

DATE: March 26, 2018

TO: RMC Governing Board

FROM: Mark Stanley, Executive Officer

SUBJECT: Item 11: Consideration of a resolution approving a grant extension to the Watershed Conservation Authority for the Vasquez Property Acquisition (RMC16001).

PROGRAM AREA: Mountains and Foothills

PROJECT TYPE: Acquisition

JURISDICTION: County of Los Angeles First District

PROJECT MANAGER: Mark Stanley

RECOMMENDATION: That the RMC approve a grant extension to the Watershed Conservation Authority (WCA) for the Vasquez Property Acquisition project through February 28, 2020 (RMC16001).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The WCA acquired ±39.79 acres of undeveloped open space located in the San Gabriel Mountain foothills above the City of Azusa within unincorporated Los Angeles County in December 2016, and are engaged in site planning and the development of a restoration and stewardship plan. This open space acquisition preserves one of the last remaining private holdings along the foothill interface between the San Gabriel Valley and the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument for watershed restoration, community-driven stewardship, and suitable low-impact recreation. Additional site planning and management will protect significant natural and scenic resources, and help to preserve critical landscape connections to close-by conservation lands, including the River Wilderness Park. Exhibit A: Vicinity Maps.

BACKGROUND: As part of the deliverable for this grant, the WCA acquired the Former Vasquez property in December 2016 from the San Gabriel Mountains Regional Conservancy (SGMRC), a private not-for-profit conservation organization, focused on the acquisition and watershed restoration of the subject property for over a decade.

In late 2015, SGMRC, under threat of foreclosure on their privately held loan with the prior property owner, contacted RMC and WCA staff and offered the transfer of the property to the WCA for watershed and open space protection in the amount equal to the outstanding balance on their outstanding loan. The land was acquired for \$600,000 with the remaining \$120,000 budgeted to complete pre-planning activities and collaborate with SGMRC on development of a Stewardship Program. This to be completed planning work is consistent and aligned with the WCA's efforts in developing the larger vision through the San Gabriel Foothills Acquisition Master Plan and Study project scheduled for completion in 2020.

The site planning efforts and stewardship agreement will explore opportunities to enhance and/or restore habitat for coastal sage scrub, chaparral and Walnut woodlands, as well as, opportunities for public passive recreational use and access improvements. This work would benefit the watershed by restoring habitat that was burned and severely denuded of vegetation in the 2014

Colby fire. Biological reconnaissance completed prior to the wildfire indicated that over 75% of the property was formally dominated by these three habitat types. Other notable features of the site include an abandoned fluorite mine with possible cultural and interpretive value, and a vista point overlooking the San Gabriel Valley.

Potential benefits to come from planning and stewardship program may include: conservation and restoration of habitat areas, educational programing, community stewardship, and trail connections along the foothills. WCA is currently managing the natural resource as open space. The condition of the sites sensitive plant and wildlife species may provide an opportunity for future mitigation and in-lieu fee programs, as well as, enhance watershed through habitat and natural system enhancements to the land.

To complete the planning and stewardship portion of the grant, the WCA is requesting to extend the Vasquez Property Acquisition project period to February 28, 2020. (see Exhibit B Extension Request and Exhibit C Updated Timeline.



Site Photo: View looking down and over the San Gabriel Valley from highest point along the northernmost property line.

FISCAL INFORMATION: No fiscal impact.

This grant was funded by the RMC Grant Program under the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84). This action will authorize grant funds to the Watershed Conservation Authority (WCA) in the amount of \$720,000 for acquisition of real property within the foothills above Azusa, Assessor Parcel No. 8684-024-036 and related initial planning for restoration and potential public access (RMC16001).

Funding for this project was allocated from the following Proposition 84 allocations, under statute: 75050. The sum of nine hundred twenty eight million dollars (\$928,000,000) shall be available for the protection and restoration of rivers, lakes and streams, their watersheds and associated land, water, and other natural resources in accordance with the following schedule:... (g) The sum of seventy two million dollars (\$72,000,000) shall be available for projects within the watersheds of the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers according to the following schedule:

(1) \$36,000,000 to the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy pursuant to Division 22.8 (commencing with Section 32600).....

