DESERT AND MOUNTAIN CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

FROM: Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Executive Officer

DATE: August 9, 2006

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item VII: Consideration of authorizing a) the acceptance of an approximately 187-acre open space donation from J.P. Eliopulos (Lot 48 of Tract No. 52200-01) bordering Elizabeth Lake Road; b) entering into agreements to accept and to expend permanent maintenance funding; and c) the acceptance of maintenance funding, City of Palmdale.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing a) the acceptance of an approximately 187-acre open space donation from J.P. Eliopulos (Lot 48 of Tract No. 52200-01) bordering Elizabeth Lake Road; b) entering into agreements to accept and to expend permanent maintenance funding; and c) the acceptance of maintenance funding, City of Palmdale.

Background: Representatives of J.P. Eliopulos Company contacted the Antelope Valley Resource Conservation District regarding the possible donation of hundreds of acres of open space that is remainder to the 800-unit Joshua Ranch project towards the western edge of Palmdale. The northern boundary of the project borders California State Aqueduct property. Staff toured the property extensively earlier this year. Maps of the property and vicinity are attached. All permits have been obtained and mass grading is in process over hundreds of acres.

The property contains exceptionally high quality juniper woodland habitat intermixed with other desert scrub plant communities. Ample topographic relief provides significant vistas particularly to the south. As shown on the attached maps, open space owned by the Bureau of Land Management and the City of Palmdale abuts various sections of Joshua Ranch open space. Across Elizabeth Lake Road to the south, the Joshua Ranch project area remains connected to the greater Sierra Pelona Mountains ecosystem via several routes. The width and quality of those habitat linkages will decline dramatically with the construction of the Ritter Ranch

and City Ranch projects located between the Joshua Ranch project and Ritter Ranch open spaced dedicated to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority over seven years ago.

J.P. Eliopulos desires to donate approximately 350 acres over time. This first stage donation is for a 187-acre contiguous parcel located in the southeast corner of project. An wide established trail courses a long a ridgeline through this parcel. The trail is currently closed. The City of Palmdale had signed the trail in the past, but all of the improvements are deteriorating. To staff's knowledge this trail on the City's trail plan was voluntarily allowed on the property, not with a trail easement.

J.P. Eliopulos has generously agreed to set the Homeowners Association CC&Rs up with a permanent open space maintenance funding source for the DMCA. The funding is to cover minimum monthly ranger/park maintenance personnel visits and light maintenance as necessary. The agreed upon amount is $8,500 annually to be paid on January 15th.

The company has also agreed to provide an initial payment of $4,000 to cover the design and production of rules signs and other trail/park signage. This additional funding is important for an initial park opening.

J.P. Eliopulos hopes to donate additional open space lots from the project in calendar year 2008. At that time staff will request a commensurate increase in the annual maintenance funding, particularly if a substantial section of public trail bisects the parcel(s).