

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: March 27, 2017

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 16: Consideration of resolution authorizing an augmentation of Proposition 84 funds to grant SMM-50-1525 for Joughin Ranch Improvements by the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution recommending authorizing an augmentation of Proposition 84 funds to grant SMM-50-1525 for Joughin Ranch Improvements by the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority.

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) previously submitted a grant application in the amount of \$500,000 for capital improvements to Michael D. Antonovich Regional Park at Joughin Ranch. On April 27, 2015, the Conservancy Board authorized the grant for roadway improvements to provide safe recreational access for the public, and to provide fire and life safety access to the undeveloped open spaces of the Santa Susana Mountains.

Acquired in 2003, the 2,326-acre property is located on the southern slopes of the Santa Susana Mountains between Chatsworth and Simi Valley. The park offers stunning vistas, rolling hills, oak and walnut woodland, water sources, and an abundance of wildlife. Throughout the park, majestic views of the San Fernando Valley; the Santa Monica, Totopa, and Santa Susana Mountains; and the Simi Hills abound. Part of a key watershed area for the Los Angeles River, the Antonovich Park encompasses the Headwaters of Devil, Ybarra, and Browns Canyons. These canyons contain extensive oak and walnut woodland and riparian corridors with year-round surface water.

Browns Canyon Road is the primary access to the property and, along with Oat Mountain Motorway, one of few fire roads in the Santa Susana Mountains. The condition of the pavement in many sections has been deteriorating in the 11 years MRCA has held the property. In some areas there is danger of a washout in a extreme storm event. Due to the very steep slopes, rebuilding these portions of the road after a washout would require major retaining structures for support.

When MRCA initially applied for the grant in 2015, it was not part of the plan to re-pave the entire roadway completely. However, in the time since the original Conservancy grant was obtained, approximately an additional 2,500 linear feet of roadway has become deteriorated and is necessary to improve.

In June 2016, MRCA staff received bids from potential roadway contractors for the road paving work. The lowest bid was determined from a sample project scenario, which was based on the amount of work *anticipated* for the Joughin Ranch road improvement project. As it is difficult to exactly quantify the work in drawings because road and pavement conditions at a single site can vary widely, with some areas needing only patching and others requiring full-depth removal and replacement, the intent of the bid was to have a pre-agreed upon unit price, renewable for up to five years, making it possible to accurately budget projects. After completion of a customized assessment of the entire road, MRCA now has actual costs for the complete scope of the paving work that is required in order to provide full and safe recreational access for the public and for fire and life safety. The project will require, but not be limited to, the following work: filling gullies and washouts, repairing road scour, removing debris, excavation, clearing shrubs, adding road base, and placing asphalt. A full-depth reclamation process is proposed so that the resulting road will have the longest-possible life span.

The current request for an additional \$200,000 in Proposition 84 funding from the Conservancy is the product of a final field determination of exact boundaries and specifications of the paving work, in consultation with the paving contractor (Hardy & Harper) . This amount is sufficient to complete the full length of road work required for the comprehensive Joughin Ranch road improvements.

Analysis–Proposition 84 and the Common Ground Plan

Section 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.” Section 75050 (g)(2) of the Act specifically allocates funding 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 Joughin Ranch roadway improvements project constitutes watershed protection, preservation and restoration activities in the Upper Los Angeles River watershed. The

geographic area covered by the grant is within the Upper Los Angeles River watershed, and the property and its facilities are resources for public recreational use. The project is consistent with Proposition 84's goals and is consistent with its 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. MRCA is requesting a grant to rehabilitate, restore, protect and improve the road and the surrounding habitat.¹ All elements of the project fit within the definitions of eligible activities (development, preservation, protection, and restoration) because the funds will be spent to physically improve the road, enhance its active recreation uses, and ensure that the surrounding native habitat can be protected.

The Joughin Ranch roadway improvements project is consistent with the *San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers Watershed and Open Space Plan*,² also known as and hereinafter referred to as the "Common Ground" plan. The Common Ground plan was jointly developed by the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, or Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC), and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC). 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.³ These broad principles, referenced further below, are designed to

¹Chapter 1, Section 75005 of Proposition 84 defines the following terms:

(f) "Development" includes, but is not limited to, the physical improvement of real property including the construction of facilities or structures.

(l) "Preservation" means rehabilitation, stabilization, restoration, development and reconstruction, or any combination of those activities.

(m) "Protection" means 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.

(n) "Restoration" means the improvement of physical structures or facilities. Restoration projects shall include the planning, monitoring and reporting necessary to ensure successful implementation of the project objectives.

²A copy of the Common Ground Plan can be accessed online at http://www.rmc.ca.gov/plans/common_ground.html

³The Guiding Principles are outlined in Page 2 of the Executive Summary, or discussed with greater depth on Page 47 of the Plan.

accommodate the varying priorities and needs of projects in the region. The Joughin Ranch Roadway Improvements and Construction Project rehabilitates the main access road for the park, creating a stable access to the site. This protects the landscape from unplanned access as well as improves the access to the site.

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 Joughin Ranch roadway improvements project implements the following guiding principles:

- Create, Expand and Improve Public Open Space Throughout the Region
- Improve Access to Open Space and Recreation for All Communities
- Promote Stewardship of the Landscape

Based upon consistency with the selection criteria and Guiding Principles, the 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. Section 16727 (a) also allows bond funds to be used for costs that are incidentally but directly related to construction including costs for planning, engineering and other design work.

This project is for the development, preservation, protection and restoration of a capital asset, that is a land and water resource in the Los Angeles River watershed. As such, it is a proper expenditure of bond funds. In addition, the activities that this grant will fund will enhance the useful life of the facilities and on that basis as well qualify as capital assets for purposes of the General Obligation Bond Law.

Consideration: The application from the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority is for \$200,000 of Proposition 84 funds.

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