

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: February 24, 2020

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 11: Consideration of resolution authorizing adoption of 2020 updates to 2017 Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy Eastern Santa Monica Mountains Habitat Linkage Planning Map.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing adoption of 2020 updates to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy Eastern Santa Monica Mountains Habitat Linkage Planning Map that was adopted in January 2017.

Legislative Authority: Sections 33211(c) of the Public Resources Code.

Background: At its January 2017 meeting the Conservancy as the principal State planning agency for the Santa Monica Mountains adopted the first Eastern Santa Monica Mountains Habitat Linkage Planning Map prepared by staff. As the attached May 2017 letter to the City of Los Angeles Planning Director states, the map is meant to be an iterative document, that is continuously improved by incorporating changed conditions and new information. The Conservancy subsequently adopted a Griffith Park Area Habitat Linkage Planning Map later in 2017. Staff has not produced a high volume of changes to the map, but three years have passed and an up to date tool is most effective. It is impossible to always have perfect map both because changes occur constantly and because the staffing level to ground truth every linkage and sub-linkage on private property is not currently obtainable.

The importance of the habitat linkage or wildlife corridor system that provides for animal movement between the 405 and 101 freeways leading to Griffith Park has long been recognized. The Conservancy and other agencies have acquired land and commented on development projects to protect distinct sections of the habitat linkage system for over 30 years. Tens of millions of public dollars have been invested in this effort. That effort to date has been successful enough to bring mountain lions into the area and to progressively increase the sightings of bobcats. Unfortunately, many significant unprotected gaps remain. The highest quality planning tools are needed if the wildlife corridor system is to remain intact and be less subject to hit or miss protection efforts.

Not until the end of 2018 did the City of Los Angeles Planning Department begin to conduct independent research on habitat connectivity with its Wildlife Pilot Study and Protected Areas

for Wildlife (PAW). That study area is virtually identical to that of the subject Conservancy planning map. However, until the City study is turned into an Ordinance with enforcement teeth, habitat linkage protection for individual development applications must wholly rely on public agencies and citizens pushing for site specific protection measures.

The City Planning Department staff had long requested a comprehensive map of known and potential wildlife corridors in the eastern Santa Monica Mountains. The subject 2017 Eastern Santa Monica Mountains Habitat Linkage Planning Map was designed as a tool for the City to use for impact analysis and mitigation measures. A graphically superior version of the map was provided both electronically and on large format paper to the City in May 2017.

Soon thereafter staff met with City planning officials and were told that the Conservancy map was not supported by actual wildlife movement data or documented observations. In addition if a mapped habitat connection on private land was not ground truthed (even if patently obvious from high resolution aerial photographs) the City staff conveyed that the City Attorney ruled that such a mapped connection was not valid to make an exaction. Nonetheless, staff uses the map in its comment letters to secure habitat connectivity and inform City staff.

The map covers the area between the 405 and 101 freeways comprehensively, with the exception of smaller peripheral habitat patches. The mapping consists of outlined and numbered habitat blocks and lines depicting both proven, and potentially functional, wildlife corridors between the blocks.

The main map changes since 2017 were on the north slope of the range in the Cahuenga Pass area. In that area new development has eliminated virtually all potential large mammal movement on that section of the north slope. The only primary east-west linkage route is now on the south slope following a DWP power line corridor into Runyon Canyon Park.