

DATE: September 16, 2021

TO: WCA Governing Board

FROM: Suely Saro, Project Development Specialist (RMC JPA Staff)

THROUGH: Mark Stanley, Executive Officer

SUBJECT: Item 15: Consideration of a request to the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy for a grant to the Watershed Conservation Authority for the River Ranger Pilot Program Implementation Project

RECOMMENDATION: The Watershed Conservation Authority (WCA) Governing Board authorize WCA staff to submit a request to the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy and, if granted, acceptance of funding up to \$3 million dollars for the River Ranger Pilot Program Implementation Project.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The WCA identified the first of two proposed REACH Zones in the Lower LA River at the Rio Hondo Confluence. It is approximately five miles of linear corridor along the Los Angeles and Rio Hondo rivers.



The River Ranger Pilot Program Development Project facilitated coordination between the Los Angeles River and Rio Hondo Confluence tributary government bodies and stakeholders to develop a River Ranger Pilot Program Plan. Development of the River Ranger program included multiple phases, plan development, implementation, measure program performance. During Phase 1: Program Planning and Development, WCA and RMC staff worked with consultants to create a plan and curriculum for program implementation.

WCA and RMC staff kicked off the project on March 2020. However, due to COVID 19 conditions, it impacted ability of the project to complete a desired level of outreach and public engagement.

WCA and RMC staff met with the following stakeholders to provide an overview and shape the River Ranger Pilot Program.

- A. Conservation Corps of Long Beach,
- B. Los Angeles Conservation Corps,
- C. Sacred Places Institutes of Indigenous People,
- D. Center for a Competitive Workforce and Rio Hondo College,
- E. East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice,
- F. From Lot to Spot, and MRCA,
- G. LA County Flood Control District,
- H. City Managers of both the City of South Gate and the City of Downey,
- I. Police Department of the City of South Gate,
- J. Bell Garden, and Downey,
- K. Fire Department of the City of Downey,
- L. LA County Department of Parks and Recreations and their Trails Division, and
- M. Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority.

Conservation Corps of Long Beach, River in Action, Nature for All and Amigos De Los Rios makes up the Project Team and were brought on through an RFQ process to provide services including but not limited to achieving the following program goals:

1. Recreational and/or Interpretative/Educational Programs to creatively activate the LA River in REACH Zone at the Los Angeles River and Rio Hondo Confluence.
2. LA River Safety Ambassador Program to improve public safety for visitors on the LA River in REACH Zone at the Los Angeles River and Rio Hondo Confluence.

A River Ranger Pilot Program Advisory Committee was formed and is made up of all the stakeholders mentioned above. A kick-off meeting occurred virtually on Wednesday, May 5, 2021 at 1:30pm-3:00pm. The meeting have been held monthly thereafter.

Phase 2, River Ranger Pilot Program Implementation, will begin in October/ November 2021.

Phase 2 tasks and deliverables are provided in detail below to request funds from RMC:

Task 1: Project Implementation Management

The WCA will provide project and grant management for the life of the grant, including, but not limited to, administrative oversight, financial accounting, and program implementation. Signage will be an important component of the River Ranger Pilot Program to indicate the local jurisdictions. Furthermore, it will contribute to the maintenance element if it can be done as a beautification at the REACH Zone at the Lower LA River and Rio Hondo Confluence.

Deliverables: Quarterly reporting and Invoicing.

Task 2: Agency Partnership

Partnerships between WCA, RMC, and river-adjacent governments and agencies are crucial for the pilot project, as those government entities have control over river rights-of-way. Those local and regional agencies are participating in the river ranger program and staff is in the process of establishing formal agreements with the WCA to pursue the program.

WCA will continue to convene the advisory committee for Phase 2: Implementation to ensure the advisory committee provide guidance on Program Implementation, including outreach, education, and engagement programs.

WCA will facilitate the advisory committee meetings that includes the RMC and river-adjacent agencies, such as cities and law enforcement (LA County Sheriff or local police departments), regional entities including the Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation Department, non-profit organizations, schools near the Lower Los Angeles River, and other stakeholders.

Deliverables: Meeting coordination, agendas and minutes.

