

# BALDWIN HILLS REGIONAL CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

*A public entity of the State of California exercising joint powers of the County of Los Angeles and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy*

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**TO:** The Governing Board

**FROM:**  Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Hon. ASLA, Executive Officer

**DATE:** May 28, 2013

**SUBJECT: Agenda Item VIII: Consideration of resolution authorizing adopting the Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the Park to Playa Regional Trail Project.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution to adopt the Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the Parkto Playa Regional Trail project.

Background: The goal of the Park to Playa project is to create a seamless regional trail that connects urban residents with the natural coast. This goal will be realized through coordination between multiple-agencies and jurisdictions. Once completed, the final trail will be a total of approximately 13-miles and will cross through and connect the trail systems of parks and open spaces within the Baldwin Hills, along Ballona Creek to the Pacific Ocean. The Baldwin Hills Regional Conservation Authority (BHRCA) is working in partnership with Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA), Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation, California Department of Parks and Recreation, Baldwin Hills Conservancy, City of Culver City, City of Los Angeles, Office of County Supervisor Ridley-Thomas, and others to realize the vision of the project.

The Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) has been prepared to analyze the environmental impacts of the eastern 7-mile portion of the proposed Park to Playa Trail. The western portion of the Park to Playa Trail consists of the existing 6-mile Ballona Creek Bike Path and is not part of the current project. The eastern portion is a system of walking, hiking and bicycle trails running east-southeasterly through parks and open space areas in the Baldwin Hills (including existing trails in Culver City Park, the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook, Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area [KHSRA], and along the Stocker Street Corridor). The IS/MND evaluates the potential environmental impacts associated

with the designation of existing and proposed trails in the Baldwin Hills area as the Park to Playa Trail and the construction of various improvements along this eastern portion of the designated trail alignment.

The overall Park to Playa trail will improve existing deteriorated paths within several jurisdictions and parklands and will also close gaps between the existing trails by creating new and safe connections where they are needed. Additional improvements include new trailheads and gateway entrances with native plant landscaping, decorative gates, parking lots, Storm water Best Management Practices, fencing, seating, bike racks, artwork, and interpretive, wayfinding, and connection signage along portions of the entire Park to Playa connection route.

In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (California Public Resources Code §21000 et seq.) and the CEQA Guidelines (Title 14, California Code of Regulations §15000 et seq.), an Initial Study (IS) was prepared which resulted in preparation of a Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) for the Park to Playa Regional Trail project. The IS/MND evaluated the potential environmental impacts associated with project implementation and identified the mitigation measures that would reduce or avoid the project's significant adverse impacts on the environment. There will be no significant environmental effect from this project. Anything that could have been a significant impact will be reduced to less than significant because changes were made to the project. These are the mitigation measures that will be required of the general contractor.

The mitigation measures are fully described in the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program and reflect standard practices for this type of project. The proposed mitigation measures for Park to Playa include, but are not limited to, construction practices to reduce emissions and noise, and protection of nesting birds. Mitigation measures are also specified for procedures the contractor must follow in the event archaeological or paleontological resources are encountered.

Section 15367 of the State CEQA Guidelines defines the Lead Agency as the public agency with the primary responsibility for carrying out or approving a project. The BHRCA will be responsible for approving the trail alignment and subsequent implementation of the Park to Playa Trail improvements and, therefore, is serving as the Lead Agency for the Project. As the Lead Agency, the BHRCA is responsible for completing the environmental review process, as required under CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines, and has authorized the preparation of the IS/MND document.

The public review period for the IS/MND was from January 16, 2013 through February 18, 2013. A public hearing was held at the KHSRA Community Meeting Room on January 30, 2013 to present the project to interested individuals and to solicit comments on the IS/MND. Notice to the public of the IS/MND was given via several methods: The Notice of Availability/Notice of Intent (NOA/NOI) was mailed to local agencies, filed with the

County Clerk and State Clearinghouse, posted at Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area, Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook, and Culver City Hall, and posted on BHRCA's website. A notice was also published in the Los Angeles Times on January 16, 2013. Hard copies of the IS/MND document were available at View Park Library, Culver City Julian Dixon Library, and the Los Angeles River Center and Gardens offices for public viewing. On April 17, 2013, a meeting with adjacent oilfield property owners and operators was also held at the KHSRA Community Meeting Room to hear and discuss project concerns and the IS/MND, mainly on Segment C.

Per CEQA Guidelines Section 15074, the Governing Board shall adopt the proposed mitigated negative declaration "...only if it finds on the basis of the whole record before it (including the initial study and any comments received), that there is no substantial evidence that the project will have a significant effect on the environment and that the negative declaration or mitigated negative declaration reflects the lead agency's independent judgment and analysis."

We received eleven (11) written letters or e-mails during the public review and comment period. Several oral and written comments during the public hearing were also received. No written comment letters were received after the public review and comment period. The commenting parties are listed in the "Responses to Public Comments" document. Additionally, when applying for grants from Baldwin Hills Conservancy and Los Angeles County Regional Park and Open Space District, MRCA received letters of support from the following agencies and partners: County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation, and California Department of Parks and Recreation.

Written responses were prepared to address each environmental concern raised, and the "Responses to Public Comments" has become part of the final MND along with the Mitigation Monitoring Reporting Plan. Any changes to any of these documents made at the May 28, 2012 meeting shall also become part of the final MND with no further action required of the Governing Board. Once the MND is adopted by the Governing Board, the Governing Board must approve the project, and the final step is to file a Notice of Determination which shall be filed with the State Clearinghouse and Los Angeles County Clerk.