

DATE: January 19, 2017

TO: Watershed Conservation Authority Governing Board

FROM: WCA Staff

THROUGH: Mark Stanley, Executive Officer

SUBJECT: Item 8: Liaison and Activities Report

San Gabriel Discovery Center Authority: The SGRDCA and LA County Sanitation Districts have obtained approval from the Water Board in July 2016 for disbursements to commence for the San Gabriel River Discovery Center Supplemental Environmental Project. In August 2016, SGRDCA began submitting project progress reports to the LA Sanitation Districts. SGRDCA has received funding for Supplemental Environmental Project design fees and administrative costs. The license agreement with LA County for site access for construction has been executed. The project team is targeting the end of February 2017 to obtain all necessary plan check approvals. This timing is dependent on Army Corps of Engineers completing their reviews within the next six weeks.

San Gabriel Mountains National Monument: The USDA Forest Service prepared a San Gabriel Mountains National Monument Management Plan Amendment to the existing Angeles National Forest Land Management Plan (LMP). The Forest Service proposed to change some management direction in the existing LMP to be consistent with the Proclamation. The project areas for this plan covers 246,177 acres of the northern and southeast portion of the San Gabriel Mountains that established a National Monument in 2014 through a Presidential Proclamation.

A draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Monument Management Plan has also been prepared and was circulated for public review during the summer and fall of 2016, with the comment period closing November 1, 2016. WCA submitted a comment letter focused of ensuring consistency with the San Gabriel River Confluence with Cattle Canyon Improvements Project. This letter is attached as Exhibit A. The Forest Services is currently reviewing comments, and considering adjustments to the Plan Amendment and EA.

WCA PROJECTS & PROPERTIES

Duck Farm Project: Final Permit plan check set and signed Maintenance and Operations Agreement has been submitted to Caltrans for their final approval and execution. AECOM is finalizing updated submittals for LA County Building and Safety, Architecture Review, Plumbing and Electrical departments for final plan check approvals. The grading plan check approval is secured, pending EPD and GMED referral concurrence and signature sign-offs. A labor compliance plan is required for submittal to the California Department of Industrial Relations for compliance with requirements specific to Prop 84 use of funds for public works projects.

Emerald Necklace: Since the last WCA Board meeting an Implementation Report, as well as a Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) were completed for the 15 projects included in the Emerald Necklace Implementation Plan – Phase 1. The DEIR was prepared to inform stakeholders and decision makers of potential direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects that could result from implementation. In order to solicit comments and input on the DEIR, to ensure that all environmental issues are fully identified

and adequately addressed, the WCA established a 45-day public review period that began October 19, 2016. Twelve comment letters were received, including 5 agency comment letters.

Responses to these comments have been drafted by the project environmental consulting firm, ECORP, and are under review by the WCA. Based on the issues raised during the review, staff does not anticipate recirculation of the DEIR. Therefore a Final Program Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) is in the process of being prepared. Consideration to certify the FEIR is scheduled to be brought before the WCA Board at the March 2017 meeting. The FEIR will be the final deliverable for the Emerald Necklace Feasibility Study and Implementation Planning Project. Future Emerald Necklace Coordination Committee efforts will focus on fund raising and project implementation.

The Emerald Necklace Feasibility Study and Implementation Planning Project is being completed to identify and advance trail connections and urban greening projects within the 17-mile Emerald Necklace, located in the heart of the San Gabriel Valley. This work is being conducted in collaboration with members of the Emerald Necklace Coordination Committee, which includes staff from the RMC, Amigos de los Rios, County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation, Los Angeles Flood Control District, and County of Los Angeles First Supervisorial District. This planning study serves as a guide for the coordinated implementation of these projects.

