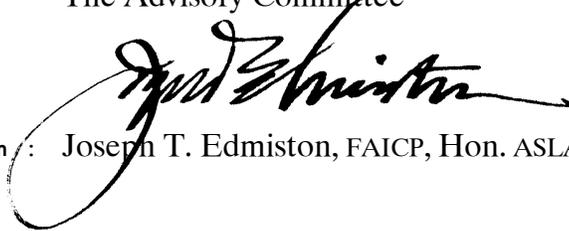


Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: July 22, 2013

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 13: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for interpretive and preservation improvements at the San Vicente Mountain Park, Los Angeles.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 84 funds in the amount of \$50,000 to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for interpretive and preservation improvements at the San Vicente Mountain Park, Los Angeles.

Legislative Authority: Sections 33204.2 and 33204.27 of the Public Resources Code.

Consideration: The application from the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority is for \$50,000 of Los Angeles River Watershed Proposition 84 funds.

I. BACKGROUND

Background: San Vicente Mountain Park is located in the heart of the Santa Monica Mountains above an unpaved portion of Mulholland Drive ("Dirt Mulholland"), 2.7 miles west of the 405 Freeway. The 10.2-acre park offers visitors stunning, 360-degree views, and is a gateway to a large network of hiking, mountain biking, and equestrian trails, and the nation's largest metropolitan wilderness area. The popular park, which was opened to the public in 1996, contains restrooms, accessible parking, shade structures, and picnic areas.

During the Cold War, from 1956-1968, San Vicente Mountain Park was the site of a Nike control and radar station, one of sixteen stations in the Los Angeles area built to protect the metropolis in the event of a Soviet nuclear attack. The site contained ground-based radar and computer systems to detect and track hostile aircraft, and to guide anti-aircraft missiles that could be launched from nearby Sepulveda Basin. The park was designed to retain some of the military atmosphere of the site, in order to enhance the public's understanding of its role in military and urban history. Features include fences, equipment, and structures--the most prominent of which is the original radar tower. From the tower, visitors can enjoy spectacular views of the Santa Monica Mountains, the San Fernando Valley and nearby Encino Reservoir, and the Los Angeles Basin. Many of the historic structures that remain are subject to rusting

and now require a protective coating of paint.

Key to the educational resource of the park is visitor-serving thematic signage that interpreted the historic and cultural significance of the site and the Cold War artifacts, and provided self-guided information about the ecology and natural resources of the site and the Santa Monica Mountains. A series of ten signs were originally installed almost twenty years ago. While some of the signage has held up remarkably well, many are faded and are in deteriorating condition, and no digital files exist because the custom artwork was produced manually.

Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) has submitted an application for grant funding to recreate the signs in a modern graphic format, replace all interpretive signage at the park, and paint and treat historic structures to ensure their continued longevity and function. The structures in need of preservation include the radar tower, catwalks and stairs, railings, various concrete remnants, and the restroom. Deteriorated and chipped paint will be removed from these elements, rust will be mitigated, and all surfaces treated with paint, sealant or other protective coating.

II. Analysis–Proposition 84 and the Common Ground Plan

Section 75050 of the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84), allocates funds to various entities “for the protection and restoration of rivers, lakes and streams, their watersheds and associated land, water, and other natural resources.”

Section 75050 (g)(2) of the Act specifically allocates funding to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy “for implementation of watershed protection activities throughout the watershed of the Upper Los Angeles River pursuant to Section 79508 of the Water Code.” The section of the Water Code referenced therein states that watershed protection activities in the Los Angeles River shall be consistent with the *San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers Watershed and Open Space Plan*.

A. The San Vicente Mountain Park Interpretive and Preservation Improvements Project Constitutes Watershed Protection Activities Within the Watershed of the Upper Los Angeles River, as Required by Section 75050(g)(2)

San Vicente Mountain Park lies within the Los Angeles River Watershed, and the property and its facilities are resources for public recreational use. As outlined in the application, the proposed project is consistent with Proposition 84's policy to promote the access to and

enjoyment of land and water resources. MRCA is requesting a grant to interpret, restore, preserve and protect the park's resources.¹

All elements of the project fit within the definitions of eligible activities (interpretation, preservation, protection, and restoration) because the funds will be spent to provide visitor serving amenities to communicate the value of the park's resources, allow the continued use and enjoyment of the property, and improve physical structures.