75060. The sum of five hundred forty million dollars (\$540,000,000) shall be available for the protection of beaches, bays and coastal waters and watersheds, including projects to prevent contamination and degradation of coastal waters and watersheds, projects to protect and restore the natural habitat values of coastal waters and lands, and projects and expenditures to promote access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources of the state, in accordance with the following schedule:.... (3) To the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy.....\$15,000,000.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY AND RMC ADOPTED POLICIES/AUTHORITIES: The Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC) statute provides in part that:

Section 32602: There is in the Resources Agency, the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, which is created as a state agency for the following purposes:

- (a) To acquire and manage public lands within the Lower Los Angeles River and San Gabriel River watersheds, and to provide open-space, low-impact recreational and educational uses, water conservation, watershed improvement, wildlife and habitat restoration and protection, and watershed improvement within the territory.
- (b) To preserve the San Gabriel River and the Lower Los Angeles River consistent with existing and adopted river and flood control projects for the protection of life and property.
- (c) To acquire open-space lands within the territory of the conservancy.

Section 32604: The conservancy shall do all of the following:

- (a) Establish policies and priorities for the conservancy regarding the San Gabriel River and the Lower Los Angeles River, and their watersheds, and conduct any necessary planning activities, in accordance with the purposes set forth in Section 32602.
- (b) Approve conservancy funded projects that advance the policies and priorities set forth in Section 32602.
- (d) To provide for the public's enjoyment and enhancement of recreational and educational experiences on public lands in the San Gabriel Watershed and Lower Los Angeles River, and the San Gabriel Mountains in a manner consistent with the protection of lands and resources in those watersheds.

Section 32614: The conservancy may do all of the following:

- (b) Enter into contracts with any public agency, private entity, or person necessary for the proper discharge of the conservancy's duties, and enter into a joint powers agreement with a public agency, in furtherance of the purposes set forth in Section 32602.
- (e) Enter into any other agreement with any public agency, private entity, or person necessary for the proper discharge of the conservancy's duties for the purposes set forth in Section 32602.
- (f) Recruit and coordinate volunteers and experts to conduct interpretive and recreational programs and assist with construction projects and the maintenance of parkway facilities.

Further, Section 32614 provides that: The conservancy may do all of the following:

- (g) Undertake, within the territory, site improvement projects, regulate public access, and revegetate and otherwise rehabilitate degraded areas, in consultation with any other public agency with appropriate jurisdiction and expertise, in accordance with the purposes set forth in Section 32602.

The conservancy may also, within the territory, upgrade deteriorating facilities and construct new facilities as needed for outdoor recreation, nature appreciation and interpretation, and natural resources projection. The conservancy may undertake those projects by itself or in conjunction with another local agency; however, the conservancy shall provide overall coordination of those projects by setting priorities for the projects and by ensuring a uniform approach to projects. The conservancy may undertake those projects with prior notification to the legislative body of the local agency that has jurisdiction in the area in which the conservancy proposes to undertake that activity.

Section 32614.5:

- (a) The conservancy may award grants to local public agencies, state agencies, federal agencies, and nonprofit organizations for the purposes of this division.
- (b) Grants to nonprofit organizations for the acquisition of real property or interests in real property shall be subject to all of the following conditions:
 - (1) The purchase price of any interest in land acquired by the nonprofit organization may not exceed fair market value as established by an appraisal approved by the conservancy.
 - (2) The conservancy approves the terms under which the interest in land is acquired.
 - (3) The interest in land acquired pursuant to a grant from the conservancy may not be used as security for any debt incurred by the nonprofit organization unless the conservancy approves the transaction.
 - (4) The transfer of land acquired pursuant to a grant shall be subject to the approval of the conservancy and the execution of an agreement between the conservancy and the transferee sufficient to protect the interests of the state.
 - (5) The state shall have a right of entry and power of termination in and over all interests in real property acquired with state funds, which may be exercised if any essential term or condition of the grant is violated.
 - (6) If the existence of the nonprofit organization is terminated for any reason, title to all interest in real property acquired with state funds shall immediately vest in the state, except that, prior to that termination, another public agency or nonprofit organization may receive title to all or a portion of that interest in real property, by recording its acceptance of title, together with the conservancy's approval, in writing.
- (c) Any deed or other instrument of conveyance whereby real property is acquired by a nonprofit organization pursuant to this section shall be recorded and shall set forth the executor interest or right of entry on the part of the state.

RMC Resolution 2016-18 approved \$720,000 to fund acquisition of real property and initial site planning within the foothills above Azusa, Assessor Parcel No. 8684-024-036.

