

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: March 30, 2020

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 7: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant of General Funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for Woolsey Fire Restoration, Safety and Recovery projects.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing a grant of General Funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for Woolsey Fire Restoration, Safety and Recovery projects in the amount of \$8,100,000.

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

Background: In November of 2018, the Woolsey fire burned tens of thousands of acres of Conservancy parkland and open space. The 2019-2020 State of California Budget appropriated \$12,500,000 to the Conservancy to provide for public safety related maintenance on Conservancy property due to the Woolsey fire. The Conservancy previously granted a portion of these funds to the California Conservation Corps (CCC) for removal of hazardous fuels and accumulated sediment, trail restoration and habitat restoration projects. Funds were also granted to Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) to address immediate safety concerns, assess the damage from the fire and subsequent storms and develop site specific plans for recovery and restoration.

The MRCA has, and continues to, address safety concerns at properties affected by the Woolsey fire. While immediate concerns have been addressed, there is still a need for long-term recovery and restoration projects, as well as ongoing safety measures and increased patrol and monitoring. Based on their assessment, the following plan is recommended for implementation from 2020-2024:

- Fire Resilience Improvements, Restoration and Safety Projects at Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Open Space Preserve (\$500,000). This scope includes infrastructure maintenance, improvements, suppression options, structure hardening, and increased operational and monitoring costs due to fire effects. Hardening measures and fire resilient components and materials shall be implemented while the damaged structures are being repaired. One of the buildings on the site will be converted to park employee housing, providing additional monitoring of the site. Restoration projects are needed

in some burned areas.

- Fire Resilience Improvements, Restoration and Safety Projects at King Gillette Ranch (\$600,000). This scope includes infrastructure maintenance, improvements, suppression measures, structure hardening, and increased operational and monitoring costs due to fire effects. King Gillette Ranch contains the primary headquarters for MRCA's fire division, and those facilities are in need of repairs. Hardening measures and fire resilient components and materials shall be implemented while structures are repaired. Staff displaced by damage to other properties have relocated to this park, and some improvements are still needed to accommodate that use.

- Fire Resilience Improvements, Restoration and Safety Projects at Ramirez Canyon Park (\$700,000). This scope includes infrastructure maintenance, improvements, suppression measures, structure hardening, and increased operational and monitoring costs due to fire effects. Hardening measures and fire resilient components and materials shall be implemented while structures are repaired. Staff displaced by damage to other buildings in the park could be accommodated by renovating another structure on the site. Erosion from surrounding hillsides requires frequent clearing of the vehicular crossings on the site to maintain safe egress out of the property, as well as emergency access to it. Restoration projects are needed in some burned areas.

- Vegetation Management (\$300,000). In addition to the improvements listed above, vegetation management projects are recommended at all properties affected by the Woolsey fire as fuels return each year. Some properties have massive fuel loads as invasive plants have thrived post-fire. In addition, it is critical that erosion control measures be undertaken each year to ensure the stability of burned slopes.

- Patrol, Monitoring, and Immediate Issues (\$1,000,000). The properties affected by the Woolsey fire have various issues that require monitoring and quick response. This is both to protect the properties and to protect the public. Several areas have sensitive habit and/or cultural resources and should not be disturbed. In addition, because the properties are so fragile, dangerous conditions can appear without warning (e.g. downed limbs, slides, etc.) Patrol and monitoring is required through 2024 to identify problems and address issues that arise. This work will be done on multiple properties affected by the fire.

- Trails and Emergency Access (\$1,500,000). A trail survey of the burned area is necessary to identify legitimate trails and maintain them. The massive vegetation clearance caused by the Woolsey fire allowed visitors to create many new but unauthorized trails and shortcuts. While the CCC will work on restoration of legitimate

trails under their grant, efforts also need to be made to remove encroachments and discourage use of unauthorized trails. In addition, several access roads were severely damaged by the fire and subsequent storms and require work. In many cases these roads are the only means of emergency access to park facilities and are necessary for safety reasons. Improvements to culverts, turnouts, and other road facilities are needed to maintain safe egress and emergency access to these properties. These improvements will be made on multiple properties affected by the fire.

- Equipment needed (\$3,500,000): Completion of the recovery activities described above will require use of a variety of equipment over a four year period. Purchase of this equipment is preferred over rentals, both because of cost savings and more efficient scheduling across multiple sites. This equipment could also be made available to the CCC for implementation of the existing grant. Equipment considered for procurement include bobcats, skid units, Traxx mowers, stakebeds and trailers, cameras, radios, water tanks, patrol vehicles and Type III engines. Equipment will be utilized on multiple properties affected by the fire.

The MRCA has requested that up to 50% of the funds be available as advanced funds to ensure public safety on the affected lands. This is necessary because the properties affected by the Woolsey Fire continue to be more vulnerable to severe erosion, landslides, extraordinary growth of weedy non-native species, and other conditions. Unusual weather conditions may arise unexpectedly, necessitating immediate responses. Measures to combat these conditions, protect the lands from further damage, and ensure public safety are needed on an ongoing basis, and funding this work in arrears would be a hardship.

Consideration: The grant application from the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority is for \$8,100,000 of General funds.