Gateway Cities and Rivers Urban Greening Master Plan: With a grant from the Strategic Growth Council and partner collaboration the WCA is developing a green infrastructure plan for the Gateway Cities Region. The WCA is advancing collaborative integration of regional efforts as staff continues to engage in compatible regional planning initiatives—including the AB530 Lower LA River Working Group. Together with the RMC-funded GREEN Project the plan is organized as an interactive web platform positioned to facilitate coordination, planning efforts, and funding for greening projects across the Gateway Cities and beyond.

Over the last quarter, staff has additionally been working to develop analysis methods, design approaches, and an outreach plan to target and quantify greening benefits for the identification and prioritization of best strategies for project implementation. These benefits include water management, active transportation, health, habitat, air quality, climate impacts, safety, security, equity, and economy.

Staff is working to finalize a contract with the Cal Poly Pomona Foundation for consultation on mapping efforts, develop an RFP for web services, and continues to work with the project partner North East Trees to develop design options for best practices in key areas. Additionally, staff is working with project partners to survey public interests in plan developments, with a survey planned for launch over the next quarter.

The next project advisory meeting will be held Tuesday February 7.

Mt. Baldy Wilderness Preserve: During the spring and early summer of 2016, the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) rangers contracted by the WCA began responding to an increased number of public complaints concerning users parking in unauthorized areas, and blocking access for neighboring residents. The inappropriate parking is attributed to an increase in parking demand attributed to an upsurge in recreational use. As part of the response by WCA and MRCA, law enforcement coordination was initiated with the Los Angeles and San Bernardino County Sheriff Departments. As a result of this coordination, the MRCA authorized deputies from both departments to issue citations against the MRCA Park Ordinance, an ordinance designating park rules that are enforceable by any Peace Officer on WCA parkland. Enforcement of park rules on the property has since increased with deputies assistance on their regular patrols. Toward

the end of the high use season a noticeable decreasing trend in ranger service calls were observed, suggesting that this cooperative effort is proving to be successful.

Acquired in 2014, the Mt. Baldy Wilderness Preserve is a 237+/- acre property located on the eastern extent of the Authority's territory, directly south of Mt. Baldy Village. This open space being preserved is in its undeveloped state. The site is publicly accessible for passive recreational use.

River Wilderness Park: Based on the 2012 adopted RWP Master Plan for the Canyon Inn Property, the RWP Entry Improvements Project is currently under design development. To inform the design work a geotechnical investigation was conducted from early September through December 2016. This work was delayed by Caltrans permitting due encroachment required for borings within State highway right-of-way. With a geotechnical report expected to be provided to the WCA by the date of this meeting, the design work is commencing toward a 90% Construction Package.

To fund the RWP Entry Improvements, Staff continues to seek grant opportunities. In early June Staff submitted an approx. \$1.9 million grant proposal to Cycle 3 of the State Active Transpiration Program (ATP). With a similar proposal submitted last year narrowly missing the scoring threshold for funding, Metro provided in-kind grant writing assistance through a transportation planning consultant, Stantec. The funding request, if funded, will match the anticipated California River Parkways Grant to complete a 1,750 foot bike path extension and roundabout protected highway crossing into the River Wilderness Park. Award announcements for ATP are scheduled for the Fall.

The RWP is an approx. 75.7 acre property slated to provide unique wilderness experiences in the lower San Gabriel River Canyon comprised of engaging landscapes, gathering spaces, thriving habitats, and a regional hub and welcome center for the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument.

San Gabriel River Confluence with Cattle Canyon Project: Along a 2.5-mile segment of the East Fork San Gabriel River recreational use is highly concentrated. This heavy use combined with the lack of facilities has resulted in degraded conditions. In response, the Cattle Canyon Project seeks to better manage the recreational use, and balance the needs for resource project within this area of the San Gabriel Mountains.

