

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: January 23, 2006

From :  Joseph J. Edmiston, FAICP, Executive Director

Subject: **Agenda Item 20: Consideration of resolution approving revised Newhall Ranch High Country Recreation and Conservation Authority Joint Powers Agreement.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the resolution approving the revised Newhall Ranch High Country Recreation and Conservation Authority, a Joint Exercise of Powers Agreement between the Conservancy, the City of Santa Clarita, and the County of Los Angeles for the ownership and management of the Newhall Ranch project Special Management Areas and Westridge Open Space in unincorporated Santa Clarita.

Legislative Authority: Section 6500 *et seq.* of the Government Code.

Background: On August 30, 2004 the Conservancy authorized entering into a joint exercise of powers agreement (JPA) with the City of Santa Clarita and the County of Los Angeles for ownership and management of open space required to be preserved in the Newhall Ranch and Westridge projects in the Santa Clarita area of unincorporated Los Angeles County. The City approved the JPA on September 28, 2004. The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors was to be the last approval needed. However, the County subsequently requested some revisions, mainly to change the appointing authority for the four county seats on the new JPA to the Fifth District Supervisor rather than the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors as a whole, since the jurisdiction of the JPA will be entirely within the Fifth District. The Santa Clarita City Council approved the minor revisions to the document at the January 10, 2006 Council meeting.

Additional Background: The Conservancy and the City of Santa Clarita formed the Santa Clarita Watershed Recreation and Conservation Authority (SCWRCA) in 1993 for the purpose of working for the common goals of open space preservation and watershed protection in the Santa Clarita area. SCWRCA has provided an important focus on cooperative planning and resource issues in the Santa Clarita Woodlands, wildlife corridors, upper Santa Clara River watershed, trails, and Rim of the Valley Trail Corridor (including Angeles National Forest interface). The JPA Governing Board consists of four members, two appointed by the Conservancy and two appointed by the City. The City Council appoints the City Manager and the Director of Parks, Recreation, and Community Services as its representatives to SCWRCA. The Conservancy's current appointees are Jerome C. Daniel and Michael D. Berger.

Since its inception, SCWRCA has worked closely with the Conservancy and the City on a variety of open space projects including the Santa Clarita Woodlands Park, Mentryville restoration, the purchase of the Rivendale Ranch, and public open space dedications from the Newhall Ranch and Westridge projects. In 2002 SCWRCA acquired Whitney Canyon Park, the first property owned by the JPA.

In 1998, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors required, as part of its approval of the Newhall Ranch project, that approximately 6,000 acres of open space within the project area be dedicated as open space and that “a method for insuring meaningful local participation in management of the property” be formulated, along with conditions for joint powers ownership of the High Country open space, including four county representatives to be appointed by the Board of Supervisors.

Subsequent to the Board of Supervisors action, the SCWRCA Board reviewed the County requirement and discussed amending the JPA to allow for additional members from the unincorporated areas to provide oversight of the management of the new open space. Between August 19, 1998 and September 14, 1998, SCWRCA, the City Council, and the Conservancy all approved amending the SCWRCA JPA to add additional members to reflect the Newhall High Country at such time as the land was transferred. Also, during the County approvals for the Westridge project, an additional 140 acres of oak woodland from that project were added to the scope of the unincorporated members’ oversight.

As the Newhall Ranch project moved forward toward final approvals and as the Westridge project began construction, staff from Conservancy, the County, and the City began discussions on the JPA and the types of amendments necessary to the JPA to ensure these new public open space areas would be managed to expectations.

During the initial discussions that began in 2003, the County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation proposed a separate JPA alternative to the expansion of SCWRCA, primarily for technical and fiscal procedural issues. As envisioned, the new JPA, titled the Newhall Ranch High Country Recreation and Conservation Authority (NRHCRCA), will be charged with ownership, management and conservation oversight of the open space dedications. Staffs from the County, the City, Conservancy crafted the provisions of the attached draft Agreement, which has been reviewed by Conservancy Staff Counsel and County Counsel.

In order to provide consistency with Santa Clarita Valley open space issues, the new JPA would incorporate the existing four board members of SCWRCA into its structure and combine them with four members appointed by the County. The parties intend that the two JPA’s, (SCWRCA

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and NRHCWRCA) would meet concurrently or back-to-back to facilitate the broadest communication and public participation and to reduce administrative burden. The new JPA would focus only on the Newhall Ranch and Westridge open space and would not vote on SCWRCA-related issues.