Task 3: Program Implementation

The Conservation Corps of Long Beach will conduct phase 2 implementation of the River Ambassador Program. The River Ambassador Program will begin in October 2021. The River Ambassadors will enhance and support ecological, social, and recreational opportunities within, along, and near the LA River. The program will focus on the three core elements of safety, education, and stewardship. The River Rangers will participate in a two-week training and orientation at the beginning of their six-month enrollment. These classes and field trips will cover the natural and cultural history of the LA River. This program will combine a curriculum with guest lectures, field trips, education days, and career pathway presentations to immerse the participants in the natural world of the LA River and surrounding areas. Throughout the year, seasonal changes may be made to the curriculum to reflect varying work needs for each season. Upon completing their six-month term, the River Rangers will be given the opportunity to extend their enrollment up to a year. These [or is it "Each participant"] participants will train

in one specialized field of the three core elements of the program: safety, education, or stewardship. This opportunity will be given to participants who have shown dedication and keen interest in the program as stewards and ambassadors of the LA River.

The recreational and educational/Interpretative Programs will begin in January 2022. River in Action is a 501c3 nonprofit organization that works to provide community based environmental education programs for K-5 youth. They are a place-based organization and work in the communities along the Lower Los Angeles River. River in Action (RIA) will conduct Phase 2 Implementation of its community based environmental education for K-5 youth. It will consist of 4 localized environmental education lessons that will include a children's coloring book for the REACH Zone at the Lower LA River and Rio Hondo River. Each coloring sheet will be based on each park in that REACH Zone. Their goal is to use STEAM educational programming to increase the usage of river path and parks in an effort to increase public safety along the Lower L.A. River

Nature for All (NFA) is a non-profit organization that is committed to building a diverse base of support to ensure that everyone in the Los Angeles area has equitable access to nature and the wide range of benefits that nature provides. Nature for All (NFA) will conduct Phase 2 Implementation of its Leadership Academy adapted for the REACH Zone at the Lower LA River and Rio Hondo Confluence. The Lower LA River Leadership Academy Program will consist of education, community engagement, celebration, and action. The participants will learn about in-depth topics related to land and water stewardship, park equity, environmental justice, native plants, civic engagement, careers in conservation and much more. In partnership with Project partners and advisory committee members, participants will plan at least 4 local events and experiences that will engage the community and begin to promote the collaborative efforts taking place in their communities and around the LA River. NFS will be conducting outdoor activities that will highlight existing open space, watersheds, tribal lands, biodiversity and local habitat unique to the SELA region and Lower LA River neighborhoods and cultures. Such events can include: tree planting, clean-ups, habitat restoration and much more.

Amigos De Los Rios (ADLR) is a non-profit organization to create an "Emerald Necklace" green infrastructure network of parks, trails, river greenways and green schools throughout the Los Angeles Basin. ADLR will be proactively responsive to and inclusive of the full range of needs & potential desires for potential programs from local communities in the REACH Zone at the Lower LA River and Rio Hondo Confluence. They will foster relevant recreation, Stewardship, Community Science, Interpretive/Educational & training activities as a part of a robust river ranger program – special focus on High School Youth/College Age Youth/Service Clubs. Additionally, they will ensure programming is relevant and benefits a full range of stakeholders of all ages and abilities effectively serving park-poor river-adjacent communities.

Deliverable: Program Report detailing the programs implementation outcomes.

Task 4: Public and Stakeholder Outreach

Public acceptance of the river ranger program rests on how much they know about the program itself and how it can help safely access the river, outreach and letting the public know that the river rangers are coming will provide for a program that the public trusts.

Our goal is to communicate with the public and key stakeholders regarding the programs and activity opportunities. These include traditional, digital, and online tools. In particular, we believe that online tools are a powerful and cost-effective way for engaging the public. We will develop material such as fliers, e-blasts, newspaper ads and advertising in local sources and to existing platforms.

Conservation Corps of Long Beach, River in Action, and Nature for All will be conducting outreach and recruitment for their respective program. Conservation Corps of Long Beach will conduct outreach and recruitment for the River Ambassador Program through schools, colleges, newsletters, social media, word of mouth community groups in the surrounding area, and will offer the opportunity to their current corps members from the City of South Gate. River in Action will conduct outreach to K-5 students in schools in the Cities of Downey, Bell Gardens, and South Gate. Nature for All will conduct outreach and recruitment to the Leadership Academy via coalition members, churches, schools, colleges, newsletters, social media, word of mouth, and community groups in the surrounding area.

