

**DATE:** November 21, 2019

**TO:** WCA Governing Board

**FROM:** Jane Tsong, Project Manager

**THROUGH:** Mark Stanley, Executive Officer

**SUBJECT:** Item 12: Consideration of a resolution to 1. accept a grant from the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy Prop 68 program (RMC 19006); and, 2. authorize the acquisition of real property known as 'Vasquez Overlook' within the Azusa foothills (Assessor Parcel No. 8684-024-001). Property owner: Vasquez Ranch, LLC. Negotiator: Mark Stanley, EO.

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**RECOMMENDATION:** That the Watershed Conservation Authority (WCA) Governing Board 1. accept a grant from the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy Prop 68 program (RMC19006); and, 2. authorize the Executive Officer to negotiate the acquisition of real property known as 'Vasquez Overlook' within the Azusa foothills (Assessor Parcel No. 8684-024-001). Property owner: Vasquez Ranch, LLC. Negotiator: Mark Stanley, EO.

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION:** The acquisition of the 39-acre Vasquez Overlook parcel (AIN#: 8684-024-001) will protect one of the last remaining undeveloped private holdings along the foothill interface between the San Gabriel Valley and the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument from development, in order to support watershed restoration, community-driven stewardship, and compatible public uses in the foothills above Azusa.

In April 2019, the Vasquez family expressed their desire to sell Vasquez Overlook to WCA if the sale could be completed by the end of the calendar year. In consideration of this time-sensitive opportunity, WCA applied for an RMC Prop 68 grant to fund the pre-acquisition activities and the acquisition itself.

In July, the WCA submitted a Prop 68 grant application to the RMC for consideration to fund the acquisition through the competitive grant round this past summer. As noted in the application for funding, the transfer of this property to WCA ownership would protect significant natural and scenic resources and augment an existing cluster of contiguous public conservation lands in the Azusa Foothills that includes: WCA's River Wilderness Park and Vasquez 907 (both owned and managed by WCA), Azusa-RMC Open Space, and City of Pasadena Open Space. Exhibit A- Vasquez Overlook in WCA Territory; Exhibit B-Vasquez Overlook and public conservation lands; Exhibit C- Vasquez Overlook site map; Exhibit D-Site Photos.

Staff finds the property meets the purpose of the WCA which "is to provide for a comprehensive program 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 area consistent with the goals of the flood protection, water supply, groundwater recharge and water conservation."

**BACKGROUND:** In 2016, the WCA board authorized resolution 2016-34 to acquire Vasquez 009 (AIN#: 8684-024-036 / 8684-024-907), 40 acres of open space in the Azusa Foothills, from the San Gabriel Mountains Regional Conservancy (SGMRC) utilizing a grant from the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC). At this same time, the Vasquez family engaged the RMC in discussing the purchase of additional lands for conservation, including the Vasquez Overlook parcel. These lands are owned by Vasquez Ranch, LLC, a family-run avocado farm established by Arturo Vasquez Senior.

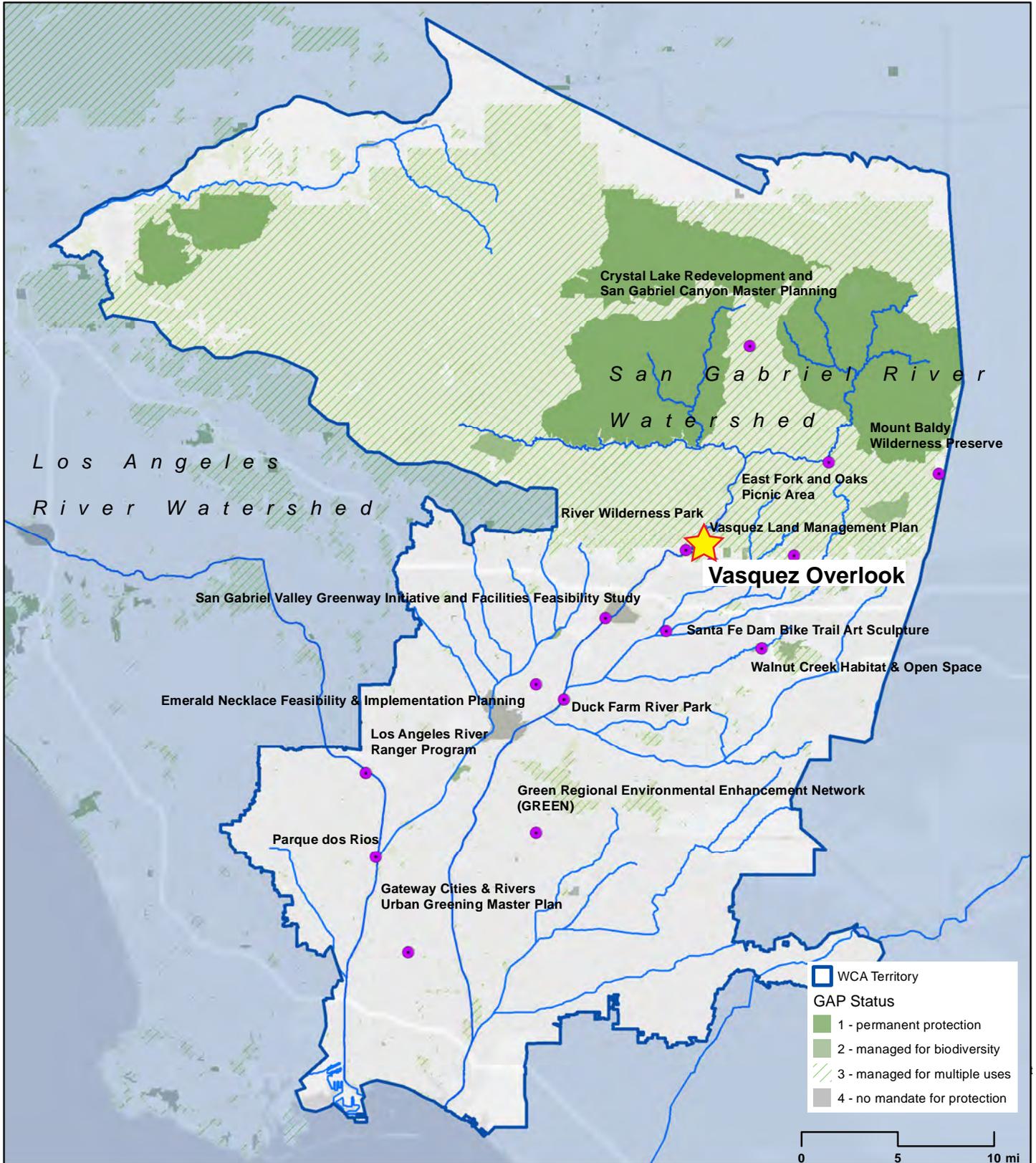
Considerations in favor of acquiring the Vasquez Overlook parcel for conservation include the following:

