

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: April 27, 2015

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 16: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 50 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for capital improvements at Michael D. Antonovich Regional Park at Joughin Ranch, unincorporated Los Angeles County.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution recommending authorizing a grant of Proposition 50 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for capital improvements at Michael D. Antonovich Regional Park at Joughin Ranch, in the amount of \$500,000, unincorporated Los Angeles County.

Legislative Authority: Sections 33204.2 and 33204.27 of the Public Resources Code and Section 79570 of the Water Code.

Background: The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) has submitted the attached grant application for capital improvements to Michael D. Antonovich Regional Park at Joughin Ranch. Acquired in 2003, the 2,326-acre property is located on the southern slopes of the Santa Susana Mountains between Chatsworth and Simi Valley. The park offers stunning vistas, rolling hills, oak and walnut woodland, water sources, and an abundance of wildlife. Throughout the park, majestic views of the San Fernando Valley; the Santa Monica, Totopa, and Santa Susana Mountains; and the Simi Hills abound. Part of a key watershed area for the Los Angeles River, the Antonovich Park encompasses the Headwaters of Devil, Ybarra, and Browns Canyons. These canyons contain extensive oak and walnut woodland and riparian corridors with year-round surface water.

Browns Canyon Road is the primary access to the property and along with Oat Mountain Motorway, one of few fire roads in the Santa Susana Mountains. The condition of the pavement in many sections has been deteriorating in the 11 years MRCA has held the property. In some areas there is danger of a washout in a extreme storm event. Due to the very steep slopes, rebuilding these portions of the road after a washout would require major retaining structures for support.

MRCA has submitted a grant application for roadway improvements to Browns Canyon Road and Oat Mountain Motorway in an effort to continue to provide safe recreational access for the public, and to provide fire and life safety access to the undeveloped open spaces of the

Santa Susana Mountains. The project may require filling gullies and washouts, repairing road scour, removing debris, clearing shrubs, adding road base, and placing asphalt. A full-depth reclamation process is proposed so that the resulting road will have the longest-possible life span.

II. Analysis–Proposition 50 and the Common Ground Plan

The State of California has authorized expenditure of funds from the Water Security, Clean Drinking Water Coastal and Beach Protection Act of 2002 (Proposition 50) to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, in Chapter 10, Section 79570(c), for purpose of protecting coastal watersheds, including but not limited to, acquisition, protection and restoration of land and water resources and associated planning, permitting, and administrative costs, and for the acquisition and development of facilities to promote public access to and participation in conservation of land, water, and wildlife resources.

A. The Joughin Ranch Roadway Improvements and Construction Project Constitutes Watershed Protection Activities Within the Watershed of the Upper Los Angeles River.

The Joughin Ranch Roadway Improvements and Construction Project lies within the Los Angeles River Watershed, and the property and its facilities are resources for public recreational use. As outlined in the application, the proposed project is consistent with Proposition 50's goal to promote the access to and enjoyment of land and water resources. MRCA is requesting a grant to rehabilitate, restore, protect and improve the road and the surrounding habitat.¹

¹Chapter 1, Section 75005 of Proposition 84 defines the following terms:

(f) "Development" includes, but is not limited to, the physical improvement of real property including the construction of facilities or structures.

(l) "Preservation" means rehabilitation, stabilization, restoration, development and reconstruction, or any combination of those activities.

(m) "Protection" means those actions necessary to prevent harm or damage to persons, property or natural resources or those actions necessary to allow the continued use and enjoyment of property or natural resources and includes acquisition, development, restoration, preservation and interpretation.

(n) "Restoration" means the improvement of physical structures or facilities. Restoration projects shall include the planning, monitoring and reporting necessary to ensure successful implementation of the project objectives.

All elements of the project fit within the definitions of eligible activities (development, preservation, protection, and restoration) because the funds will be spent to physically improve the road, enhance its active recreation uses, and ensure that the surrounding native habitat can be protected. The scope of work includes rehabilitation and stabilization of hillside and trail erosion, removal of non-native, invasive species, and revegetation with native plants.

B. The Joughin Ranch Roadway Improvements and Construction Project is Consistent with the *San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers Watershed and Open Space Plan*

The *San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers Watershed and Open Space Plan*,² also known as and hereinafter referred to as the "Common Ground" plan, was jointly developed by the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, or Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC), and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC). The purpose of the plan is to "articulate a vision for the future of the San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers Watersheds" and "provide a framework for future watershed and open space planning." The plan outlines a holistic approach to watershed protection and development, organized by a set of Guiding Principles.³ These broad principles, referenced further below, are designed to accommodate the varying priorities and needs of projects in the region. The Joughin Ranch Roadway Improvements and Construction Project rehabilitates the main access road for the park, creating a stable access to the site. This protects the landscape from unplanned access as well as improves the access to the site.

The Joughin Ranch Roadway Improvements and Construction Project implements the following guiding principles:

- Create, Expand and Improve Public Open Space Throughout the Region
- Improve Access to Open Space and Recreation for All Communities
- Promote Stewardship of the Landscape

III. 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,

²A copy of the Common Ground Plan can be accessed online at http://www.rmc.ca.gov/plans/common_ground.html

³The Guiding Principles are outlined in Page 2 of the Executive Summary, or discussed with greater depth on Page 47 of the Plan.

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. Section 16727 (a) also allows bond funds to be used for costs that are incidentally but directly related to construction including costs for planning, engineering and other design work.

This project is for the development, preservation, protection and restoration of a capital asset, that is, a land and water resource in the Los Angeles River watershed. As such, it is a proper expenditure of bond funds. In addition, the activities that this grant will fund will enhance the useful life of the facilities and on that basis as well qualify as capital assets for purposes of the General Obligation Bond Law.

Consideration: The application from the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority is for \$500,000 of Proposition 50 funds.