

SANTA CLARITA WATERSHED RECREATION AND CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

*A PUBLIC ENTITY OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA EXERCISING JOINT POWERS OF THE CITY OF SANTA
CLARITA AND THE SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY PURSUANT TO GOVERNMENT CODE
SECTION 6500 ET SEQ.*

MEMORANDUM

TO: Governing Board

FROM:  Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Hon. ASLA, Executive Officer

DATE: September 21, 2009

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item IX: Consideration of resolution authorizing the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority to restore an approximately 1400-foot-long section of lower Whitney Creek using in lieu mitigation funding and to enter into any agreements, if necessary, City of Santa Clarita.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority to restore an approximately 1400-foot-long section of lower Whitney Creek using in lieu mitigation funding and to enter into any agreements, if necessary.

Background: The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) has operated a year round restoration program for almost nine years as part of an In-Lieu Fee Mitigation Program established between the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC) and the Army Corps of Engineers. This program secures funding for a variety of mitigation projects, such as the one proposed in this report.

Los Angeles County Department of Public Works is one such entity which has provided funding for restoration and enhancement of riparian habitat in the south fork of the Santa Clara River watershed. The MRCA has already used some of these funds for a project in adjacent Elsmere Canyon. These funds would also be used to restore the subject portion of Whitney Creek.

The funding from Los Angeles County Department of Public Works had to be tied to a particular location within 60 days of receiving the funds. Elsmere and Whitney Canyons were the best available locations, where the MRCA and the other JPAs including the SMMC, had land control. The 60 day deadline required MRCA to submit a Habitat Mitigation and Monitoring Plan so as not to lose the funding. With no other options, Whitney Canyon was included as a second site in May 2009. Staff has been attempting to receive authorization for the project from the Governing Board. MRCA has an approved

Streambed Alteration Agreement with California Department of Fish and Game, and is in the process of filing a CEQA exemption for the Whitney Canyon portion.

Through decades of filling, the entirety of the northern bank of the subject channel has become degraded. Extensive fill has been pushed against the stream, narrowing the channel and the historic flood plain. Sections of an old broken up asphalt road parallels this northern bank of the altered channel.

The proposed plan is to remove fill, and create expanded flood plain habitat area. The proposed project would remove fill along the length of this section and create an over 1000-foot-long section of lower elevation flood terraces.

The goal, by removing all of this filled earth, is to create a maximum amount of ground surface close enough to the water table to maintain a self-sustaining riparian plant community. For the first two planting seasons, only tree species such as California Sycamore (*Platanus racemosa*), Cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*), and Coast Live Oak (*Quercus agrifolia*) would be planted. The first 20 horizontal feet of new channel will support a sycamore and cottonwood community, and a 30-foot-wide slope and upper bank edge would support a mixed oak woodland community. At least 200 trees would be installed. An effort will be made to establish willow cuttings where hydrology permits. Since it will be a virgin planting bed, the best strategy is to do the tree layer first and work on the reduction of the weed seed bank. This tree layer should create enhanced shade and soil conditions for understory development in the latter stages of the project.

Fortunately, because of the degraded site conditions, no riparian plants will be removed from the creek area where soil will be removed for stream channel widening (creation). A few upland shrubs may be transplanted if necessary. The removed soil will be spread out in the large flat, highly disturbed fields north of the creek. This adjacent area supports 100 percent non-native weed field lacking any topographic relief. A new dirt road will be established with superior utility.

Well water from Whitney Canyon and from the MRCA water meter at Elsmere Canyon will be used to hydrate the project.