

DATE: September 21, 2017

TO: Watershed Conservation Authority Governing Board

FROM: Johnathan Perisho, Project Manager

THROUGH: Mark Stanley, Executive Officer

SUBJECT: Item 16: Consideration of a resolution to approve Operational Statement for River Wilderness Park for City of Azusa Conditional Use Permit Application.

RECOMMENDATION: The WCA Governing Board approve Operational Statement for River Wilderness Park for City of Azusa Conditional Use Permit Application.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: River Wilderness Park is envisioned as a gateway for the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument at the northernmost terminus of the San Gabriel River Bikeway along natural river flow in the Azusa Canyon off State Route 39 (Location Exhibit A).

WCA staff has been working to finalize construction drawings and to secure funding and approvals for implementation of the first phases of completing the River Wilderness Park Master Plan: both River Wilderness Park Entry Improvements and the Newman's Roost Special Use Area. An Operational Statement is required as part of the permit and approval process for the City of Azusa. This statement itemizes all improvements and operational elements planned for the completed park (Exhibit B).

BACKGROUND: River Wilderness Park is moving closer to becoming a reality after over a decade of planning, acquisitions, ongoing search for grant funds, and construction drawing development now moving into approvals. The park comprises 76 acres of planned park area in the Azusa Canyon, including both the El Encanto property acquired in 2006 and the Canyon Inn Property acquired in 2008. RWP items outlined in the Operational Statement have been informed through the planning process and community and stakeholder outreach in the general conceptual plan development conducted through October 2007, and the subsequent Canyon Inn Conceptual Plan and Programming Report following acquisition and adopted into the master plan 2012.

The WCA has committed funding for detailed plans and construction drawings now nearing completion for the Entry Improvements with a grant accepted from the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy approved May 15, 2014 in the amount of \$455,998. Specific components of the Canyon Inn portion of the RWP Master Plan include development of a formal entryway with signage, an extension of the Azusa Bikeway into the park, and traffic calming measures along State Route 39 that will facilitate a safer at-grade bicycle crossing into the RWP. Other elements include development of a café (concessioner)/restroom building, picnicking areas, an adventure play area, river overlooks, interpretive features, and realignment of North Old San Gabriel Canyon Road and parking.

Following a competitive bidding process on July 24, 2014 the WCA Board awarded Withers and Sandgren a contract to lead a team providing design services for the River Wilderness Park Front Entry Improvements Project. The 60% drawings were completed in 2016 with final documents to be completed