RMC Resolution 2012-01 allowed staff to re-evaluate projects already received and projects must meet or exceed the RMC's criteria and guiding principles and funding must be identified before a recommendation is presented to the RMC Governing Board for approval. Further, staff recommends funding acquisition of real property within the foothills above Azusa, Assessor Parcel No. 8684-024-036, since it exceeds the RMC's guiding principles based on its goals, objectives, timeline, and ability to complete the project.

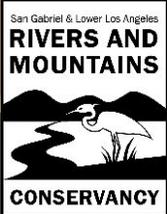
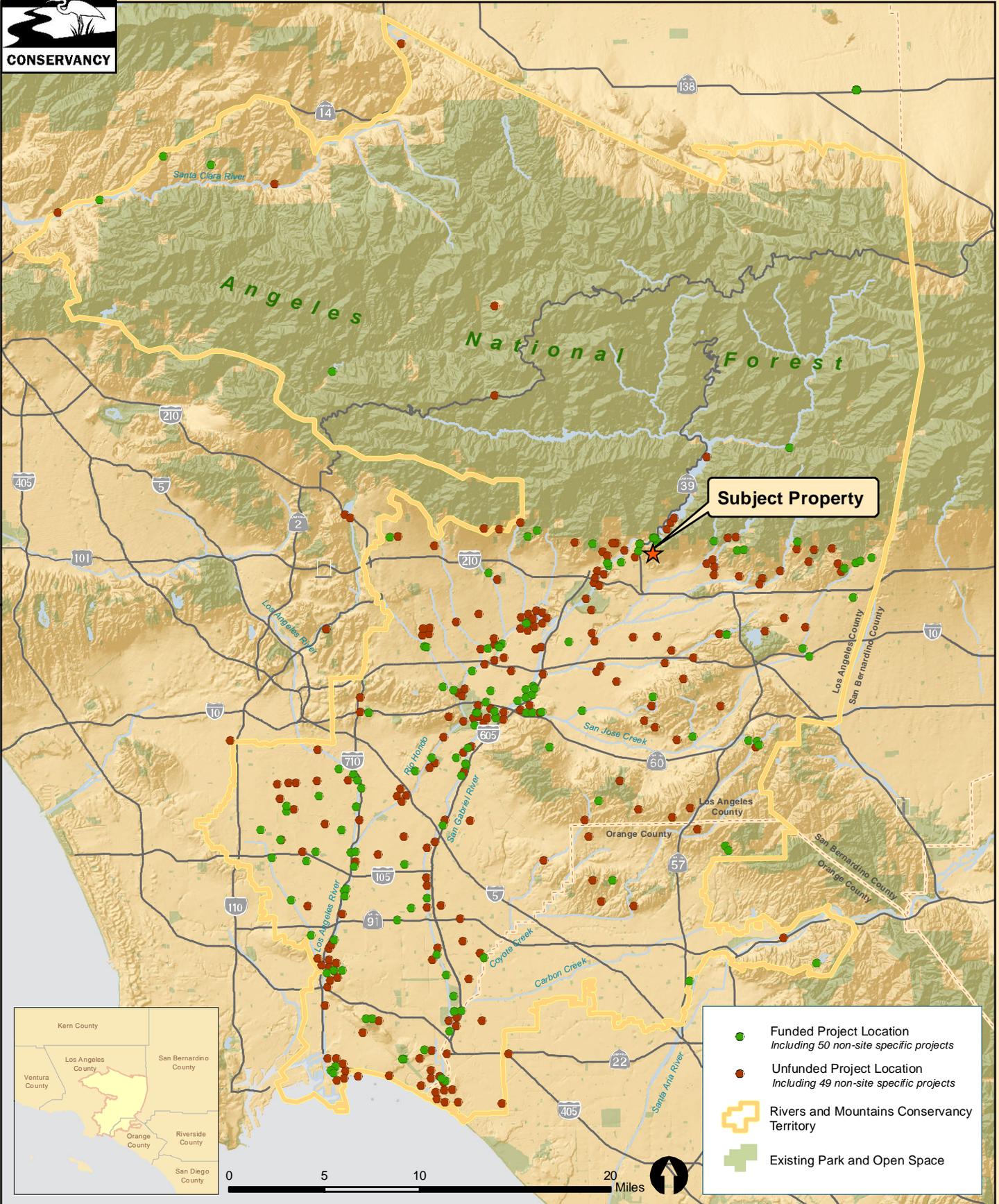


