

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: October 22, 2018

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 12: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 68 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority in support of the Liberty Canyon Wildlife Crossing project.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy authorize a grant not to exceed \$3,000,000 in Proposition 68 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) in support of the joint Caltrans/MRCA Liberty Canyon Wildlife Crossing project over the 101 Freeway and Agoura Road in Agoura Hills.

Legislative Authority: Section 33204.2(a), 33204.27(a) and Section 80110(b)(8) of the Public Resources Code.

Background: Please see the attached Proposition 68 grant application from the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for a detailed description and analysis. The grant request is for up to \$3,000,000 to augment other private funds and California wildlife funds for Caltrans to proceed with design and engineering for the long-planned wildlife bridge over the 101 Freeway and Agoura Road in Agoura Hills.

The Conservancy and MRCA are part of a partnership for design and ultimate construction of the corridor linkage bridge, in conjunction with Caltrans, National Wildlife Federation, National Park Service, and the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains. This structure will ensure that wildlife movement back and forth between the Santa Monica Mountains, Simi Hills, and Santa Susanas (and the two National Forests to the north) can continue unimpeded for the foreseeable future. The long term health of the ecosystem and persistence of wildlife populations depend on it.

The Liberty Canyon location and efficacy of a bridge structure have been validated by the National Park Service and other scientists. Other wildlife road crossing structures have been highly successful in Canada, Nevada and other countries and states. Mountain lion is the target species, but the vegetated bridge structure is expected to be used by many other species, including mule deer, bobcats, coyotes, fox, badger, birds, and reptiles. MRCA owns the land both to the north and south of the 101, and to the south of Agoura Road where the bridge structure landings are to be situated.

MRCA has authorized entering into a cooperative agreement with Caltrans for the project. Caltrans completed the environmental review document earlier this year, and engineers are ready to commence work on this design and engineering phase once sufficient funding is in place to proceed and with reasonable assurances that progress payments will be forthcoming. A start time is planned for early 2019; design and engineering is estimated to take approximately one year. The National Wildlife Federation has pledged to raise the funding and continues to receive donations for the project that it will pass through to MRCA. MRCA will then be invoiced by Caltrans on a periodic basis. The total needed for Phase 2 is estimated to be approximately \$8-10 million. Having the potential of additional park and wildlife funding from Prop 68 from the Conservancy and the state Wildlife Conservation Board would allow Caltrans to proceed without interruption through this design and engineering work.

Under the Conservancy's Proposition 68 grant guidelines for Resource Protection and Restoration, this grant request received sufficient scoring under values for Prioritization, Category, Implementation, Climate Change, and Additional Consideration, plus points for matching funds.