

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: September 23, 2019

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 16: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 1 and 68 funds for River Green project planning and design, Upper Los Angeles River Watershed.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 1 and 68 funds in the amount of \$1,000,000 to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for River Green Project Planning and Design, Upper Los Angeles River Watershed.

Legislative Authority: Sections 33204, 33204.2, 33204.27 of the Public Resources Code.

Background: The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) has submitted a grant application for a pre-improvement planning project for the Los Angeles River watershed, "River Green." River Green is the idea that the essence of a river can be understood through its identifiable natural resources, such as presence of water, wildlife, ability to support recreation, etc., and that those characteristics are fundamentally important to all. The historic pattern of land use and development around the Los Angeles River (River) does not promote these values. Since the mid-1990s, the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA), the Conservancy, and many community-based organizations have striven to keep protection of the River's natural resources in the forefront of discussions about the river's future. The success of the Conservancy and MRCA river parks, and their emotional appeal, attests both to the universal appeal of natural resources and to the need for more green projects on the river. These types of projects also increase the region's resiliency to the impacts of climate change, and benefit all communities.

Several important regional river planning efforts are currently underway (e.g. the Conservancy's Upper Los Angeles River and Tributaries Revitalization Plan and the County's Los Angeles River Master Plan Update) that seek to coordinate stakeholders and unify planning efforts throughout the Upper Los Angeles River Watershed. While these planning efforts strive to find balance in competing policies, goals, and systemic issues that affect the watershed, the region's current needs for low-cost housing, transportation options, and the conscientious use of water resources have the potential to overshadow our equally dire needs for more green space, natural habitat, outdoor passive recreation, and spaces for respite. Furthermore, there is little discussion about connecting the region's waterway corridors to the wildlife and trail corridors that existing in the surrounding mountains, and this also needs to be included in current planning.

The MRCA seeks to frame River discussions with the premise that revitalization is fundamentally a green process. There is a need to ensure that the policies and goals now being developed include the River Green concept, and deeply integrate it in the efforts of all of the jurisdictions working along the waterways of the Upper Los Angeles River Watershed. Staff plan to work with a team of consultants to develop a guiding vision and recommendations that will be recommended for implementation throughout all of the various planning efforts currently underway. Technical and engineering studies that support and quantify the River

Green concept will be conducted. The proposed grant will also be used to identify and develop a wide range of potential projects that would implement the River Green concept, including acquisition of land, public access points, and recreational opportunities throughout the watershed. The grant request is for Proposition 1 and 68 funds to be split evenly in the total amount of \$1,000,000 to provide project planning and design support of the River Green concept.

Analysis—Consistency with Plans

The proposed grant is consistent with all applicable plans, including the Santa Monica Mountains Comprehensive Plan, Strategic Plan, Rim of the Valley Trail Corridor Master Plan, and the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Plan.

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, and tangible physical property with an expected useful life of 10 to 15 years. Section 16727 (a) also allows bond funds to be used for costs that are incidentally but directly related to construction or acquisition including costs for planning, engineering and other design work.

The activities that to be funded with this grant constitute planning of projects to protect land and water resources, protect and restore rivers, lakes and streams, their watersheds and associated land, water and other natural resources. Thus, the proposed activities fall within the definition of "capital assets" or are incidentally but directly related to acquisition or construction, and therefore are proper under the General Obligation Bond Law.

Scoring - Competitive Grant Program

Please see the attached Proposition 1 and 68 grant analysis.

Scoring under the Conservancy's Proposition 1 Guidelines results River Green pre-improvement planning project receiving the following: 85 points (out of a possible 86; 61 minimum required), plus 4 out of 4 climate change value points, plus 25 out of 25 possible points under Additional Criteria. Total points: 114 (out of possible 115).

Scoring under the Conservancy's Proposition 68 Guidelines results in the River Green pre-improvement planning project receiving the following:

Prioritization Value: 19(out of 21)
Category Value: 67(out of 70)
Implementation Value: 15 (out of 16)
Climate Change Value: 16 (out of 16)
Additional Criteria: 25 (out of 25)

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Consideration: The grant to Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority is for \$1,000,000, split evenly between Proposition 1 funds and Proposition 68.