

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: February 22, 2021

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 14: Presentation and public hearing on Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy Big Wild - Topanga State Park Core Habitat Area Planning Map.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy provide and receive comments on the provided draft *Big Wild - Topanga State Park Core Habitat Area Planning Map* and instruct staff to circulate the map widely for additional comments prior to bring a revised map back for adoption.

Legislative Authority: Public Resources Code Section 33211(c)

Background: As the principal State planning agency for the Santa Monica Mountains Zone, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (Conservancy) adopted two eastern Santa Monica Mountains habitat linkage planning area maps in 2017. The first such map was the *Eastern Santa Monica Mountains Habitat Linkage Planning Map* for the section of the Santa Monica Mountains between the 405 freeway and the 101 freeway in the Cahuenga Pass. A revised version of that map was adopted in February 2020. The second map was the *Griffith Park Area Habitat Linkage Planning Map* that covers the area from the 101 freeway to I5 at the eastern edge of Griffith Park and into the Los Angeles River.

To expand the area covered by the Conservancy's planning maps, the draft planning map for this agenda item covers the whole area from the 405 freeway west to the edge of Topanga Canyon Boulevard (SR 27). This area is often referred to as the Big Wild. The Big Wild is the approximately 20,000 acre contiguous area including Topanga State Park that is not bisected by a paved road. The attached map also includes all currently identified habitat blocks located in the subject area but not contiguous to the Big Wild. It also shows habitat connections across the 405 freeway/Sepulveda Boulevard and Topanga Canyon Boulevard. All of the Santa Monica Mountains in the Santa Monica Mountains Zone are defined as an environmental resource of critical concern in the California Public Resources Code.

The catalyst for these maps was a request by the City of Los Angeles Planning Department for documentation of habitat resources, particularly wildlife corridors, that would help in the City's analysis of project impacts and provide nexus for the requirement of mitigation. The maps include the boundaries of numbered habitat blocks and show both known and probable wildlife

movement routes between habitat blocks and across the two subject freeways. The Conservancy and other parties routinely use the two adopted maps in CEQA comments to the City. To date the City has basically ignored the maps based on the fact that all of the line work is not ground truthed, updated regularly, nor based on documented repeated wildlife movement data. That is the case even though 99 percent of the line work is the irrefutable tracing of development boundaries and the parcel data is supplied by the Los Angeles County Assessor.

The maps are designed as tools to identify potential constraints and opportunities to help protect habitat connections and land within all sized habitat blocks. The maps are all constructed by GIS staff using the best available electronic data and some ground truthing. The perimeters of habitat blocks are depicted from the most recent and highest resolution aerial photography available. Most often that is Google Earth aerial photography. Often back year aerial photography shows a particular area much better than the most current available photography. The lines showing habitat connections are often enhanced with Google Earth street view photography.

In the case of the subject draft *Big Wild - Topanga State Park Core Habitat Area Planning Map* the aerial photography within the habitat blocks is from February 2, 2020 0.5 meter MAXAR aerial from ESRI base maps. All of the subject area is included in the Google Earth 2020 aerial photography layer. The area shown outside the habitat blocks is based on 2014 LARIAC data. The Conservancy does not have access to the County's 2019 LARIAC data.

On the ground conditions are fluid because fences can come and go and new construction occurs in almost every neighborhood. It is impossible to provide a perfect map in time; and hence, this mapping effort is meant to be an iterative process that includes continuous input from all available sources. Each distinct habitat block polygon is sequentially numbered to establish baseline nomenclature for easy reference between parties.