

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: August 17, 2015

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 9(c): Consideration of resolution authorizing conditionally waiving first right of refusal on APN 2840-009-900, Oak Springs Canyon, City of Santa Clarita.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing conditionally waiving first right of refusal on APN 2840-009-900, Oak Springs Canyon, City of Santa Clarita.

Legislative Authority: Sections 33207(b) of the Public Resources Code.

Background: In October 2014 the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy notified Los Angeles County that it intended to exercise its first right of refusal with the Los Angeles County Flood Control District on a one acre parcel located essentially at the confluence of Oak Springs Canyon and the Santa Clara River (see attached map). Approximately half of the parcel was and is illegally occupied by horse stalls, sheds, and other ranch infrastructure. The County had intended to sell the whole property to this adjacent private owner. Rather than deal with the removal of encroachments, staff struck a deal with the County to potentially acquire 21,503 square feet of the property that contained the key habitat resources. The remaining 22,267 square feet would be sold to a private party.

The total valuation of the parcel per the County is \$65,655. Because the proposed Conservancy portion is in the active stream channel, ninety percent of the property value would be held by the private owner. So the agreed upon sale price to the Conservancy is 10 percent of the total value or \$6,565.

The County also agreed to allow the Conservancy to conditionally waive its first right of refusal and allow the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) to be the acquiring (and funding) agency. The proposed action would authorize conditionally waiving the Conservancy's first right of refusal if Los Angeles County agrees to enter into an agreement to sell the subject portion of the property to the MRCA for the agreed upon sum. The MRCA would pay for the property and own and manage it.

The railroad tracks that run along the south side of the Santa Clara River from the Sand Canyon and SR 14 overcrossing area to a location miles up Soledad Canyon, provide just one

Agenda Item 9(c)

August 17, 2015

Page 2

of two under-crossings for animals over a distance of approximately five miles. One of those two under-crossings is at Oak Springs Canyon. The protection of such under-crossings is paramount to maintain wildlife movement between the Santa Clara River and regional upland habitats. Pure alluvial habitat and one Arizona crossing remain between the subject parcel and City of Santa Clarita open space in the Santa Clara River. To the south beyond the elevated railroad tracks, Oak Springs Creek filters through horse properties, private open space, and then Sand Canyon golf course for a total of 1.25 miles to reach the Angeles National Forest.

The property is regionally significant for habitat connectivity. It currently supports limited alluvial scrub vegetation at the margins of the active channel where vehicles do not drive to go up unpaved Oak Springs Canyon Road. Multiple vehicles do prescriptively use the property for access but that use does not negate the ecological importance of the parcel.

The MRCA has assured the Conservancy staff that the acquired property would remain open to all non-motorized trail use in perpetuity. The non-traveled portion may be restored at some juncture but wide passage would always be available for trail users.

At its August 5th meeting the MRCA agreed to acquire the subject property. With the Conservancy's adoption of the attached resolution, Los Angeles County would proceed with a sale to the MRCA.