



MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

FROM:  Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Hon. ASLA, Executive Officer

DATE: August 6, 2008

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item VIII: Consideration of resolution authorizing 1) entering into a Project Agreement with the Los Angeles County Regional Park and Open Space District to acquire and improve approximately 126 acres in the Lopez Canyon watershed (APNs 2581-012-005, 007, 008, 009, 010, and 011; 2581-013-006, 008, 009, and 010); 2) expenditure of Proposition A Excess Funds for said parcels and related improvements; and 3) authorizing the acquisition of said parcels, unincorporated Los Angeles County.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing 1) entering into a Project Agreement with the Los Angeles County Regional Park and Open Space District to acquire and improve approximately 126 acres in the Lopez Canyon watershed (APNs 2581-012-005, 007, 008, 009, 010, and 011; 2581-013-006, 008, 009, and 010); 2) expenditure of Proposition A Excess Funds for said parcels and related improvements; and 3) authorizing the acquisition of said parcels, unincorporated Los Angeles County.

Background: The subject ownership of ten lots would join three unconnected sections of the Angeles National Forest along the watershed divide between Lopez and Kagel Canyons. The 125-acre property includes numerous existing trails and offers the best alignments for the Rim of the Valley Trail between Pacoima and Kagel canyons. The site provides key, direct access into the national forest via the Kagel Canyon Truck Trail to the northeast, Indian Canyon Lateral to the south, and the Pacoima Motorway to the southwest.

The final alignment of the Rim of the Valley Trail on both the east and west sides of the subject property will take time, work, and funding to nail down. Most importantly the subject property offers a major existing trail hub that greatly increases the options for an optimally aligned trail cutting across Pacoima, Lopez, and Kagel canyons. From Kagel Canyon eastward, the ROV trail will cross Little Tujunga Wash and then Big Tujunga Wash cutting in and out of national forest

lands. This acquisition is important to create some fixed sections of the Rim of the Valley Trail in an ignored, under-planned area on which to add additional trail sections via trail staging area.

The property can be reached via either Kagel or Lopez Canyon roads. These are two lane roads that are maintained by the County with good connectivity to the 210-118 Freeway interchange area. The site has a three bedroom home in good condition and numerous out buildings mostly related to equestrian uses over decades. The property includes numerous flat graded areas with connecting dirt trails and roads. This system on one had will allow for a broad range of public access and use improvements. For example, virtually all the elements are fully in place for a substantial equestrian staging area. The site historically had private horseback riding vendors providing public rides into the national forest and surrounding areas. The site has well water and a septic system.

The downside of the site's history of uses is that funding will be needed to remove debris, to erect barrier fencing to prevent future dumping, to correct erosion problems, and reestablish native plant cover. The general area comes with historic dumping issues that hopefully will be improved by MRCA presence in cooperation with Los Angeles County and the forest service that does not have resident ranger in the area.

Fortunately the 5th Supervisorial District has agreed to fund both the acquisition and these necessary site protection and recreational improvements with an additional \$500,000 above the purchase price. All funding would be from Proposition A from the 5th District accounts. Some of that amount would be from Specified Excess Funds assigned by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy to the Mountain Recreation and Conservation Authority. Much of the property is not pristine, but on balance provides a unique opportunity to establish a premier recreational staging area. Wise application of this improvement funding and a permanent MRCA staff residence should reduce maintenance costs. Discussions with the forest service also showed their interest in having an onsite employee, potentially in a trailer.

Staff's intent is to make the site usable for equestrians, bikers and hikers as quickly as possible. Because so much of the 125 acres borders forest service land, staff plans to seek input from that federal agency. The forest supervisor has been apprised of the pending acquisition. The three southwesternmost parcels contain a disturbed stream system that is ripe for the application of in lieu mitigation fees to restore in a vibrant riparian system. Once restored it should support small amounts of year-round surface water.

The site provides sensational views of the San Fernando Valley and its surrounding mountain systems. Apparently, the nighttime city lights are also quite striking. Because of the lack of neighbors, the site provides a wilderness experience a few minutes from the freeway system. The disturbed areas also provide opportunities to establish youth

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campsites and allow for special events with no disturbance of native vegetation coupled with existing clearance for fire safety. Many oak trees should be planted on the property.

Apparently the current Alonzo Family ownership homesteaded the property. They contacted staff in 2003 because they preferred for the property to remain undeveloped. They reinitiated that contact last fall. Staff has provided a written offer. To protect the house, staff has a month to month lease agreement for an MRCA employee to live in the house. The Alonzo's need to close escrow by October 15, 2008 for tax savings purposes. The only structures that require brush clearance on the property are the onsite house and out buildings.