

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: April 27, 2015

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 22: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 84 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for capital improvements at Wilacre Park, Los Angeles.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 84 funds in the amount of \$400,000 to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for capital improvements at Wilacre Park, Los Angeles.

Legislative Authority: Sections 33204.2, 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 capital improvements to Wilacre Park. Wilacre Park is one of the most heavily-visited trailheads in the Santa Monica Mountains because of its convenient location off of Laurel Canyon Boulevard and excellent trail connections to regional open space. The Betty B. Dearing Trail and the Cross Mountain Park Trail system to Fryman Canyon Park, Coldwater Canyon Park, and Franklin Canyon Park are all accessible from this trailhead making it particularly popular for hikers and recreationalists.

The proposed grant will be used to improve the parking lot and facilities located at the trailhead and trails. Because the site has not had any recent major improvements, the existing facilities are under-sized compared to the level of visitation. The grant will be used to plan, design, and construct improvements to enhance the safety and experience for the visitors and the functionality of the site so that it can continue to be well-maintained. The parking lot layout and circulation will be evaluated to maximize efficiency, and distinguish pedestrian and vehicular traffic for better functionality and safety. A pre-engineered restroom building with permanent sewer and water connections will be constructed to replace the existing portable toilets. Depending on the final layout of parking and circulation, other planned improvements may include additional seating and/or picnic tables, relocating the drinking fountain, adding maintenance storage, and adding a kiosk and other signage to provide park information and interpretive content. New native plantings and revegetation of areas disturbed by grading will be included in the work covered by this grant.

These improvements will restore, protect, and preserve the natural resources of the site and its watershed by providing opportunity for visitors to use the site in ways that respect the resource. The improvements will greatly enhance the utility and safety of the existing facilities and will contribute to a more enjoyable user experience.

Analysis - Proposition 84 and the Common Ground Plan

Sections 75050 of the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84), allocates funds to various entities “for the protection and restoration of rivers, lakes and streams, their watersheds and associated land, water, and other natural resources.” “Protection” is defined in Proposition 84 as 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. “Preservation” means rehabilitation, stabilization, restoration, development and reconstruction, or any combination of those activities. “Restoration” is defined in Proposition 84 to mean the “improvement of physical structures or facilities and, in the case of natural systems and landscape features includes, but is not limited to, projects for the control of erosion, the control and elimination of exotic species, prescribed burning, fuel hazard reduction, fencing out threats to existing or restored natural resources, road elimination, and other plant and wildlife habitat improvement to increase the natural system value of the property.”

The proposed project constitutes watershed protection, preservation and restoration activities in the Upper Los Angeles River watershed. The sites are within the Upper Los Angeles River watershed and are consistent with the Proposition 84 definitions of protection, preservation, and restoration. The project contains elements which protect and restore the Los Angeles River watershed and associated land, water and other natural resources.

Section 75050(g)(2) funds from Proposition 84, the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006, to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy “for implementation of watershed protection activities throughout the watershed of the Upper Los Angeles River pursuant to Section 79508 of the water Code.” The section of the Water Code referenced therein states that watershed protection activities in the Los Angeles River shall be consistent with the *San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers Watershed and Open Space Plan*.

The project planning and design grant is consistent with the *San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers Watershed and Open Space Plan* as required by Section 79508 of the Water Code. The *San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers Watershed and Open Space Plan*, 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 and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. 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. These broad principles are designed to accommodate the varying priorities and needs of projects in the region.

To help guide decision making in watershed planning and project selection, the Common Ground plan includes a set of Project Evaluation Criteria (Appendix F), developed to help the agencies determine “regionally significant” park, trail, and restoration projects.

The Wilacre Park capital improvements project scores highly as a project in the following categories:

Public Recreation Value: The Wilacre Park improvements are for a park site that serves a visitor base in a regional or greater geographic area. The provision of a permanent restroom will facilitate visitor use.

Interpretation Value: The Wilacre Park improvements include a new kiosk with educational and interpretive information to promote stewardship of watershed resources.

Natural Resources Value: The Wilacre Park improvements will serve to protect the existing habitat by better accommodating visitors.

Trail Resource Value: The Wilacre Park improvements will improve accessibility at the trailhead for a wide range of ability levels and physical conditions.

Urban Park Value: Wilacre Park is conveniently located for the 10,000,000 residents of Los Angeles County, and in 2014 parking fees were eliminated.

Sustainability Value: All improvements to the Wilacre Park trailhead will be designed to retain storm water on site. The provision of permanent restrooms will eliminate the need for daily truck trips for portable restroom servicing.

Based upon consistency with the selection criteria and Guiding Principles, the Wilacre Park capital improvements project is consistent with the Common Ground Plan as required by Section 79508 of the Water Code.

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 the MRCA proposes to fund with this grant constitute planning of a land improvement project 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.

Consideration: The application from the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority is for \$400,000 of Proposition 84 funds.