

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: April 27, 2015

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 15: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 40 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for capital improvements at Mentryville, Pico Canyon, unincorporated Los Angeles County.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 40 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for capital improvements at Mentryville, Pico Canyon in the amount of \$300,000, unincorporated Los Angeles County.

Legislative Authority: Sections 33204.2 and 33204.27 of the Public Resources Code.

Background: The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) has submitted the attached grant application for capital improvements to Mentryville. MRCA began development of the Santa Clarita Woodlands regional park in 1995 with a 3,035-acre acquisition that preserved the heart of this ecologically significant land. Since then, the Woodlands have expanded to over 4,000 acres. Pico Canyon features large valley and coast live oak trees, chaparral-dominated slopes, and views of Santa Clarita. The canyon offers hikers, bikers, and equestrians shaded trails into the rugged and lushly vegetated headwaters of Pico Canyon, and the Santa Susana Mountains. Mentryville is a historic 1880s oil town. Mentryville was home to over 100 families until the early 1930s. The oil well “Pico No. 4” went on to become the longest continually operating oil well in the world, closing in 1990. Historic buildings still stand including Charles Mentry’s grand thirteen-room mansion, a one-room school house, and a period barn. Mentryville and Pico No. 4 are registered as California State Historical Landmarks.

MRCA has submitted a grant application for capital improvements to rehabilitate the water line for the property. This project will preserve the canyon’s recreational opportunities and protect the property’s resources by rehabilitating the main water line upon which current and future drinking fountains, restrooms, irrigation systems, facilities, and fire protection infrastructure depend upon. Replacement of the aging water infrastructure is crucial because the biggest, most unpredictable threat to Mentryville’s historic resources is wildfire. The ability to protect the historic structures from wildfire is wholly dependent on having a reliable water source. In addition, the Santa Clarita Woodlands have a high volume of recreational use, and Mentryville

provides an important opportunity to expose visitors to the natural systems of the Woodlands. The currently unreliable water lines break frequently and experience frequent minor and major leaks. During the investigation, inspection, and repair of these breaks, water service to the park is interrupted, impacting wildfire protection and public amenities such as drinking water and the restrooms in Johnson Park. The project is part of a larger effort to increase water use efficiency at MRCA-operated facilities within the Santa Clarita Woodlands Park. The importance of rehabilitating the water line at Mentryville is heightened during a time of increased awareness of the value of water and Best Management Practices for water conservation are most critical.

Analysis–Proposition 40

The “California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2002” (Proposition 40) allocated \$40 million to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy for the acquisition, development, rehabilitation, restoration, and protection of land and water resources in accordance with the Conservancy Act. The California Attorney General has previously advised the Conservancy that Proposition 40 bond proceeds may be used for preservation which, as defined in the bond act, includes interpretation, protection, rehabilitation, restoration, stabilization, development or reconstruction. Proposition 40 also defines “development” to include “improvement, rehabilitation, restoration, enhancement, preservation, protection, and interpretation.” In the General Provisions of the Proposition, the Legislature declares that “to maintain a high quality of life for California’s growing population requires a continuing investment in parks, recreation facilities, and in the protection of the state’s natural and historical resources.” Proposition 40 bond proceeds may also be used to pay costs that are incidentally but directly related to the acquisition, development, rehabilitation, restoration or protection of a capital asset.

As outlined in the application, the proposed project is consistent with Proposition 40. The activities to be planned are all development, stabilization, rehabilitation, restoration, and protection of land and water resources, and the improvements to property will enable use for interpretation and as a recreation facility. The capital improvements to be planned will enhance the useful life of park facilities, provide public access to parkland, and/or are major maintenance projects that ordinarily not be done more often than every five to fifteen years. This project will enable the MRCA to provide a continuing investment in parks and recreation facilities within the Santa Clarita Woodlands, available to visitors from and the surrounding region.

Analysis - General Obligation Bond Law

The General Obligation Bond Law provides that bond funds may be used for the construction and acquisition of "capital assets." Capital assets include major maintenance, reconstruction, demolition for purposes of reconstruction of facilities, and retrofitting work that is ordinarily done no more often than once every 5 to 15 years or expenditures that continue or enhance the useful life of the capital asset (Government code Section 16727 (a)). Capital assets also includes equipment with an expected useful life of two years or more, and tangible physical property with an expected useful life of 10 to 15 years. Section 16727 (a) also allows bond funds to be used for costs that are incidentally but directly related to construction or acquisition including costs for planning, engineering and other design work.

The activities that MRCA proposes to fund with this grant constitute planning of improvement projects to protect land and water resources, protect and restore rivers, lakes and streams, their watersheds and associated land, water and other natural resources. Thus, the proposed activities fall within the definition of "capital assets" or are incidentally but directly related to acquisition or construction, and therefore are proper under the General Obligation Bond Law.

Analysis–Consistency with Plans

The proposed grant is consistent with all applicable plans, including the *Santa Monica Mountains Strategic Plan* and *Rim of the Valley Trail Corridor Master Plan*. These two plans, adopted in 1997 and 1990 respectively, identify the Conservancy's goals and priorities in preserving important resources and providing public recreation. The requested grant meets the following goal objectives of these two plans:

- Increase resource stewardship capabilities;
- Complete ROV trails and trail amenities recommended by the Plan;
- Maintain scenic resources, and contribute to recreational resources which enhance residents' quality of life;
- Minimize impacts to sensitive, threatened, and endangered species;
- Provide opportunities for multi-use trail recreation in a naturalistic setting; and
- Develop long term capital improvement and maintenance plans.

Mentryville's new water infrastructure will be used by emergency services personnel, fire crews, and maintenance staff to protect and restore the natural, scenic, and historic resources of the park, and protect all resources from wildfire risk.

Consideration: The application from the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority is for \$300,000 of Proposition 40 funds.