

# Memorandum

To : The Conservancy  
The Advisory Committee

Date: January 11, 2021

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 13: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant of Environmental License Plate funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) for the Community Nature Connection Youth Leadership Series.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing a grant of Environmental License Plate funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for the Community Nature Connection Youth Leadership Series in the amount of \$120,000, Los Angeles.

Legislative Authority: Sections 33204.27 of the Public Resources Code.

Background: The Community Nature Connection Youth Leadership Series (YLS), originally developed by the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, is a year long multi-program series that leads young people from disadvantaged communities, through a series of training and on the job experience in the furtherance of a pipeline to either a career in parks, entrance to university, or both.

A robust outreach and engagement in targeted communities identifies community based organizations that serve youth and for whom these programs provide an expansion of their existing services. These community partners are critical to the recruitment and organization of the programs and work directly with staff to ensure that programs meet community needs. Programmatic and staffing components of the Youth Leadership Series includes Naturalist Explorers, the Community Naturalist Leadership Program.

Naturalist Explorers is a 16 week program that introduces youth to natural and cultural resources, outdoor and camping skills, principles of interpretation, parks careers, community advocacy and career development. Each program is facilitated by a naturalist who transforms the mountains, coast and urban parks into an outdoor classroom.

The Community Naturalists Leadership Program is a professional development program that builds the skills of Naturalist Explorer graduates so that they can design coordinate and lead outdoor programs in their own communities. By adding risk management, logistics and leadership to skills already introduced in Naturalist Explorers, participants in this program

become leadership figures and ambassadors of the outdoors in their own communities. By investing in young leaders from under-represented communities and preparing them for jobs in the outdoor field and with public park agencies, we are also addressing a significant barrier to park access from these communities. Lack of representation of staff and volunteers from diverse communities is often cited as a source of fear or discomfort by new park visitors. “Will there be someone who looks like me?” “Someone who speaks my language?” Many participants from YLS have gone on to be hired as Outdoor Leaders and Naturalists with Community Nature Connection and local, state and federal agencies, addressing this important issue of representation and diversity in our profession.

Funding for the Youth Leadership Series has been allocated from the Environmental License Plate Fund in the amount of \$120,000. The terms of the funding allow for an advance, which will be requested from the funding source. MRCA will grant these funds to the Community Nature Connection for operation of these programs.