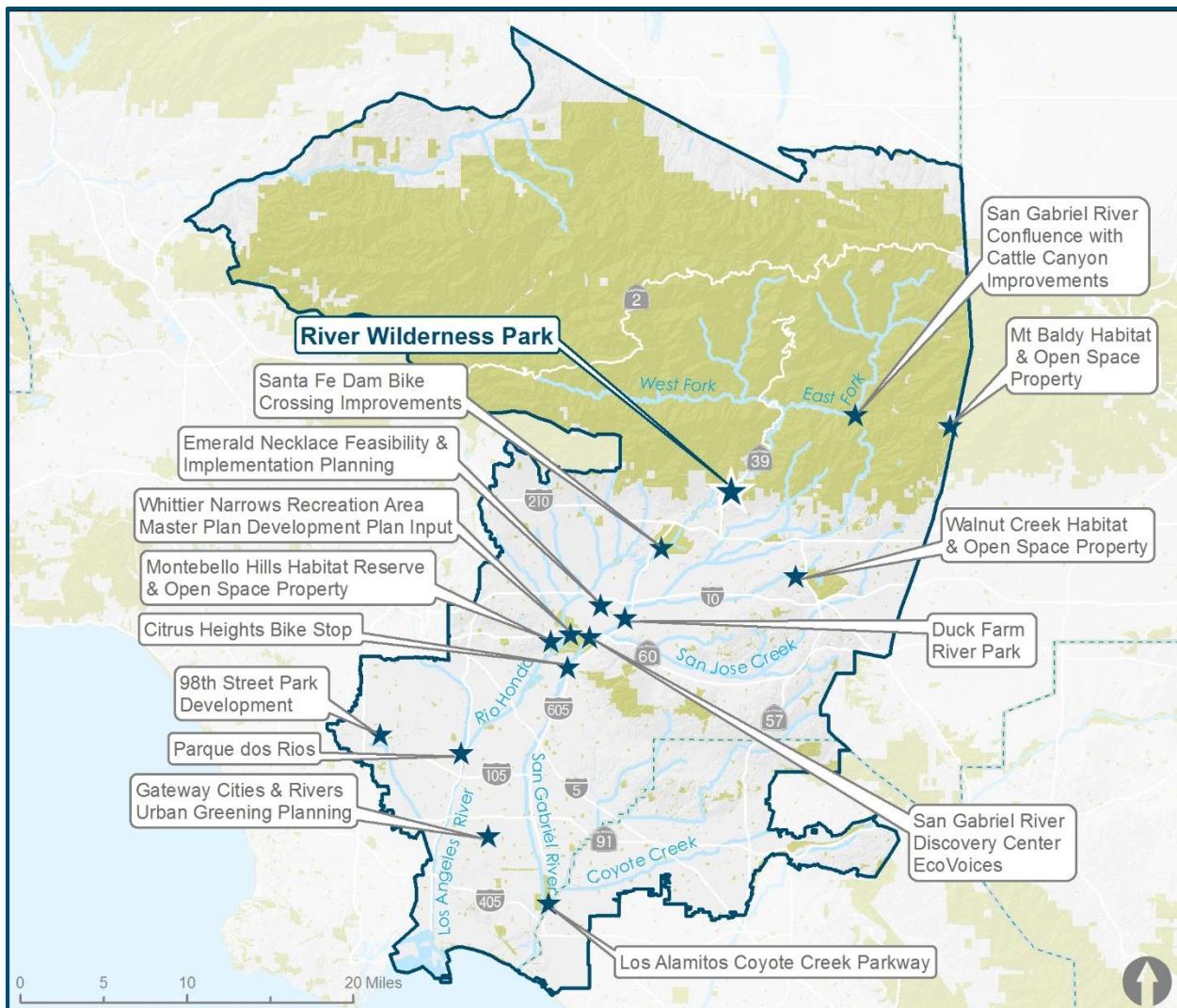
through the review and approval process initiated this summer 2017. The planning and design work will realize the park entry improvement goals of the RWP Master Plan, and provide a shovel-ready project which has already helped to secure approximately \$2.3 million in funds toward completion.

Detailed plans and construction drawings for the Newman's Roost Special Use Area component of the El Encanto property were funded in 2010 by excess funds from the Canyon Inn acquisition granted by the RMC in the amount of \$210,000. Following a competitive bidding process a contract was awarded to Blue Green Consulting in the amount of \$208,668, with the package completed and approved in 2011. The Newman's Roost Special Use Area includes the reconstruction of an ephemeral stream, trail and bridge crossing, an outdoor amphitheater, outdoor education elements, picnic areas, and a public restroom adjacent the main office and former El Encanto restaurant.

FISCAL INFORMATION: This action has been planned and budgeted through a grant from the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy for the River Wilderness Park Entry (RMC14001), and is necessary to secure permit approvals for implementation of ongoing applications for funds including the approximately \$2.3 secured to date.



River Wilderness Park





River Wilderness Park Entry Improvements Project Operational Statement

The River Wilderness Park Entry Improvements Project is a part of the larger approximately 76-acre River Wilderness Park in the Azusa Canyon. The Watershed Conservation Authority (WCA) is the property owner and lead on park developments. The WCA is a local public entity of the State of California exercising joint powers of the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC) and the Los Angeles County Flood Control District with a vision of *Connecting Communities through Nature*. The project area is approximately 6.5 acres zoned open space along the San Gabriel River at the north end of Azusa on Highway 39. The WCA is requesting authorization from the City of Azusa for the following improvements:

- Entry Gateway
- Park Signage
- Food Concession/Information Building
- Restrooms
- Pavilion
- Loop Nature Trail
- Bicycle Rest Stop
- River Overlooks
- Shady Grove Picnic Facility and Overnight Tent Camping (By Permit)
- Children's Nature Play Area
- Grading drainage improvements and vegetated swales
- Landscape plantings and irrigation system
- Realignment and improvement of approximately 900 feet of Old San Gabriel Canyon Road from SR-39 at the River Wilderness Park entry to the property boundary between Canyon Inn and El Encanto.
- Constructing a roundabout to slow down vehicular travel along SR-39 at the entry to the Park at Old San Gabriel Canyon Road, and for ingress and egress to and from the park.
- Extending the San Gabriel River Bike Trail from its northern terminus along the west side of SR-39, across SR-39 through the protected roundabout into the Park
- Installing water and sewer utility lines from the connection point at Mountain Laurel Way, along SR-39 to the realigned and improved Old San Gabriel Canyon Road.
- Undergrounding existing overhead electric utility lines and communications lines within the realigned and improved Old San Gabriel Canyon Road and within the project area.

The existing project area currently consist of degraded undeveloped areas and primarily ruderal vegetation. There are currently no parking areas in the project area, and no public access available except immediately along Highway 39 and Old San Gabriel Canyon Road rights of way.

The proposed hours of operation for the developed park are for public access from sunrise to sunset, for permitted special events up to 2am, and for permitted overnight camping until the following day.

The proposed park will provide holistic programs and services consistent with the purpose of the WCA:

- Passive recreation including walking and sitting, as well as unsupervised children's play area
- Picnic areas
- On-site food service and provisions for alcohol sales by concession and/or catering, sale permits to be held by third parties
- Information booth regarding local and regional interest in the foothills, San Gabriel Mountains National Monument, and beyond
- Main building estimated to accommodate up to 39 persons
- Outdoor dining area estimated to accommodate up to 27 persons
- Meeting facility estimated to accommodate up to 43 persons, to be available by permit for special events including weddings, personal and professional gatherings, etc.
- Parking: approx. 42 parking spaces on-site, and potential availability by parking covenant for up to an additional 140 spaces on property owned and operated by WCA immediately adjacent to the east. Parking fees may be applied.
- On-site utilities:
 - Bear boxes for trash disposal and collection
 - Limited bike racks for bike storage
 - Low-level area lighting for visibility and security, oriented for minimal impact on night sky
 - Gas-operated fire pit
- Security:
 - The main park east of Highway 39 will be fenced and hours of operation will be enforced by a lockable entry gate
 - Emergency access box and/or password access for police, fire service, etc.
 - Emergency call box
 - Contracted 24/7 ranger services, and potential for security cameras
- Deliveries during operating hours
- Location may serve as a bus shuttle stop destination
- Special uses:
 - Limited special events that may involve shows and performing arts, such as intimate concerts in the park, live music, and art displays
 - On-site storage for special events, such as tables, chairs, and sound system
 - Filming and photography uses by permit
 - Overnight tent camping by permit, e.g. for youth groups, etc. on special request
 - Educational programming including interpretation, directed site walks, etc. which may involve school buses on-site
 - Future programming may include low-impact exercise meetups and classes including yoga, tai chi, etc.

Exhibit C



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RESOLUTION 2017-32

RESOLUTION TO APPROVE OPERATIONAL STATEMENT FOR RIVER WILDERNESS PARK FOR CITY OF AZUSA CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT APPLICATION.

WHEREAS, the Watershed Conservation Authority (WCA) has been established as a joint powers agency between the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy and the Los Angeles County Flood Control 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 approves the Operational Statement for River Wilderness Park for the City of Azusa Conditional Use Permit Application and approval of first phases of park development; and

WHEREAS, the proposed action is exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA); 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 CEQA.
3. **ADOPTS** the staff report dated September 21, 2017.
4. **APPROVES** a the Operational Statement for River Wilderness Park for City of Azusa Conditional Use Permit Application.

~ End of Resolution ~

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Motion: _____ Second: _____

Ayes: _____ Nays: _____ Abstentions: _____

Resolution 2017-32

Passed and Adopted by the Board of the
WATERSHED CONSERVATION AUTHORITY
On September 21, 2017

M. Janet Chin, Governing Board Chair

ATTEST: _____

David Edsall
Deputy Attorney General