



## MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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### MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

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

DATE: October 3, 2007

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item VIII: Consideration of resolution authorizing a contract for services and memorandum of understanding between Jewish Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Los Angeles and the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for environmental science camp curriculum and naturalist services at Big Mountains Camp, Camp Max Straus, Glendale.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing a contract for services and memorandum of understanding between Jewish Big Brothers, Big Sisters (JBBBS) of Los Angeles and the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for environmental science camp curriculum and naturalist services at Big Mountains Camp, Camp Max Straus, Glendale.

Background: The proposed Big Mountain Camp is a collaborative effort between Jewish Big Brothers Big Sisters and Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) to promote environmental education in formal and informal settings. Big Mountain will take place at Camp Max Straus in the Verdugo Hills, owned and operated by JBBBS and implemented in partnership with the MRCA. The program is designed to serve Los Angeles County public and private schools, such as Title 1 Schools, identified as serving children that may not be otherwise privileged to this type of experience. The environmental learning opportunities are integrated into core statewide educational curriculum and standards. The programming is designed to accomplish several goals:

- Improve student understanding and comprehension of all grade specific subject state standards, with a focus on science.
- Create and nourish deep connections between each student and the natural world.
- Raise awareness about and present alternatives to the often destructive connection between people and our natural environment.

- Enable students to make responsible and educated decisions as to how they interact with the world around us.
- Participants' interpersonal skills, leadership skills, and self-esteem grow as a natural result of teamwork and an active relationship with the outdoors.
- Participants gain a sense of accomplishment and mission through their active participation in a sustainable project.
- Convey the importance of environmental education as part of a child's overall development, as aligned with Assembly Bill 1548 and the state's Environmental Education Initiative

Jewish Big Brothers Big Sisters currently operates Camp Max Straus for underserved children during the summer and two weekend mentoring programs, Arts Buddies and Sports Buddies, during weekends throughout the school year. Camp Max Straus has been in operation since 1938. Big Mountain will increase the utilization of Camp Max Straus on weekdays during the school year and has the potential to increase the number of children served at the camp by a significant amount. Camp Max Straus provides a wilderness setting of 112 acres, nestled in close freeway proximity in the Verdugo Hills. It has 10 sleeping cabins, each with a current capacity of 12 people. In addition, it has a number of high quality indoor and outdoor facilities for programs and staff housing. For programming needs, the camp has office and storage space to accommodate a sufficient number of staff.

Big Mountain will initially focus on the sixth grade level, utilizing a number of state-aligned educational modules from the Temescal Gateway Park site that can be adapted for Camp Max Straus for this grade level. Other modules will be developed that are also integrated into state education curriculum and standards.

Big Mountain will facilitate a pilot program period in the fall of 2007, seeking approximately four elementary or middle schools to participate. The duration for the initial Big Mountain sessions will be three days, from Tuesday through Thursday, and each will involve approximately 45 students. The pilot program period will conclude with an evaluation and feedback from all audiences involved. During the pilot period, there is an option to host an Open House event at Camp Max Straus as a way to increase community awareness and confidence in the program. This pilot phase will be funded by JBBBS from a private donation.

The next phase in Big Mountain will be from January 2008 – May 2008, and will seek to include at least ten weeks of programming. During this period in 2008, JBBBS and MRCA will work with LAUSD and Glendale USD to determine schools to involve the following school years. In addition, JBBBS and MRCA will seek to maximize relationships with Jewish and other targeted educational communities.

In future phases, Big Mountain will have the capability to expand the number of children served each week as well as different grade levels. JBBBS will be the key fundraiser for the Big Mountains Project and understands that MRCA naturalists and other camp staff can participate only as funding allows. A separate contract for services will be employed to address the terms and conditions of payment for these services.

JBBBS and the MRCA will operate Big Mountain as a joint venture. JBBBS and MRCA will work with the Glendale and Los Angeles school districts to determine schools to involve in the program. The MRCA will develop curriculum in valuable consultation with JBBBS. The two organizations will identify naturalists, cabin and other staff needed for the program and will cooperatively recruit and train new staff to fill any vacancies.

In the latter half of 2008, JBBBS and MRCA will evaluate Big Mountain and the structure of their joint venture to make any needed adjustments before proceeding in 2009. All curriculum developed in this partnership will become property of both organizations.