for specialized public uses. The canyon bottom contains a 500-foot-long flat area along the east bank of Ramirez Creek. This flat area contains a large lawn with California sycamore trees, stream side picnic tables, decomposed granite and brick pathways, a terraced orchard, a low, wood fence-encircled garden area, and a self-contained waste water treatment system. The gentle terrain, existing development, and stunning natural surrounding make this portion of the park well suited for ADA accessible camping and picnic facilities that are lacking in the Malibu area Coastal Zone. Much of the proposed improvement zone already is developed with ADA

accessible facilities including a 0.1-mile trail on NPS land along Ramirez Creek that leads to an ADA accessible picnic area. Currently there are fully accessible portable restrooms. None of the park buildings are in the subject unincorporated area.

In 2011 the Conservancy and the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) certified a Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for Malibu Parks Public Access Enhancement Plan - Public Works Plan. This FEIR covered park improvements in Ramirez Canyon Park, Escondido Canyon Park, Corral Canyon Park, and the Conservancy's Malibu Bluffs property. The Conservancy's and the MRCA's approved project alternative was entitled the Modified Redesign Alternative (MRA). Later in 2011 the California Coastal Commission approved the Public Works Plan for all of these improvements contained in the MRA. Lawsuits were filed over both approvals. The Public Works Plan has been set aside. Litigation with the Ramirez Canyon Property Owners on the FEIR is incomplete but the document remains certified. Settlement negotiations with the City of Malibu are on this same agenda.

The Conservancy and the MRCA both desire the most rapid implementation of the subject portion of the Coastal Slope Trail and public land camping and day use facilities in the Malibu area coastal zone. The subject proposed application to the California Coastal Commission for a coastal development permit in the unincorporated portion of Ramirez Canyon Park fulfills this objective. The proposed project will provide supervised camping limited to a time of year when fire danger is historically lessened (January 16 to September 14) and a high quality trail leading to a day use destination with restroom and picnic tables. It will also jump start completion of the Coastal Slope Trail from Ramirez Canyon to Solstice Canyon on already existing public rights-of-ways.

Staff recommends the filing of this application irrespective of the outcome of settlement negotiations with the City of Malibu. No development is proposed in the City of Malibu and thus no approvals from the City are required. The MRCA is funded to construct the trail as soon as it is fully permitted. A future, separate permit application will be necessary for the continuing portion of the Coastal Slope Trail to the east into Escondido Canyon Park.

The proposed application is for approximately 6,500 feet of Coastal Slope Trail construction on MRCA, National Park Service, and Conservancy property and the following improvements within the subject 3.9 acre portion of Ramirez Canyon Park. In addition to the Coastal Slope Trail construction and clear span bridge over Ramirez Creek, the proposed application includes two ADA accessible campsites, a permanent double restroom, a separate permanent single restroom, post and rail fencing to separate camping and trail use areas, a shade structure for campers and outreach program participants, picnic tables, and underground utilities coinciding with existing developed pathways. Other than the trail construction, all development would be in existing disturbed and landscaped areas. Any resulting required fuel modification

would also be entirely confined to existing disturbed and landscaped areas. The attached figures show all of the public land necessary to implement this section of the Coastal Slope Trail, and they show the details for each proposed park development element and the trail alignment. The figures also show what vegetation communities would be disturbed by the trail construction.

All potential impacts to native vegetation were addressed in the certified FEIR. Much of the proposed Ramirez Canyon Park development was also addressed in this FEIR—such as two of the three proposed permanent restroom stalls. A subsequent California Environmental Quality Act document will be filed on the project elements not specifically addressed in the FEIR. Staff is working with the National Park Service staff on preparation of an Environmental Assessment for just the section of Coastal Slope Trail on NPS land.

Public access to the proposed new improvements in unincorporated area will be split between Ramirez Canyon Road and the Coastal Slope Trail from Kanan Dume Road. Users of the ADA accessible campsites would arrive via Ramirez Canyon Road unless they chose to use the Coastal Slope Trail via some workable means. Users of the new day use facilities (single restroom and picnic tables) in the back meadow of Ramirez Canyon Park would arrive via the Coastal Slope Trail from Kanan Dume Road initially, and then also from Murphy Way once the trail is extended eastward within the City's jurisdiction. There is an existing ADA accessible drinking fountain in this sub-area. The trail construction and bridge will accommodate equestrians. Proposed post and rail fencing and swing gates will keep equestrians out of the day use meadow and campsites.

The proposed sections of the Coastal Slope Trail beginning at Kanan Dume Road have a maximum grade of approximately 11 percent. The proposed application would include this trail alignment because it was integral to the FEIR Modified Redesign Alternative project that the Conservancy and the MRCA Governing Board adopted. The actual Proposed Project in the FEIR included a trail alignment with a maximum 8 percent grade that could greatly improve accessibility into the subject unincorporated portion of Ramirez Canyon Park.