

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: November 2, 2015

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 9(c): Consideration of resolution amending Resolution No. 15-48 regarding APN 2840-009-900 and authorizing entering into an agreement with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works to acquire said parcel, City of Santa Clarita.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution amending Resolution No. 15-48 regarding APN 2840-009-900 and authorizing entering into an agreement with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works to acquire said parcel in Oak Springs Canyon.

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

Background: In October 2014 the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy staff notified Los Angeles County via the attached letter that it intended to exercise its first right of refusal with the Los Angeles County Flood Control District on the subject one acre surplus parcel located essentially at the confluence of Oak Springs Canyon and the Santa Clara River (see attached map).

The property is regionally significant for habitat connectivity between the Angeles National Forest and the Santa Clara River. It currently supports limited alluvial scrub vegetation at the margins of the active Oak Springs Creek channel. The eastern boundary of the parcel is an unpaved section of Oak Springs Canyon Road, however that use does not negate the ecological importance of the parcel.

Railroad tracks and State Route 14, alone or in combination, form a continuous barrier between the Angeles National Forest and the Santa Clara River. The river is the most far reaching and regionally significant habitat linkage feature in the region.

Between Sand Canyon Creek and Soledad Canyon (a distance of five miles) there is only one functional wildlife crossing under the railroad tracks that run along the south side of the Santa Clara River. That under-crossing 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.

The subject parcel spans the entire width of the northern opening of the this railroad undercrossing. Pure alluvial scrub habitat and one Arizona crossing are all the lies between the subject parcel and City of Santa Clarita open space in the Santa Clara River (see attached map).

To the south of the railroad undercrossing, the Oak Springs Creek channel filters up 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.

Approximately half of the subject acquisition parcel is occupied by unpermitted horse stalls, sheds, and other ranch infrastructure. The County had intended to sell the whole property to the adjacent private owner that put in all of the unpermitted horse apparatus. Rather than deal with the removal of encroachments, staff struck a deal with the County to allow the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) to potentially acquire 21,503 square feet of the property that contained the key habitat resources for less than \$10,000. The remaining 22,267 square feet would be sold to a private party. The process was begun with the Conservancy adopting Resolution No. 15-48 (attached) to conditionally waive its first right of refusal.

That course of action would have occurred via the Conservancy conditionally waiving its first right of refusal and allow the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) to be the acquiring (and funding) agency. Unfortunately, the Department of Public Works contacted staff and said the Conservancy had to be the acquiring agency. In addition the parcel could not be split. Furthermore having to acquire the whole parcel raises the price to approximately \$50,000 to cover the County's original acquisition costs (see attached County acquisition document) and expenses covered under Public Resource Code Section 33207(b).

The significance of the property warrants acquisition by the Conservancy via the State process. The expanded use of the railroad tracks (particularly with high speed rail) would exacerbate increasingly reduced connectivity between the Angeles National Forest and the central section of the Santa Clara River. The future development (extension) of Lost Canyon Road to the north would further degrade connectivity.

At its August 5th meeting the MRCA agreed to acquire and maintain the subject property. Staff intends to work with the MRCA on a multi-source funding package in the near future. Given the initial County process and then State acquisition process there are many months to figure out funding.