Exhibit A1 Territory Location Map

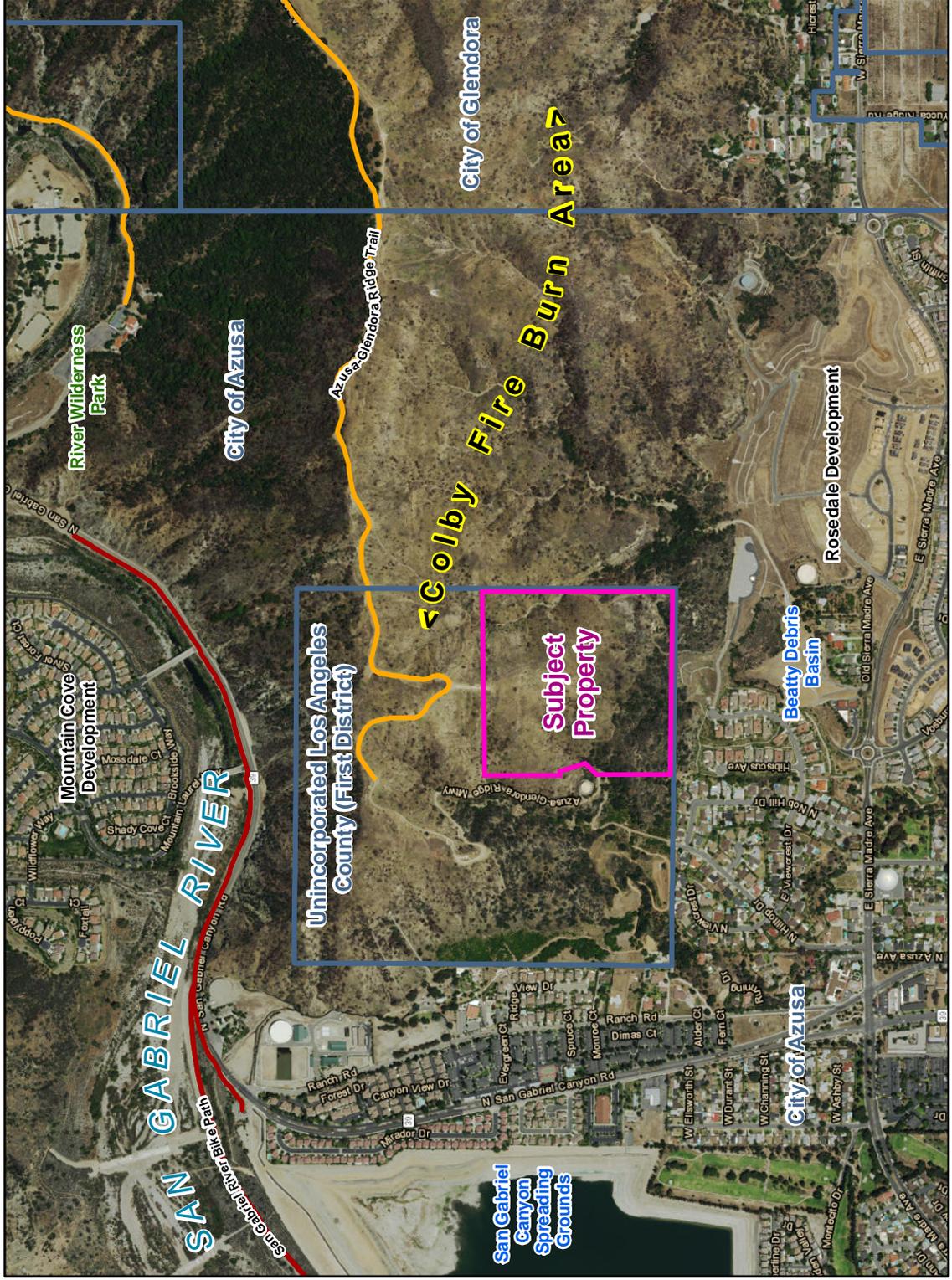


- **Funded Project Location**
Including 50 non-site specific projects
- **Unfunded Project Location**
Including 49 non-site specific projects
- Rivers and Mountains Conservancy Territory**
- Existing Park and Open Space**



Exhibit A2: Property Vicinity Map

AIN 8684-024-036, ±40 acres



Legend

-  Subject Property
-  City/Community Boundary
-  Recreational Trail
-  Bike Path

Data: Base Map Service from ESRI and their data providers. Parcel information provided by the Los Angeles County Assessor's Office. Bike path information provided by Los Angeles County Department of Public Works. Trail information provided by U.S. Forest Service and WCA.

