WILDLIFE CORRIDOR CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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MEMORANDUM

Date: July 13, 2005

To: The Advisory Committee Members

From: Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Executive Officer

Subject: **Agenda Item XVI: Discussion and possible action regarding a potential offer to dedicate open space from the Rowland Heights Residential Project, Tentative Tract 49411.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Advisory Committee recommend that the Governing Board retain its position on the project that the site should remain open space and that the current proposal for a dedication of 130 acres does not warrant the impacts of the proposed 43-unit project.

Background: Since the mid-1990s, a developer has been seeking approval for a subdivision (Tentative Tract No. 49411 on an approximately 170-acre tract in Rowland Heights). The key issue is that a prior land use decision by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors on adjoining property (Tract 34146) led to an open space designation on the subject property. The only current use on the property is a small equestrian facility in the northeast corner. The Governing Board adopted several comment letters (dated January 13, 1999, October 26, 2001, November 7, 2001, and January 16, 2002) on the project, all emphasizing that the proposed project was inconsistent with both the site's biological resources and standing open space designation from Tract 34146. The 2002 comment letter is attached.

After many continuances, the Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission denied the project approximately one year ago. The number of homes has been reduced to 43 from 55. The applicant subsequently appealed that Planning Commission decision to the Board of Supervisors. It appears that the Supervisors will hear the item on September 27, 2005.

The development firm, EPAC periodically approaches staff to emphasize the benefits of allowing their 43-unit project that is limited to 40 acres of the property. The core of their presentation is that in its current ownership status, the property continues to be beaten into the ground from over-grazing and general absence of ecological stewardship. Plus, it is not readily accessible to the public. The development would provide fee title to 130 acres, a constructed trailhead, a permanent maintenance funding source (amount to be determined), and bring the equestrian facility into compliance with its existing Conditional Use Permit (CUP).

EPAC sees the Wildlife Corridor Conservation Authority (WCCA) as the prime recipient for such an offer. The offer includes the 20-acre equestrian facility's right to operate for the life of its CUP (approximately 20 years) and the inclusion of a mobile home with utilities for an onsite ranger residence.

The Governing Board briefly discussed this item at its March 3, 2004 meeting and directed staff to stay the course with the intent of the comment letters and saw no reason to allow development of the site.

Staff recently asked the developer's representative if they would consider cutting the number of homes in half to avoid numerous oak trees. He said no because it is the constraint of an access road alignment that precipitates the need for so many oak removals. At this stage, in its design, the project would result in unavoidable significant ecological impacts. The only two outcomes for the property are not just the current stand off or the 43-unit proposed development. Ultimately, the owner my decide to sell the property to an open space agency or individual seeking a personal equestrian area.