

# Memorandum

To : The Conservancy  
The Advisory Committee

Date: December 14, 2015

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 11: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 1 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for acquisition of Chesebro Meadows, approximately 71 acres, City of Agoura Hills.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy authorize a matching grant of up to \$2,570,000 in Proposition 1 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) for the acquisition of approximately 71 acres, Chesebro Meadows, in Agoura Hills.

Legislative Authority: Section 33204 of the Public Resources Code and Section 79731(h) of the Water Code.

Background: Please see the attached Proposition 1 grant application from the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for full details. The property known locally as Chesebro Meadows is located just north of the 101 Freeway adjacent to Chesebro Road, and adjacent to MRCA parkland to the east and north. (*n.b.*, there is a different spelling for the nearby Cheeseboro Canyon and parkland owned by the National Park Service). The property has been the subject of years of land use controversies, but has long been sought for preservation for open space. The site is a significant property in the Liberty Canyon wildlife habitat linkage, which has been classified by the South Coast Wildland Missing Linkages project as a key and threatened linkage in Southern California. The site would provide buffer and excellent additional habitat value to enhance wildlife movement over the proposed nearby wildlife bridge over the 101 freeway. It is within the Malibu Creek Watershed, and contains key valley oak savannah, along with vernal pool, coastal sage scrub, chaparral, and riparian/willow habitats. A very rare plant species, round leaved filaree, is also supported here.

The property lies at an entry point to approximately 16,000 acres of protected public parklands in the Simi Hills, and contains a key portion of the Rim of the Valley Trail.

The property is owned by the City of Agoura Hills and is under contract for sale to a private developer with plans for a residential subdivision, subject to a lawsuit. MRCA is prepared to make a formal offer, depending on the status and timeline of the litigation, and will submit an application to the state Wildlife Conservation Board to secure additional funds sufficient to make the acquisition from willing sellers.

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Greenhouse gas reduction analysis has been done by the applicant, using the ecoSmart Landscape method from US Forest Service, CalFire, and UC Davis: Over 40 years, the estimated minimum carbon sequestration benefit with existing trees, is 681 MT of CO<sub>2</sub>. The site is also ideal for additional native tree establishment which along with small scale riparian restoration would result in enhanced carbon sequestration benefits.

Scoring under the Conservancy's adopted Proposition 1 Grant Guidelines results in the Chesebro Meadows acquisition receiving 104 points (out of a possible 137), with a perfect score of 18 from climate change value points, plus 28 out of 33 possible points under Additional Criteria. **Total points: 150** (out of possible 188). Staff strongly recommends award of up to \$2,570,000 for this project.