B. The San Vicente Mountain Park Interpretive and Preservation Improvements Project is Consistent with the *San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers Watershed and Open Space Plan* as Required by Section 79508 of the Water Code

The *San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers Watershed and Open Space Plan*,² also known as and hereinafter referred to as the "Common Ground" plan, was jointly developed by the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. The purpose of the plan is to "articulate a vision for the future of the San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers Watersheds" and "provide a framework for future watershed and open space planning." The plan outlines a holistic approach to watershed

¹Chapter 1, Section 75005 of Proposition 84 defines the following terms:

(i) "Interpretation" includes, but is not limited to, a visitor serving amenity that educates and communicates the significance and value of natural, historical, and cultural resources in a way that increases the understanding and enjoyment of these resources and that may utilize the expertise of a naturalist or other specialist skilled at educational interpretation.

(l) "Preservation" means rehabilitation, stabilization, restoration, development and reconstruction, or any combination of those activities.

(m) "Protection" means those actions necessary to prevent harm or damage to persons, property or natural resources or those actions necessary to allow the continued use and enjoyment of property or natural resources and includes acquisition, development, restoration, preservation and interpretation.

(n) "Restoration" means the improvement of physical structures or facilities. Restoration projects shall include the planning, monitoring and reporting necessary to ensure successful implementation of the project objectives.

²A copy of the Common Ground Plan can be accessed online at http://www.rmc.ca.gov/plans/common_ground.html

protection and development, organized by a set of Guiding Principles.³ These broad principles are designed to accommodate the varying priorities and needs of projects in the region.

To help guide decision making in watershed planning and project selection, the Common Ground plan includes a set of Project Evaluation Criteria (Appendix F), developed to help the agencies determine “regionally significant” park, trail, and restoration projects. The Evaluation Criteria identify a diverse set of values that a site might have, such as Public Recreation, Natural Resources, Environmental Education/Interpretation, Sustainability, *et cetera*. Within those values, a project receives a rating on a 1-4 scale based on the degree to which the project meets specified criteria.

The San Vicente Mountain Park Interpretive and Preservation Improvements Project scores highly when tested using the Common Ground Plan’s Project Evaluation Criteria. In the value criteria of Environmental Education/Interpretation, Public Recreation, Scenic and Aesthetic, and Historic/Cultural Restoration, the project achieves goals with the highest value:

- The project provides educational/interpretive displays that will significantly enhance appreciation and enjoyment of a resource.
- The project provides improvements to a park site that currently serves as visitor base in a regional or greater geographic area.
- The project provides aesthetic features to a park project that greatly enhance the park and visitor experience.
- The project provides a significant and unique aspect to public parkland (historical interest, cultural appreciation, educational interest).

Based upon its high scores in the selection criteria, as well as its consistency with the Guiding Principles, the San Vicente Mountain Park Interpretive and Preservation Improvements Project is consistent with the Common Ground Plan as required by Section 79508 of the Water Code.

III. Analysis - General Obligation Bond Law

The General Obligation Bond Law provides that bond funds may be used for the construction and acquisition of “capital assets.” Capital assets include major maintenance, reconstruction, demolition for purposes of reconstruction of facilities, and retrofitting work that is ordinarily done no more often than once every 5 to 15 years or expenditures that continue or enhance the useful life of the capital asset (Government code Section 16727 (a)). Capital assets also

³The Guiding Principles are outlined in Page 2 of the Executive Summary, or discussed with greater depth on Page 47 of the Plan.

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includes equipment with an expected useful life of two years or more. Section 16727 (a) also allows bond funds to be used for costs that are incidentally but directly related to construction including costs for planning, engineering and other design work.

This project is for the interpretation, preservation, protection and restoration of a capital asset, that is, a land and water resource in the Los Angeles River watershed. As such, it is a proper expenditure of bond funds. In addition, the activities that this grant will fund will continue and enhance the useful life of the facilities and on that basis as well qualify as capital assets for purposes of the General Obligation Bond Law.