Deliverables: Flyers, email lists and newsletters, correspondence with river-adjacent communities.

Task 5: Program Evaluation Development

Evaluating how and what the river ranger program did well and what it could add or improve upon at the end of the pilot period will provide for a holistic evaluation that can add to the program when it's made permanent.

Program evaluations for Conservation Corps of Long Beach, River in Action, Nature for All conducted in Phase 2 will capture the following:

- A pre and post survey program survey
- An understanding of current and past usage of the LA River and adjacent open spaces
- Number of participants engaged through our programming
- Any and all work with local city departments to assess existing programs and usage
- Create a survey of post usage of the LA River and adjacent open spaces, in addition to new open spaces beyond the region

Deliverables: Program success and learnings that includes metrics, outcomes, and impacts.

Background: The Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC) and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC) established an agreement to implement Assembly Bill 1558 (AB 1558), also known as the River Ranger Bill, introduced by Assembly member Cristina Garcia (AD 58). The bill required both Conservancies to collaborate with multiple state and local agencies to develop a river ranger program to provide a network of river rangers along the entire 51-mile Los Angeles River and its tributaries. The Conservancies agreed to implement AB 1558 with support from their JPAs – WCA and MRCA. MRCA facilitated the completion of Phase 1 – Visioning and Framework, which included development of vision, goals, objectives, and framework for a river ranger program which was finalized in June 2018. Senate Bill 1126 (SB 1126) introduced by State Senator Anthony J. Portantino (SD 25) and signed by Governor Brown on September 28, 2018 extended the time frame of AB 1558 to March 30, 2019 to allow for WCA to facilitate the completion of Phase 2 of the report.

On October 15, 2018, WCA Board approved resolution 2018-23 to accept a \$250,000 grant from the RMC (RMC 18005) to complete the River Ranger Program Establishment Plan. Phase 2 included recommendations for a governance structure, identification of funding sources to sustain a river ranger network, and a pilot program implementation strategy. WCA, working with our MRCA partners, engaged agency stakeholders while community-based organizations conducted targeted public outreach throughout the study area to inform the final plan. The final plan was submitted to the State Legislature in May 2019 for consideration to fund the following three-tiered pilot River Ranger program: 1. Enhance Public safety, resource management and general maintenance utilizing Sworn Peace Officer Rangers. 2. Engage river adjacent communities through interpretation and recreation opportunities administered by program staff & contracted partners. 3. Employ Conservation Corps Youth and trainees to become River Stewards providing maintenance services and supporting naturalist and outreach programs.

On November 21, 2019, the WCA Board approved the acceptance of a Proposition 1 grant in the amount of \$250,000 to the Watershed Conservation Authority (WCA) for the Implementation of the LA River Ranger Program Reach Zones (RMC 19005), which is considered Phase 1: Program Development and Planning.

Fiscal Information: The budget will be developed between September and October prior to a grant request submission to the RMC that may be up to \$3 Million. It is anticipated that approximately 60% will be dedicated to project implementation, 15% for project management and indirect, 10% for outreach and engagement, 10% for evaluation, 5% for agency coordination and agreements. If awarded, the grant award will be reflected as an update to WCA's Fiscal Year Budget.

Planning services are funded from a grant by the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy to implement LA River Ranger Program Reach Zones (RMC 19005) pilot projects.

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RESOLUTION 2021 - 25

RESOLUTION TO APPROVE AN UPDATE TO THE EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

WHEREAS, The Watershed Conservation Authority has been established as a joint powers agency between the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC) and the Los Angeles County Flood Control District (District); and

WHEREAS, the Watershed Conservation Authority (WCA) has further 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 will authorize a grant application to the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy; and

WHEREAS, the proposed action is exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act; NOW

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 (CEQA).
3. **ADOPTS** the staff report dated September 16, 2021.
4. **APPROVES** the application to RMC for a grant for the River Ranger Pilot Program Implementation Project; and
5. **ACCEPTS**, if granted, funding up to \$3,000,000.

~ End of Resolution ~

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Motion _____ Second: _____

Ayes: _____ Nays: _____ Abstentions: _____

Resolution 2021-25

Passed and Adopted by the Board of the
WATERSHED CONSERVATION AUTHORITY
On September 16, 2021

Herlinda Chico
Governing Board Chair

ATTEST: _____
Elizabeth St. John
Deputy Attorney General