Since the last WCA Board meeting, a proposed action has been completed for the design and implementation components of the project. This proposal is defined within a 30-page project description available online at www.wca.ca.gov/cattle_canyon. The purpose and need is further addressed by this proposed action is described as:

- Providing recreation facilities and infrastructure that are high quality, well-maintained, safe, accessible and consistent with visitors' expectations;
- Shifting and concentrating recreational use to certain areas in order to minimize adverse effects over a broader area;
- Promoting stewardship of public land by providing quality and sustainable recreation opportunities that result in increased visitor satisfaction;
- Allowing for better management of recreation resources on the Forest; and
- Improving riparian habitat conditions in certain areas and making progress toward enhancing stream habitat conditions by restoring vegetation, minimizing invasive plants and noxious weed presence, and developing access management strategies.

Upon completing the proposed action, the WCA, in partnership with the Angeles National Forest and San Gabriel Mountains National Monument, distributed a Notice of Intent/Notice of Preparation (NOI/NOP) for

a joint Environmental Impact Statement and Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR). The NOI/NOP initiated a 45-day public comments period, providing an opportunity for the public and agencies to comment on the scope and content of the environmental impact assessment. Approximately 200 letters were received before the end of the review period on November 30, 2016. A new article was also published in response to the NOI/NOP: <http://www.sgvtribune.com/environment-and-nature/20161124/get-a-look-at-the-15-million-plan-to-clean-up-east-fork-of-san-gabriel-river-in-angeles-national-forest>.

WCA and ANF staff, and the project consultants, are currently summarizing the scoping comments, and considering modifications to the proposed action and range of alternates to be considered in the EIS/EIR. An Environmental technical assessment and report has also begun to be prepared with the release of a DEIS/DEIR for public review scheduled for early summer 2017.

South Gate Habitat Restoration Project/Parque dos Rios: City of South Gate has approved plan check submittals and is set to issue necessary permits for Construction. Caltrans plan check is in progress and signed Maintenance and Operations Agreement has been submitted for execution. ACOE has not yet provided extension of amended 408 permit to include the installation of a water line under Imperial Bridge along the flood wall. Local Conservation Corps of Los Angeles is currently preparing a proposal to complete construction work.

Walnut Creek Habitat & Open Space: After completing a conceptual development plan in coordination with the City of San Dimas, the City secured County Proposition A funding in the amount of \$850,000 to begin initial West Phase development. The City and WCA cooperatively completed CEQA review, and independently approved proceeding with development of the West Phase. The initial phase includes site clean-up, passive recreational elements, habitat enhancements, and the planting of a vegetated screening buffer. This phase will accomplish the necessary improvements to provide public access over a portion of the Project Site. Recreational elements include trail development and trail-side amenities (interpretive signage, benches, etc.) that will create a looped spur trail connection to the existing LA County Antonovich Trail. Public access will only be made from the Antonovich Trail, accessible from four nearby County-operated trail staging areas. Site clean-up includes removal of buildings from a portion of the Project Site under City ownership.

Since approval the West Phase at the May 2016 WCA Board meeting Staff has begun working with City Staff to update the project schedule and budget, as well as to identify and coordinate critical task to begin project-level planning, permitting, and implementation. Staff is also engaging the Tzu Chi in discussions to secure trail right-of-way necessary for the project.

Acquired in 2008, the Walnut Creek Habitat and Open Space Property is a total of approx. 60.8 acres. It is located directly east of Bonelli Regional Park and along the Walnut Creek riparian corridor. Approximately 6.7 acres are owned by the City of San Dimas and 54 acres are owned by the WCA.

LA COUNTY ELECTION UPDATE

Measure A: Safe, Clean Neighborhood Parks, Open Space, Beaches, Rivers Protection, and Water Conservation Measure. To replace expiring local funding for safe, clean neighborhood/ city/ county parks; increase safe playgrounds, reduce gang activity; keep neighborhood recreation/ senior centers, drinking water safe; protect beaches, rivers, water resources, remaining natural areas/ open space; levy of 1.5 cents annually per square foot of improved property in Los Angeles County, with bond authority, requiring citizen

oversight, independent audits, and funds used locally. This measure was overwhelmingly approved by the required 2/3 supermajority of votes on November 8, 2016 by 73.48%, or 1,568,781 votes.

