

# Memorandum

To : The Conservancy  
The Advisory Committee

Date: September 22, 2014

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 12: Consideration of resolution authorizing a project planning and design grant to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for the Eastern Simi Hills - Upper Los Angeles River Watershed area.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing a project planning and design grant to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for the Eastern Simi Hills - Upper Los Angeles River Watershed area Project.

Legislative Authority: Sections 33204.2(a), 33204.27(a), and 75050(g)(2) of the Public Resources Code.

Background: The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) has submitted the attached grant application for project planning and design services in a discrete section of the upper Los Angeles River watershed. Staff has worked collaboratively with the MRCA staff to identify key project areas where project planning and design services are needed. The application includes extensive background, mapping, and justification. Multiple public lands are adjacent, or allow access to, or are partially included in the project area, including Sage Ranch, Santa Susana State Historic Park, Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Open Space Preserve, Bell Canyon Open Space, Bell Canyon Park, and El Escorpián Park. From south to north the subject proposed grant work area encompasses portions of the following Los Angeles River tributaries: El Escorpián, Bell, Dayton, Woolsey, Box, Chatsworth, and Santa Susana. This area includes portions of both Ventura and Los Angeles counties.

The proposed project area includes miles of the Rim of the Valley Trail Alignment. The eastern side of the Simi Hills provide numerous trailhead opportunities at the edge of the San Fernando Valley and form part of the inter-mountain range habitat linkage from the Santa Susana Pass area. The area also provides the habitat linkages to the Chatsworth Reservoir Nature Preserve. There are many gaps between protected habitat areas and many trails on private lands that should be permanently protected. The area also hosts several key ownerships that have attempted dense subdivision over the past two decades.

The MRCA proposes to conduct planning and design work to acquire easements and fee simple parcels in this defined project area. The next two years will pose one time opportunities to work to secure public open space and trail dedications and many land donations. Many longstanding

Conservancy acquisition priorities are in this proposed Eastern Simi Hills project area.

The proposed project area included under this grant would encompass an area of approximately 4,085 acres. It includes 1,036 parcels in Ventura County and 350 parcels in Los Angeles County. The subject Eastern Simi Hills - Upper Los Angeles River Watershed area is shown on the attached map.

Public Resources Code Section 75050(g)(2) allocated the sum of \$36,000,000 to the Conservancy for implementation of watershed protection activities throughout the Upper Los Angeles River pursuant to Section 79508 of the Water Code. The subject study area is within the Upper Los Angeles River Watershed. Section 79508 provides that watershed protection activities shall be consistent with the *San Gabriel and Los Angeles River Watershed and Open Space Plan (Common Ground)*. The proposed project would provide opportunities to implement planning principles in *Common Ground* including: *Improve habitat quality, quantity and connectivity*, and *Establish riverfront greenways to cleanse water, hold floodwaters and extend open space*. This project is also consistent with the Conservancy's Strategic Objectives: Further Cooperation with Local Governments in the Region to Secure Open Space and Parkland and Expand Efforts to Integrate Nature into the Urban Environment.

The proposed grant would allocate \$75,000 under Section 75050(g)(2) of Proposition 84 for the Upper Los Angeles River.