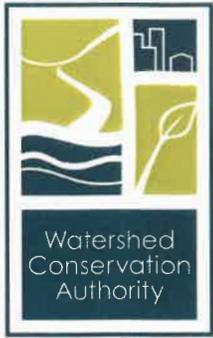


Exhibit A3: Surrounding Public Lands Map

AIN 8684-024-036, ±40 acres



Data: Base Map Service from ESRI and their data providers. Parcel information provided by the Los Angeles County Assessor's Office. Bike path information provided by Los Angeles County Department of Public Works. Trail information provided by U.S. Forest Service and WCA.



March 19, 2018

Mark Stanley
Executive Officer
Rivers and Mountains Conservancy
100 N. Old San Gabriel Canyon Rd.
Azusa, CA 91702

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**EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Mark Stanley**

RE: Vasquez Property Acquisition and Planning Project (RMC16001) Grant Extension

Dear Mr. Stanley:

The Watershed Conservation Authority (WCA) is hereby requesting an extension for RMC16001, the Vasquez Property Acquisition and Planning Project to February 28, 2020.

This project has resulted with a successful acquisition of approximately 40 acres of undeveloped open space located in the San Gabriel Mountain foothills above the City of Azusa, within unincorporated Los Angeles County. The WCA is currently engaged in site planning and the development of a restoration and stewardship plan. This open space property preserves one of the last remaining private holdings along the foothill interface between the San Gabriel Valley and the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument for watershed restoration, community-driven stewardship, and suitable low-impact recreation.

Additional site planning and management will protect significant natural and scenic resources, and help to preserve critical landscape connections to close-by conservation lands, including the River Wilderness Park.

To complete the planning work, the WCA will require additional time to collaborate with stakeholders, develop a Stewardship agreement and to align the plan with the broader San Gabriel Mountains and Foothill Acquisition Master Plan and study project to be completed in 2020.

If you have any questions regarding the project, enclosed timeline or our request for extension, please contact project manager, Alex Linz at alinz@wca.ca.gov or at (626) 815-1019 ext. 105.

Sincerely,

M. Janet Chin
Governing Board Chair

Enclosure: Amended Project Schedule

JC:de

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March 26, 2018 – Item 11

RESOLUTION NO. 2018-07

RESOLUTION OF THE SAN GABRIEL AND LOWER LOS ANGELES RIVERS AND MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY (RMC) AUTHORIZING A GRANT AMENDMENT TO THE WATERSHED CONSERVATION AUTHORITY TO EXTEND THE TIMELINE FOR THE VASQUEZ PROPERTY ACQUISITION (RMC16001).

WHEREAS, The legislature has found and declared that the San Gabriel River and its tributaries, the Lower Los Angeles River and its tributaries, and the San Gabriel Mountains, Puente Hills, and San Jose Hills constitute a unique and important open space, environmental, anthropological, cultural, scientific, educational, recreational, scenic, and wildlife resource that should be held in trust to be preserved and enhanced for the enjoyment of, and appreciation by, present and future generations; and

WHEREAS, The people of the State of California have enacted the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84), which provides funds for the RMC grant program; and

WHEREAS, The RMC may award grants to local public agencies, state agencies, federal agencies, and nonprofit organizations for the purposes of Division 22.8 the Public Resources Code; and

WHEREAS, This action is exempt from the environmental impact report requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA); and NOW

Therefore be it resolved that the RMC hereby:

1. FINDS that this action is consistent with the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy Act and is necessary to carry out the purposes and objectives of Division 22.8 of the Public Resources Code.
2. FINDS that the grant is consistent with the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006, which provides funds for the RMC grant program.
3. FINDS that the actions contemplated by this resolution are exempt from the environmental impact report requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act.
4. APPROVES a grant amendment to the Watershed Conservation Authority to extend the timeline for the Vasquez Property Acquisition (RMC16001) through February 28, 2020.
5. ADOPTS the staff report dated March 26, 2018.

~ End of Resolution ~

Motion _____ Second: _____

Ayes: _____ Nays: _____ Abstentions: _____

Passed and Adopted by the Board of the
SAN GABRIEL AND LOWER LOS ANGELES RIVERS AND MOUNTAINS
CONSERVANCY on March 26, 2018

Frank Colonna, Chair

ATTEST:

David Edsall, Jr.
Deputy Attorney General