

SANTA CLARITA WATERSHED RECREATION AND CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

*A PUBLIC ENTITY OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA EXERCISING JOINT POWERS OF THE CITY OF SANTA
CLARITA AND THE SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY PURSUANT TO GOVERNMENT CODE
SECTION 6500 ET SEQ.*

MEMORANDUM

TO: Governing Board


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

DATE: June 10, 2013

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item X: Consideration of resolution authorizing the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority to conduct riparian mitigation work on Agua Dulce Creek with APN 3210-002-007, south of State Route 14.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority to conduct riparian mitigation work on Agua Dulce Creek with APN 3210-002-007, south of State Route 14.

Background: SCWRCA acquired APN 3210-002-007 in Agua Dulce Canyon in 2012 as part of the 1,018 Nomin (formerly Rio Dulce) acquisition. SCWRCA is the fee title holder. No formal maintenance agreement exists for the 1,018 acres with either the City of Santa Clarita or the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA). For now both entities pitch in in the interim.

APN 3210-002-007 is a standalone 25.5-acre public parcel located just west of Agua Dulce Canyon Road. The parcel contains portions of three blue line streams, Escondido Creek, Agua Dulce Creek, and smaller Bee Creek. Sometime prior to 1990, perhaps as far back as the construction of State Route 14, the north-south coursing channel of Agua Dulce Creek was filled in and a new straight channel was created. Evidence for this action includes the current creek channel not being located anywhere near where USGS data (GIS and 1:2000 topo quad) historically show it to be. A now desiccated and burned row of cottonwood and willow trees remains right where the former natural channel was located. Likewise the existing stream channel is unnaturally straight and does not exhibit the geomorphological characteristics of a mature channel.

The MRCA proposal is to create a new, more meandering channel in a location between the existing and historical channel. The MRCA would consider unearthing the exact historical channel if the Governing Board preferred that option to bring surface flow back

to the vestigial riparian vegetation corridor. The downside of the old channel is that the status quo provides for a flat area served by a historical road from Agua Dulce Canyon Road. The level disturbed area could provide a high quality trail head in an area where level terrain with good paved access is otherwise non-existent. Its freeway accessibility is also excellent. Furthermore if the historic channel relocation coincided with some phase of the freeway construction, the current large culvert under SR 14 may to have been shifted west from the natural drainage bottom with the creation of the Agua Dulce Canyon Road interchange. In which case the whole baseline hydrological regime has been shifted westward. In all cases both the Army Corps of Engineers and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife must approve of the restoration plan. If the Governing Board approves this restoration permission request from the MRCA, its preferences on this issue should be emphasized but might be able to be perfectly realized if these regulatory agencies require different channel location and characteristics.

There is one private ownership located between SR 14 and the subject SCWRCA parcel. Public ownership of this parcel would make any riparian restoration project better and easier. Staff has intended to pursue this and other parcels that the Governing Board approved funding for well over a year ago. The combination of the acquisition of the Nomin property and the desire to do the subject restoration project will make this a top priority. Staff will begin appraisals on at least three properties within the month of June. The restoration planning and construction work can proceed regardless of the ownership of this private parcel.

The MRCA has funding available to do the restoration work. That work is also proposed on a small portion of Escondido Creek that enters and leaves the southeast corner of the subject parcel. The MRCA also requests the permission to be the CEQA lead agency on the subject restoration project. The sooner work begins the sooner the area will heal and the viewshed restored. The restoration work would set the stage for future public improvements enhanced with shade and native greenery. The site clearly supports Fremont's cottonwood, willow and coast live oak. California sycamore trees do well a short distance downstream within Agua Dulce Creek. The MRCA staff reports an open well shaft in the center of the property with visible water approximately 15 below ground level.

This area is also a critical wildlife corridor area for animals crossing under SR 14. Wildlife can either use the broad Agua Dulce Canyon Road underpass or Agua Dulce Creek culvert that leads directly to the parcel.

Numerous photographs and maps are attached.