

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: February 24, 2014

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 16: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant to The Nature Conservancy for the acquisition of the Alamos Canyon habitat linkage property either side of the 118 freeway, incorporated and unincorporated Simi Valley area.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing a \$500,000 grant of Proposition 84 funds to The Nature Conservancy for the acquisition of the Alamos Canyon habitat linkage property in the Calleguas Creek watershed.

Legislative Authority: Public Resources Code Sections 33204.2 and 75060(d)(1)

Background: Alamos Canyon is part of one of the 15 most endangered habitat linkages (Sierra Madre to Santa Monica Mountains) in the South Coast Central region identified by the Missing Linkages Project in 2000. The regional linkage connects the Santa Susana Mountains to the Simi Hills via the Arroyo Simi and the Tierra Rejada Valley area. Alamos Canyon was slated for a full 118 freeway interchange at one point so there is an undercrossing exceeding 80 feet in width and 16 feet in height with no pavement. This is the best wildlife freeway crossing structure along the full length of the 118 freeway. The incorporation of this crossing structure and protection of its associated lands on both sides of the freeway is of critical importance to the long-term ecological sustainability of both the Simi Hills and Santa Monica Mountains. The Nature Conservancy has spent the better part of two years negotiating a deal with the owner. A condition of approval for the Simi Valley Landfill expansion by the Ventura County Board of Supervisors required the owner to offer the subject land for sale.

Within the past two months The Nature Conservancy (TNC) signed a deal with the owning corporation. TNC has been in constant touch with staff over the past 2-3 years about the Conservancy contributing to the funding of this 734-acre landmark acquisition. Because the property to the north abuts a broad band of Santa Susana Mountains core habitat and to the south connects to the Alamos Creek streambed leading to the Arroyo Simi, it provides a complete and vital sub-component of a regionally significant habitat linkage. The attached maps show the property and its relationship to the inter-mountain range habitat linkage.

The Nature Conservancy has submitted the attached \$500,000 grant application for Proposition 84 funding to acquire 734 acres of a contiguous private ownership that spans both sides of the

118 freeway. As stated in the grant application the \$7.9 million price is being renegotiated to allow the seller to retain mineral rights while reducing the acquisition cost. The subject Proposition 84 funding must be encumbered in the next two months or will revert to future fiscal years. This grant would represent a cornerstone funding foundation for TNC to obtain the remaining funding. The property is already in an approved California Department of Fish and Wildlife Conceptual Area Protection Plan (CAPP) to be eligible for Wildlife Conservation Board Funding. The grant application lists other funding sources.

The subject 734 acres includes a long section of the Rim of the Valley Trail alignment that crosses under the 118 freeway through the ghost interchange. The acquisition includes a long section of Alamos Creek and a large wetland and freeway tunnel where the creek contacts the freeway. The property provides prime scenic viewshed along the 118 freeway. Most likely the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District will own and manage the property. TNC would retain a conservation easement.

The proposed funding comes from the section of the Conservancy's Proposition 84 funding restricted to the coastal watersheds of Santa Monica Bay which by statute includes the Calleguas Creek watershed within the Conservancy zone.