Measure M: Los Angeles County Sales Tax to improve freeway traffic flow/safety; repair potholes/sidewalks; repave local streets; earthquake retrofit bridges; synchronize signals; keep senior/disabled/student fares affordable; expand rail/subway/bus systems; improve job/school/airport connections; and create jobs. This measure was approved by the required 2/3 supermajority of votes on November 8, 2016 by 69.79% of votes, or 1,594,427 voters that voted yes.

Approval of Measure M (“Measure”) accepts the Los Angeles County Traffic Improvement Plan (“Ordinance”) developed by the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (“Metro”). The Ordinance imposes a retail transactions and use tax (“Sales Tax”) at the rate of one-half of one percent (.5%) within Los Angeles County (“County”), beginning on the first day of the first calendar quarter commencing not less than 180 days after adoption of the ordinance. The Sales Tax will increase to one percent (1%) on July 1, 2039, when the Measure R tax of one-half of one percent (.5%) tax imposed by Metro by Ordinance number 08-01 expires. The Sales Tax is in addition to any other taxes authorized by law. The Sales Tax has no expiration date.



November 1, 2016

Jeffrey Vail, Forest Supervisor
 Angeles National Forest,
 San Gabriel Mountains National Monument
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Mark Stanley

RE: SAN GABRIEL MOUNTAINS NATIONAL MONUMENT PLAN

Dear Mr. Vail:

The Watershed Conservation Authority (WCA) is grateful for the opportunity to submit comments on the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument Plan (Plan). The WCA was established as an independent joint powers authority to expand and improve the open space and recreational opportunities for the conservation, restoration, and environmental enhancement of the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers Watershed areas consistent with the goals of flood protection, water supply, groundwater recharge and water conservation. With this purpose, the WCA has forged an important partnership with the Angeles National Forest (ANF) to develop and implement a comprehensive master development plan for the San Gabriel Canyon that will allow for better management of recreational use while balancing the needs for resource protection. As such, comments provided herein come from a position as an invested land management partner.

WCA has reviewed the draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument Plan (Plan). This review has generated no specific comments regarding the adequacy of the environmental assessment and disclosures provided within the draft EA. More so, as a necessary precursor to modifying the management direction in the existing Forest Land Management Plan (LMP) to be consistent with the Presidential Proclamation which established the Monument, WCA is pleased with the prospect that National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance will soon be completed, allowing efforts to turn toward obtainment of the desired conditions identified within the Plan.

Implementing the San Gabriel River Confluence with Cattle Canyon Improvements Project (Cattle Canyon Project) and other cooperative efforts are important steps toward realizing sustainable recreation and use within the Monument. However, WCA cautions that the Plan may not provide the necessary flexibility to address both existing and reasonably foreseeable management needs as it relates to access and recreational uses. And as a result, may impede a balanced approach to implementing collaboratively developed solutions for sustainable recreation on the Monument.

As history has demonstrated, the existing lack of recreation facilities along the East, West, and North Forks of the San Gabriel River has not discouraged high intensity recreational use along accessible river reaches and has led to various

resource management challenges, include negative impacts to the Santa Ana sucker (SAS). New facilities, such as those proposed in our jointly-led Cattle Canyon project are urgently needed to reduced impacts from existing and anticipated increases in public use. With this in mind, WCA is concerned to see that the expansion of Critical Biological Land Use Zones (CBLUZ) proposed in the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument Plan would interfere with implementation of the Cattle Canyon project. In particular, the existing Land Management Plan currently considers developed facilities 'Not Suitable' within CBLUZ zones (ANF Land Management Plant Part 2, Table 2.1.3, pages 5-6).

