

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: January 22, 2018

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 15: Consideration of resolution authorizing a local assistance grant to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for the acquisition an approximately 111-acre Big Tujunga Canyon property along Big Tujunga Canyon Road, City of Los Angeles.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy authorize a local assistance grant of \$3,500,000 from State budget item 3810-101-0001 to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for the acquisition of an approximately 111-acre Big Tujunga Canyon property along Big Tujunga Canyon Road in the City of Los Angeles.

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

State Budget –3810-101-0001—For local assistance, Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy..... 3,500,000

Schedule: (1) 2945-Local Assistance Grants..... 3,500,000

Provisions: 1. The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy may encumber or expend funds for either capital outlay or local assistance grants for the acquisition of the Big Tujunga Wash until June 30, 2020. The Conservancy shall not encumber funds for any grant not approved by the office of the Attorney General.

Background: Assemblymember Raul Bocanegra was instrumental in the inclusion of \$3.5 million dollars of general fund appropriation in the 2017-17 State budget (3810-101-0001) for local assistance to Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. The impetus for the funding was to acquire an approximately 111-acre ownership in Big Tujunga Canyon adjacent to, and a gateway to, the Angeles National Forest.

The subject 111-acres adjacent to the Angeles National Forest in Big Tujunga Canyon were subject to an approximately one hundred home subdivision in 2013. The applicants worked with the local Assembly office to move in the direction of public acquisition. The property is bordered on all sides (and virtually surrounded) by public open space. The property occupies the prime transitional area between the broad lower Big Tujunga Wash and the more narrow wash section entering the Angeles National Forest. The Rim of the Valley Trail crosses the

property in every potential alignment. Much of the property is unusually flat with a system of dirt roads that provide immediate recreation and access opportunities. The property lies just beyond the developed fringes of the San Fernando Valley but looks and feels like it is deep into the National Forest. Virtually no other property in the Rim of the Valley Corridor can provide the recreation access, viewshed, watershed, and ecological benefits of the subject ownership.

The Big Tujunga Wash is a Los Angeles County Significant Ecological area and perhaps the most ecologically diverse geographic area in the County. The portion of the wash conterminous with the 111 acres supports clear perennial stream flow with native fish populations. The USGS blueline stream tributary on the site supports exceptionally robust alluvial fan scrub vegetation. Other vegetation types include coast live oak woodland, coastal sage scrub, and chaparral.

The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) has the property under contract based the valuation in a State-approved appraisal. The Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) staff has agreed to take an \$800,000 grant proposal to its board at their February 2018 meeting. The Arroyo and Foothills Conservancy were successful in getting a Conceptual Area Protection Plan that includes the subject 111 acres approved by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to make the project eligible for WCB funding.

The MRCA Governing Board has adopted a resolution requesting the subject Local Assistance Grant and authorizing entering into a grant agreement with the Conservancy to accept such funds from the Conservancy or State. The proposed action would authorize a Local Assistance grant for the full \$3,500,000 to the MRCA to acquire the whole 111 acres comprised of twelve legal parcels.

The expected closing date is before March 30, 2018. The MRCA would own and manage the land.