

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: November 2, 2015

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 11: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 84 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for infrastructure improvements at Tujunga Wash Greenway project, City of Los Angeles.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 84 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for infrastructure improvements at Tujunga Wash Greenway project in the amount of \$100,000, City of 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 the Tujunga Wash Greenway. The Greenway, also known as the Tujunga Wash Stream Restoration project, was the first park of its kind along Los Angeles' flood control channels. In 2007, a one mile segment of an underutilized maintenance road was converted into walking paths, restored native plant communities, comfortable benches, interpretive displays, views of the Santa Monica Mountains, and a shaded picnic area. On the Wash's west bank, dry weather runoff in the channel is piped onto the banks, feeding a meandering natural stream and riparian habitat.

The project's planting was a success over the years, and the site soon featured mature trees and thick vegetation. Unfortunately, the existing irrigation system has deteriorated over the years and experienced extensive vandalism. This, combined with the ongoing drought, results in water waste and ongoing issues stemming from leaks and mismatched materials. This combination of drought and insufficient irrigation has caused a tremendous amount of stress to the plants. Rehabilitation and improvement of the irrigation infrastructure needs to occur before further damage is incurred to the site due to loss of landscape. The proposed grant would fund rehabilitation of the majority of the irrigation system and ensure that a reliable source of water is available. The new irrigation design will reflect current site conditions and state-of-the-art water conservation technology. The improvements are necessary to ensure continued visitor use, resource protection, and functionality of the greenway. Once complete, MRCA intends to transfer the site's maintenance obligation to Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation. The improvements will ensure that all amenities are fully operational at the time

of transfer.

These improvements will restore, protect, and preserve the natural resources of the site and its watershed by ensuring the continued health of the plantings. 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 or 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 Tujunga Wash Infrastructure Improvements project scores highly as a project in the following categories:

Public Recreation Value: The improvements are for a park site that serves a visitor base in a regional or greater geographic area.

Interpretation Value: If the site’s plantings are left to deteriorate and die, visitation will be reduced and the site’s existing interpretive information that promotes stewardship of watershed resources will not be utilized.

Natural Resources Value: The improvements will serve to protect the existing habitat by providing a reliable source of water, and prepare the site for ongoing drought and other impacts brought by climate change.

Trail Resource Value: If the site’s plantings are left to deteriorate and die, visitation will be reduced and the site’s existing trails for a wide range of ability levels and physical conditions will not be utilized.

Urban Park Value: The Greenway is entirely surrounded by dense urban development and is proximate to disadvantaged populations. The surrounding area is park-poor and presents opportunities for passive and active recreation. The greenway’s proximity to the Orange Line Busway also makes it ideal for expanded public access.

Sustainability Value: The infrastructure improvements will make use of innovative and substantial water conservation techniques.

Partnership Value: The project is an ongoing partnership with Los Angeles County.

Based upon consistency with the selection criteria and Guiding Principles, the Tujunga Wash Greenway Infrastructure 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 \$100,000 of Proposition 84 funds.