

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: September 26, 2016

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 15: Consideration of resolution authorizing a vegetation management grant of Proposition 1 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy authorize a grant not to exceed \$750,000 in Proposition 1 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) for vegetation management projects in the Santa Monica Mountains Zone/Rim of the Valley Trail Corridor.

Legislative Authority: Section 33204.2(a) and 33204.27(a) 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. The grant request is for funding reduction of hazardous fuels over many hundreds of acres, removal of dead or diseased hazard trees, removal of weedy exotic species including habitat improvements by enhancing native species recovery and/or re-establishment of typically fire-resistant native species such as oaks and toyon, and prevention of wildfire risks on public parklands that may otherwise damage watersheds, habitat and structures. Unfortunately, a number of trees (even mature oaks and sycamores) have succumbed and fallen in parkland recently. Tree health has been compromised throughout the state as a direct effect of years of drought, which also can make trees susceptible to invasion by heretofore uncommon pest species. Wildfires release significant amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, and of course impose huge public safety impacts on residents, fire fighting staff, and parklands.

Vegetation management and hazardous fuels reduction provides multiple direct and indirect benefits for watersheds and water quality, from prevention of erosion and sediment loading in streams, to reestablishment of native species, to enhancing ground water recharge.

The grant would provide for equipment (*e.g.*, weed whips, chainsaws, safety gear) and field work by fire staff, conservation corps, and private contractors.

The applicant has provided a greenhouse gases analysis of the project using an EPA model.

Under carbon emissions calculations, prevention of wildfires can obviate substantial carbon

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dioxide emissions of at least 70,964 metric tons) that might otherwise be released into the atmosphere. Preservation of healthy tree canopy and greenways also ameliorates heat island effects.

Scoring under the Conservancy's adopted Proposition 1 Grant Guidelines for Vegetation Management projects results in the application receiving 85 points (out of a possible 104; minimum of 73 required), with 16 out of a possible 18 from climate change value points, plus 5 out of 20 possible points under Additional Criteria. **Total points: 106** (out of possible 142). Staff recommends award of \$750,000 for this project.