

DATE: March 30, 2022

TO: WCA Governing Board

FROM: Jane Tsong, Project Manager

THROUGH: Mark Stanley, Executive Officer

SUBJECT: Item 26: Consideration of a resolution to apply for a grant from the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy for preacquisition activities for San Gabriel Mountains open space lands.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Watershed Conservation Authority (WCA) Governing Board approve a resolution to apply for and accept a Very Small Grant from the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy for preacquisition activities for San Gabriel Mountains open space lands.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: WCA will apply for a Very Small Grant from Rivers and Mountains Conservancy to conduct preacquisition activities for conservation opportunities on foothills lands that were included in San Gabriel Mountains and Foothills Open Space Acquisition Master Plan including but not limited to the Glendora Community Conservancy (GCC) properties (Easley, Colby, and Bluebird), Robert's Canyon, and the San Gabriel River floodplain property. Additionally, the grant will allow WCA to work with partners to forward acquisition of inholdings, lands that are contiguous with existing WCA holdings, or other lands whose ecosystem services and public benefit have been demonstrated in the San Gabriel Mountains and Foothills Open Space Acquisition Master Plan.

BACKGROUND: Several small grants and funding requests paid for preliminary due diligence for GCC and Roberts Canyon (RMC15102) and Azusa Floodplain (RMC17019). Changing circumstances in the last year have renewed the current property owners' interest in considering these transfers, but also motivate WCA to reassess the obligations and costs of maintaining these conservation lands in light of new information and opportunities. Additionally, the request will allow WCA to pursue conservation outcomes for several parcels shown to have particular potential for ecosystem and public benefit in the San Gabriel Mountains and Foothills Open Space Acquisition Master Plan (RMC17019) analysis.

The WCA Board has approved acceptance of Easley (January 17, 2019) and Colby (March 21 2019) properties. However, due to changes in the GCC's intentions, these transfers did not occur. Currently the GCC board is again actively seeking to transfer the properties to a conservation minded entity. Due to the close proximity of GCC lands with WCA's conservation lands in Azusa, and WCA's long history of partnership with GCC, WCA is a logical choice. However, Colby and Bluebird continue to require clarification of details as well partnership building for stewardship and maintenance. Management of Colby involves balancing public access with protection of a conservation status species. Due diligence on the Bluebird property will require additional investigation and possibly outside expertise. Tasks anticipated will include but not be limited to:

- Verify information regarding rights, obligations, easements including conservation easements
- Update Preliminary title reports

- Examine deed restrictions
- Seeking funding and partnerships for invasive species removal, trail maintenance, patrolling, monitoring of endangered species
- Seek to understand requirements regarding stewardship, programming, maintenance, patrolling, and develop agreements with partners
- Prepare transfer paperwork

Previously, under RMC15102, WCA sought to negotiate an arrangement for the transfer of Roberts Canyon parcels to WCA. Given the liability issues and risk of fire, land failure, and informal encampments in the nearby river, WCA was not motivated to consider ownership. Currently, however, the property owner is offering an endowment to cover the costs of ownership. WCA will ask the current property owner to contribute to funding WCA's preacquisition staff time. However, the requested funding would allow WCA to work out details of a favorable agreement in case that additional amount is not forthcoming.

Negotiation for the San Gabriel River Floodplain Property was authorized by the WCA Board (January 21, 2021). The Board also authorized application to two grants (June 20, 2019 to RMC Prop 68 and September 16 2021 to Measure A). The project scored well in Prop 68. County Measure A funds have been granted. Though Measure A allows for some preacquisition expenses (\$10K), it will only cover a small fraction of preacquisition. Preacquisition funds (\$55K) are included in RMC Prop 68, however, WCA has still not yet been notified of receiving that grant. The current grant request for preacquisition funding is necessary because acquisition activities are time sensitive. If the current request is granted, WCA will seek to wholly apply Measure A and RMC Prop 68 funds (if granted in the future) to the land cost.

RELATED GRANTS

San Gabriel Mountains and Foothills Open Space Acquisition Master Plan (RMC17019) resulted in prioritization criteria by which to evaluate foothills conservation lands for acquisition. The plan compiled precedents, data, and expert interviews, and commissioned a suite of science-based studies from multiple disciplines that clarify ways in which parcels identified as priorities may contribute to the regional benefits such as flood control, increasing local water supply, ecosystem services, climate change and urban heat island mitigation, and access to passive recreation. The plan includes analysis of compatible public access opportunities, and sample budgets for acquisition and maintenance of lands acquired.

RMC17019 included limited funds for preacquisition activities for a number of important parcels identified at the outset. These included the GCC parcels as well as Rainbow Ranch. Additionally, it mentioned Robert's Canyon, though at that time preacquisition for that parcel was funded separately.

A Very Small RMC grant (RMC21014) allows WCA staff to extend the work of the San Gabriel Mountains Foothills Open Space Acquisition Master Plan (RMC17019). This work will fund WCA's work to simplify and tailor the plan's content for public use and for distribution online in the form of briefs, presentations, as well as a full version with complete documentation including all consultant work and references, and to present the plan to stakeholders as a next step in cultivating collaborative partnerships for future acquisitions. This includes foothills municipalities, city councils, conservancies, county planning staff, environmental NGOs, SGVCOG, indigenous entities; and to give feedback on policy and legislative language as opportunities arise. This grant mentions tracking developments with priority parcels, however, cannot adequately fund preacquisition activities.

FISCAL INFORMATION: The requested funding (\$50,000) will be reflected in WCA's budget for Fiscal Year 2021/2022.

March 30, 2022 – Item 26

RESOLUTION 2022-22

**RESOLUTION OF THE WATERSHED CONSERVATION AUTHORITY TO
APPLY FOR A GRANT FROM THE RIVERS AND MOUNTAINS
CONSERVANCY FOR PREACQUISITION ACTIVITIES FOR SAN GABRIEL
MOUNTAINS OPEN SPACE LANDS.**

WHEREAS, the Watershed Conservation Authority (WCA) has been established to facilitate joint projects between the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy and Los Angeles County Flood Control District; and

WHEREAS, The Watershed Conservation Authority has been established to focus on projects which will provide open space, habitat restoration, and watershed improvement projects in both the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers watershed; and

WHEREAS, this action approves application for a grant from the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy for preacquisition activities for San Gabriel Mountains open space lands; and

WHEREAS, this action is exempt from the environmental impact report requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Therefore be it resolved that the WCA hereby:

1. **FINDS** that this action is consistent with the purposes and objectives of the WCA.
2. **FINDS** that the actions contemplated by this resolution are exempt from the environmental impact report requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act.
3. **ADOPTS** the staff report dated March 30, 2022.
4. **APPROVES** application for a grant from the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy for preacquisition activities for San Gabriel Mountains open space lands.

~ End of Resolution ~

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Motion: _____ Second: _____

Ayes: _____ Nays: _____ Abstentions: _____

Passed and Adopted by the Board of the

Resolution 2022-22

WATERSHED CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

On March 30, 2022

Herlinda Chico
Governing Board Chair

ATTEST: _____
Elizabeth St. John
Deputy Attorney General