

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: December 3, 2012

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 17: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 40 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for the purchase of remaining interest in Towsley Canyon APN's 2826-018-900 and 066; -901 and 067; -902 and 068; 2826-019-901 and 040, and -902 and 041; Santa Clarita Woodlands, unincorporated Los Angeles County.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 40 funds in an amount not to exceed \$178,500, for acquisition and related closing costs to acquire the remaining 25% interest in APN's 2826-018-900 and 066; -901 and 067; -902 and 068; 2826-019-901 and 040, and -902 and 041 in Towsley Canyon in the Santa Clarita Woodlands Park.

Background: Preservation of lands in Towsley Canyon in the Santa Clarita Woodlands has been two decades-plus goal of the Conservancy and the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA). In the late 1980's and early 1990's the canyon was targeted as a regional landfill site by the Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts. Late in 1989 MRCA made a highly strategic purchase of the Rivendale Ranch at the entrance of the canyon just off Interstate 5 and The Old Road (near the Calgrove exit). Farther to the interior of Towsley Canyon are the approximately 270 acres previously known as the "Brandon property", which the Sanitation Districts were pursuing for purchase. The property was originally owned by three parties: Joel Brandon with a 50% interest; Thane Wilson with a 25% interest, and David Wiksell, et al, the remaining 25% interest. The Wiksell interest is the subject of this agenda item. MRCA purchased the Brandon interest in early 1991, and subsequently acquired the Wilson interest by the fall of 1992. MRCA has operated the entire property as parkland for the past 20+ years. The remaining one-quarter Wiksell interest was unavailable for purchase, with various title, litigation, IRS, and creditor issues. Richard DeSantis, an attorney representing creditors of Wiksell, assumed control of the property interest some time ago. After receiving a demand letter from him earlier this year, MRCA commissioned an appraisal to establish a value for the entire property at its current fair market value, and then based an offer at 25% of that valuation. A successor trustee via the law offices of Stephen Holohan, an associate of Mr. DeSantis,, has signed an acceptance of the MRCA's contingent offer.

The property is part of the Santa Clarita Woodlands Park. With a year-round stream, five species of oak, bigcone douglas fir, and other uncommon vegetation associations, it is within a designated Los Angeles County Significant Ecological Area (SEA). Acquisition of this last

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25% interest in the so-called “Brandon” Towsley Canyon property will ensure the continued preservation of beautiful, ecologically significant public parkland and trails that otherwise would potentially be compromised by any competing claims for a partition sale and private use.

There are sufficient remaining Proposition 40 funds to consider awarding a grant to MRCA for the acquisition and related closing costs. Proposition 40 funds are not limited to any specific watershed, and can be used for projects in the Santa Clarita Woodlands.