To successfully embrace an approach of sustainable recreation and use, it is critical that Monument managers have the flexibility to develop new facilities where heavy use presently occurs or can be expected to occur, such as within the proposed CBLUZ expansions. The WCA therefore urges consideration of amending the suitable uses within CBLUZs along the East, West, and North Forks of the San Gabriel River. This requested amendment, to be accomplished through the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument Plan, should allow for facility development, possibly 'by exception', when the affects would be beneficial or neutral to the SAS population, or when a facility is proposed to improve public safety. Such beneficial or neutral facilities, as proposed by the Cattle Canyon project, may include formalized river access, picnic areas located just outside of the flood plain, and development of road-adjacent pedestrian trails. An example of a facility that may improve public safety, the Cattle Canyon Project proposes a pedestrian bridge near the confluence of Cattle Canyon Creek to alleviate potential pedestrian and motor vehicle conflicts.

In addition, the East Fork San Gabriel River CBLUZ within the vicinity of Heaton Flat is a specific concern and WCA recommends a zoning modifications to allow a planned picnic area, as this proposed facility would be spatially outside of suitable habitat and would have no direct impact to the SAS. WCA's proposed zoning modification is visualized in Figure 1.

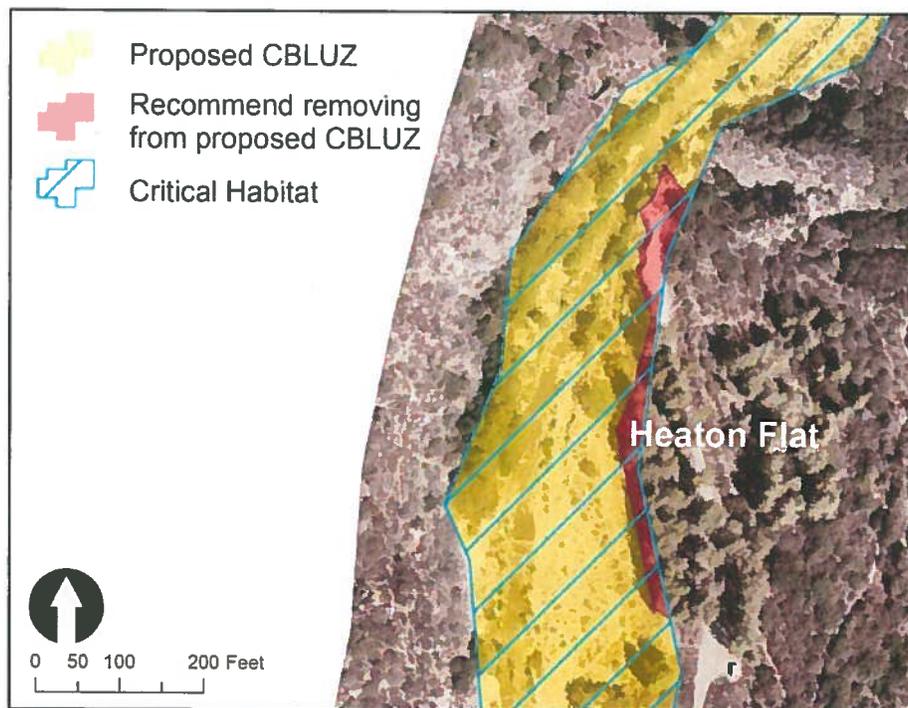


Figure 1: Recommended removal of proposed CBLUZ from Heaton Flat

Thank you in advance for your consideration of these comments. Please feel free to contact Cattle Canyon project manager, Rob Romanek or myself if you have further questions regarding this letter. I may be reached at (626) 815-1019 x100 or mstanley@wca.ca.gov, and Mr. Romanek can be reached at (626) 815-1019 x108 or rromanek@wca.ca.gov.

Sincerely,



Mark Stanley
Executive Officer

CC: River & Mountains Conservancy

MS:rr

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