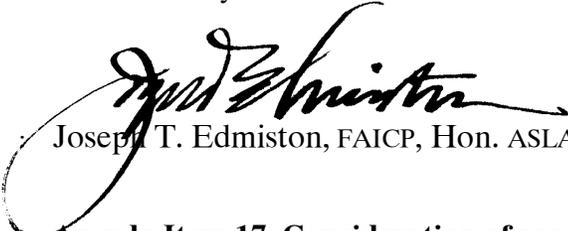


# Memorandum

To : The Conservancy  
The Advisory Committee

Date: January 23, 2012

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 17: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant application to the Wildlife Conservation Board and associated documentation for Verdugo Mountains (Mountain Oaks) property, City of Glendale.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing a grant application to the Wildlife Conservation Board and associated documentation for the Mountain Oaks acquisition in the City of Glendale portion of the Verdugo Mountains.

Background: The Mountain Oaks area is located along the northeastern perimeter of the Verdugo Mountains in the City of Glendale. The area is a small lot subdivision enveloped on all but one side by City-owned permanent open space. A subset of the area is the Whiting Woods community established in the early 1920s. The specific area has been on the Conservancy's adopted acquisition Workprogram since 2000 as part of the larger Verdugo Mountains Northeast Open Space project.

The Verdugo Mountains are a 14-square-mile core habitat area that is fully encompassed in the Los Angeles County designated Verdugo Mountains Significant Ecological Area (SEA). The mountain range remains ecologically well connected to the San Gabriel Mountains via a habitat linkage to the Big Tujunga Wash. The weathered granitic range supports a unique blend of San Gabriel and Santa Monica Mountains chaparral vegetation associations.

Staff surveyed the Mountain Oaks site earlier this month and observed exceptional vegetation biodiversity and variation within a moderate-sized area. The undulating, east and north-facing topography creates a broad range of microsites both xeric and mesic. In addition to its unique chaparral vegetation associations, the site supported some exceptionally tall stands of scrub oak woodland. This rich ecological area is fully integrated into the Verdugo Mountains core habitat area. Further development of the site would adversely affect the long-term ecological sustainability of the Verdugo Mountains ecosystem.

The site includes an old fire road system that does not detract substantially from the site's ecological value. The system of dirt road provides an excellent public access opportunity in and of itself and also to access the extensive trail system of the Verdugo Mountains. This recreation value is further complemented by the adjacent Crescenta Valley Park which has

parking, water and restrooms. A significant opportunity exists to daylight and restore a portion of the Verdugo Wash flood control channel that separates the park from Mountain Oaks. The local community seems to embrace the mountains and value public recreational access.

In summary the site would make a good candidate for funding from the Wildlife Conservation Board. Application to the Wildlife Conservation Board requires the staff preparation of a Land Acquisition Evaluation (LAE) to be submitted to the local staff of the California Department of Fish and Game. The completed evaluation is submitted to the Department's Regional Operations Committee. The proposed application would be for approximate 50 parcels totaling approximately 42.5 acres. This is currently a single ownership with a willing seller interested in a conservation sale. An aerial photo of both the subject area and its context is attached. If approved by the Conservancy, staff would proceed with the preparation of an LAE and most likely an appraisal through the Department General Services. Staff has not yet contacted CDFG staff for preliminary feedback. If additional owner's consent, the breadth of the LAE could be expand to a Conceptual Area Protection Plan (CAPP) which covers more than one ownership.