

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: January 23, 2017

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 13: Consideration of resolution adopting Eastern Santa Monica Mountains Habitat Linkage Planning Map, City of Los Angeles.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution adopting an Eastern Santa Monica Mountains Habitat Linkage Planning Map (Version January 2017).

Legislative Authority: Public Resources Code Section 33211(c)

Background: The importance of the habitat linkage or wildlife corridor system that provides for animal movement between the 405 and 101 freeways leading to Griffith Park has long been recognized. The Conservancy and other agencies have acquired land and commented on development projects to protect distinct sections of the habitat linkage system for over 30 years. Tens of millions of public dollars have been invested in this effort. That effort to date has been successful enough to bring mountain lions into the area and to progressively increase the sightings of bobcats until the last few drought years. Many unprotected gaps remain. However, the bulk of the current protection effort is solely reactive to development threats because record high land values make it impossible to complete many fee simple acquisitions of parcels. Better planning tools are needed if the wildlife corridor system is to remain intact and be less subject to hit or miss protection objectives. Conservation easements, deed restrictions, and no fencing conditions are the only other means to permanently protect pieces of the habitat linkage system.

The City of Los Angeles Planning Department does not conduct independent research on habitat connectivity and relies on public agency and citizen comments for input on potential wildlife corridor impacts. The Department staff has long requested a comprehensive map of known and potential wildlife corridors in the eastern Santa Monica Mountains. The subject Eastern Santa Monica Mountains Habitat Linkage Planning Map proposed for adoption by the Conservancy provides that tool to the City Planning Department, developers, and homeowners.

The subject map covers the area between the 405 and 101 freeways comprehensively, with the exception of smaller peripheral habitat patches. Those patches can be mapped and integrated into the next adopted version of the Eastern Santa Monica Mountains Habitat Linkage Planning Map. The map delineations are not definitive in all areas. The mapping consists of

outlined habitat blocks and lines depicting both known, and potentially functional, wildlife corridors between them. Many habitat block boundaries and connections located on difficult to reach private lands were not ground-truthed. The map delineations are based on the best available Google Earth aerial and street view photography combined with accumulated staff knowledge. The map is meant to be instructive to clue all parties into potential constraints and opportunities both to protect habitat connections and land within all sized habitat blocks. On the ground conditions are fluid because fences can come and go and new construction occurs in almost every neighborhood. Available no-cost aerial photography is always a portion of a year behind conditions. However, most projects that potentially affect either habitat linkages or habitat blocks can now be well known to all concerned parties and most importantly the Planning Department staff. Each distinct habitat block polygon will be sequentially numbered to establish baseline nomenclature for easy reference to all parties. More precise resolution and mapped lines can be available if LARIAC aerial photography data is purchased by the City of Los Angeles.

The attached Resolution calls for the map to be updated and re-adopted no less than annually. It is impossible to provide a perfect map and hence this mapping effort is meant to be an iterative process that includes input from all available sources.

The PDF map file attached to this staff report item is based on and shown on Google Earth photography dated October 2016. The best available Google Earth street view data was October 2015. The line data will in many places be skewed when applied to earlier photography. To really use the line data for fine analysis, users will need to import a KMZ file to use within the Google Earth program and the most recent aerial photography. Large maps can also be plotted from the PDF. The line data is in a GIS shape file format used by all public agencies.

The key factor is that now there is a baseline map adopted by the most pertinent State planning agency available to guide impact analysis by the City and to give landowners (existing and prospective) a heads up about sensitive wildlife corridor areas and the location of habitat blocks and patches that are all integral to a functional habitat linkage system.

Staff intends for the next version of the map to include all private property between the 101 freeway and Griffith Park and between the 405 freeway and Topanga State Park. All of that area is still within the City of Los Angeles boundary.