

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: June 26, 2017

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 15: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 84 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for project planning and design in the Mulholland Drive Scenic Corridor in the upper Los Angeles River watershed, Santa Monica Mountains, 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 project planning and design in the Mulholland Drive Scenic Corridor and Griffith park Wildlife Corridor in the upper Los Angeles River watershed, and coastal watersheds of the Santa Monica Bay, Santa Monica Mountains, City of Los Angeles in the amount of \$50,000.

Legislative Authority: Sections 33204.2(a), 33204.27(a), and 75050(g)(2), and 75060(d)1 of the Public Resources Code.

Background: The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority has submitted the attached grant application for project planning and design services in the Mulholland Drive Scenic Corridor and Griffith Park Wildlife Corridor, which includes portions of the upper Los Angeles River watershed, and coastal watersheds of the Santa Monica Bay. These two overlapping corridors have been a critical part of the Conservancy mission since the agency's inception. The Conservancy has made a significant public investment in this area over a 30 year period that it seeks to protect and enhance. The subject application includes background, a map, and justification. The project area overlaps the Summit Valley-North Addition, Benedict Canyon Watershed-West Slope, Benedict Canyon Watershed-East Slope, Mission-Rustic-Sullivan Canyons, Encino Reservoir, Hoag Canyon, Mulholland Gateway - Chapter-Natoma, Oak Forest-Fossil Ridge Adjacent, Cahuenga Pass Property, Lake Hollywood, Laurel Canyon-East Core Habitat, Runyon Canyon-Trebek Connector, Ventura Canyon, Mulholland Gateway Southeast, Mulholland Gateway Southwest, Runyon-101 Freeway Connector, Longridge Connector, Mulholland Gateway- 21000 Mulholland, Oak Forest Canyon- West, Wilacre Park Additions, Stone Canyon Reservoir Adjacent, Coldwater Canyon Wildlife Corridor, and Elrita Bowl-Laurel Canyon Park Adjacent projects from the

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SMMC Workprogram.

The overlapping Mulholland Drive Scenic Corridor and Griffith Park Wildlife Corridor are the backbone of the eastern Santa Monica Mountains. The open space protection and development needs along the corridor between Griffith Park and Woodland Hills are varied and unique. Complex work is necessary to maintain the remarkable habitat linkage that ties Griffith Park to the 20,000-acre Big Wild habitat area anchored by Topanga State Park and Marvin Braude Mulholland Gateway Park. The numerous parks along the corridor need habitat and trail connections to expand both their ecological and recreational capacity flanked by dense city on two sides. The numerous public overlooks along Mulholland Drive have seen a significant increase in use by the public in the last several years.

The proposed project area included under this grant application includes the Los Angeles City-designated Mulholland Scenic Corridor, which is one-half-mile from the roadway. That area encompasses approximately 12,700 acres in headwaters of both the Los Angeles River and Santa Monica Bay watersheds. The proposed project area is expanded beyond that to include ecologically valuable habitat at risk of development. The subject grant would serve to complement the work MRCA staff performs in those areas using other funding sources.

Within the proposed project area are approximately 1,600 undeveloped, privately-owned acres. These potential open space and easement acquisitions include approximately 20 miles of a contiguous Rim of the Valley Trail segment along Mulholland Drive (also Mulholland Core Trail). Though the subject grant would encompass projects in the Mulholland Scenic Corridor and Griffith park Wildlife Corridor between the Griffith Park and Woodland Hills areas, the bulk of the work performed under this grant would take place between the 405 and 101 Freeways (Sepulveda Pass to Cahuenga Pass). This is in the area encompassed by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy's recently approved Eastern Santa Monica Mountains Habitat Linkage Planning Map.

The MRCA staff pursues every possible opportunity in the City of Los Angeles entitlement process to secure deed restrictions, conservation easements, and trail easements to achieve a permanently functioning wildlife corridor, high quality habitat blocks, and the Mulholland Specific Plan mandated core trail. In the past 3 years, work performed under similar grants has allowed the MRCA to record an easement or deed restriction on more than a dozen projects, with several projects pending. MRCA staff is currently pursuing City conditions of approval for the required recordation of land interests on at least 5 projects at this time. All of these land interests are achieved at no public cost. The only expense is MRCA staff time to develop the projects and close the transactions. The value of the permanently protected real estate dwarfs this modest amount of public expense. The expense of a title report and legal time for otherwise cost free permanent public open space provides incomparable value to the public.

The watershed protection activities proposed within the Upper Los Angeles River Watershed

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under this grant are consistent with Water Code Section 79508. Water Code Section 79508 provides that watershed protection activities shall be consistent with the *San Gabriel and Los Angeles River Watershed and Open Space Plan (Common Ground)*. The proposed project would provide opportunities to implement planning principles in *Common Ground* including: *Improve habitat quality, quantity and connectivity*, and *Establish riverfront greenways to cleanse water, hold floodwaters and extend open space*. This project is also consistent with the Conservancy's Strategic Objectives: Further Cooperation with Local Governments in the Region to Secure Open Space and Parkland and Expand Efforts to Integrate Nature into the Urban Environment.

The proposed grant would allocate \$25,000 under Section 75050(g)(2) of Proposition 84 for the Upper Los Angeles River portion of the Mulholland Drive Scenic Corridor and Griffith park Wildlife Corridor, and \$25,000 under Section 75060(d)(1) for coastal watersheds of Santa Monica Bay.