

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: July 9, 2007

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

Subject: **Agenda Item 11(c)(2): Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 84 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for Project Planning and Design services in the upper Los Angeles River watershed and coastal watersheds of the Santa Monica Bay.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 84 funds in an amount not to exceed \$850,000 to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for Project Planning and Design services in the upper Los Angeles River watershed and coastal watersheds of the Santa Monica Bay.

Legislative Authority: Sections 33204(c) of the Public Resources Code

Background: The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) has submitted the attached application for a Project Planning and Design grant. The application outlines an emphasis on both the need to use the funding to leverage other funding sources and to plan, design, and implement projects that maximize the protection and improvement of resources in specific geographic areas on the attached "Potential Projects List."

The attached project list has been specifically prepared to cover a broad range of project areas in the eligible portions of the Conservancy's jurisdiction. The list reflects a combination of the Conservancy's and MRCA's Workprograms. Most importantly the project list also includes virtually every possible project area in portions of the Conservancy's jurisdiction that were expanded with the passage of Proposition 50 and continued forth with Proposition 84. Those areas were not addressed when the Conservancy adopted its core Workprogram in 2000.

To further assure that adequate focus is given to these post-Proposition 50 passage areas (the floors of the San Fernando and La Crescenta valleys and the broad areas in the environs of the Los Angeles River and Arroyo Seco as far south as the northernmost extent of the City of Vernon) the application includes a special component to develop a primary set of upper Los Angeles River watershed projects for the Conservancy's consideration following an extensive public process. The MRCA staff will work with the Conservancy staff to provide ample opportunity for the public to express its project preferences throughout the upper watershed (north of the City of Vernon). This set of priority projects can then be added to the Conservancy Workprogram. This major project development process accounts for the

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disproportionate amount of funding for the Los Angeles River watershed (\$575,000) versus the coastal watersheds of the Santa Monica Bay (\$275,000).

Proposition 84 provides funding to the Conservancy in two set amounts for the upper Los Angeles River watershed and the coastal watersheds of the Santa Monica Bay. To maximize the protection and improvement of land and water resources with these two set amounts of funding, it is to the Conservancy's advantage to combine its resources with other agencies on as many capital outlay projects as possible. Each additional non-Conservancy funding source for a project significantly reduces capital outlay requirements which frees up funds to do more projects elsewhere. The most dramatic example is when Conservancy funds can be pooled with State funds from the Wildlife Conservation Board or the State Coastal Conservancy.

The flip side of this favorable equation of involving other funding sources is that multiple funding sources create significantly more complex project dynamics. More involved projects require substantially more staff time, higher level staff time, and involve more public participation and outreach to complete.

For example, often when Los Angeles County Proposition A Excess funds are used by the MRCA for an acquisition project, or project match, there is voluminous paperwork required, legal work involved, and no staff time funding included to develop or implement the project. Another example of services the MRCA provides with its Project Planning and Design grants deals with the panoply of work and expenses (title reports) associated with investigating and accepting land donations. Other examples include a broad based program to acquire tax defaulted properties in Los Angeles County. Virtually every tax defaulted Chapter 8 Agreement completed by the MRCA involves several funding sources. The MRCA staff also uses the subject funding to secure and process land and trail easement dedications through environmental review and development entitlement processes in two counties and numerous cities, including from Coastal Development Permits. The MRCA reports back to the Conservancy quarterly on each Project Planning and Design grant.

In short, a relatively small investment in staff time can result in a demonstrably larger reduction in capital outlay to complete projects on the Conservancy's Workprogram as amended through the Proposition 84 expenditure process. The versatility and expertise of the MRCA makes that agency the optimal cooperative planning and project implementation partner for the Conservancy. The MRCA is currently providing project planning and design (PPD) work in the Santa Clara River watershed (not Proposition 50 or 84 eligible) with a Proposition 40 PPD grant from the Conservancy. The MRCA is also currently operating on a Proposition 50 PPD grant from Conservancy.