- The undeveloped lands of the Vasquez Overlook parcel contribute to the scenic quality of the entrance to San Gabriel Canyon along State Route 39, but are at risk of development. (The subject parcel is zoned A-1-2 for light agriculture, allowing single family homes, crops and animal keeping. In the Los Angeles County General Plan 2035, the property is designated RL20, allowing one dwelling per 20 acres. It is in a Los Angeles County Hillside Management Area.)
- Vasquez lands are included in the Glendora Ridge Biological Resource Area recommended as a city nature preserve in the City of Azusa's Open Space Element (5-16) and General Plan (OS-1).
- The Vasquez Overlook Parcel contains a dramatically situated ridge which, along with the property's north-facing slopes (which drain toward the San Gabriel River) is included in Los Angeles County's San Gabriel River Canyon Significant Ecological Area.
- Vasquez Overlook is called out as a priority parcel for conservation in the San Gabriel Mountains and Foothills Open Space Acquisition Master Plan, funded by RMC17019.
- Accessible grades, a variety of ecotones, and attainable overlooks suggest that Vasquez Overlook is well positioned for stewardship building and nature programming. A hike of less than a mile brings users to scenic views (future locations for seating and shade structures); at the 1.5 mile mark, trail users may reach WCA's Vasquez 009 and Azusa-RMC JPA's open space (a total of 241 acres of public open space which is otherwise challenging to access); strong hikers may continue on to Glendora's Colby Trail and Angeles Forest locations. There is potential for a new trail connection to connect to WCA's Azusa River Wilderness Park (71 ac), at which parking and visitor amenities are planned.
- Vasquez Overlook's scenic views are opportunities for shade/rest structures and interpretive content about San Gabriel Canyon, the Tongva village of Asuksa-nga, or the synergies between habitat conservation, watershed management, and organic agriculture as practiced by a family who came here from Mexico generations ago as agricultural workers—topics which may resonate with renewed interest in biodiversity and local food production.
- Although a biological survey has yet to be conducted on the property, the Spring Biological Report for WCA's first Vasquez acquisition (8684-024-907) has suggested Vasquez Overlook's use by mammals including the mountain lion. The Vasquez family reports sometimes seeing a bald eagle overhead.

An unpaved road known as Glendora Ridge Motorway curves over the parcel. This road is used by Los Angeles County Flood Control District, Los Angeles County Fire Department, and Azusa Water and Power. A flood control easement and other utility easements exist on the property. Water lines owned by the City of Pasadena run over the surface of the western slope and are visible from State Route 39. These lines are regularly maintained by the City of Pasadena. The City of Pasadena owns adjacent lands to the north and west. The Azusa Myanmar Monastery is a neighbor on the west side. An unpaved spur road connects Hilltop Drive, to Glendora Ridge Motorway on the subject parcel. This spur road has been severely eroded and is not drivable. The Vasquez family has reported that the County Fire Department will repair the road, but this road remains undriveable.

**FISCAL INFORMATION:** This project will be funded by an RMC Prop 68 grant award to the WCA at the RMC Governing Board meeting on November 18, 2019. Annual operations and maintenance costs to hold the land as open space is anticipated to be \$ 750-1,000 annually in insurance premiums. The FY19/20 capital budget will be updated to reflect acceptance of funds.

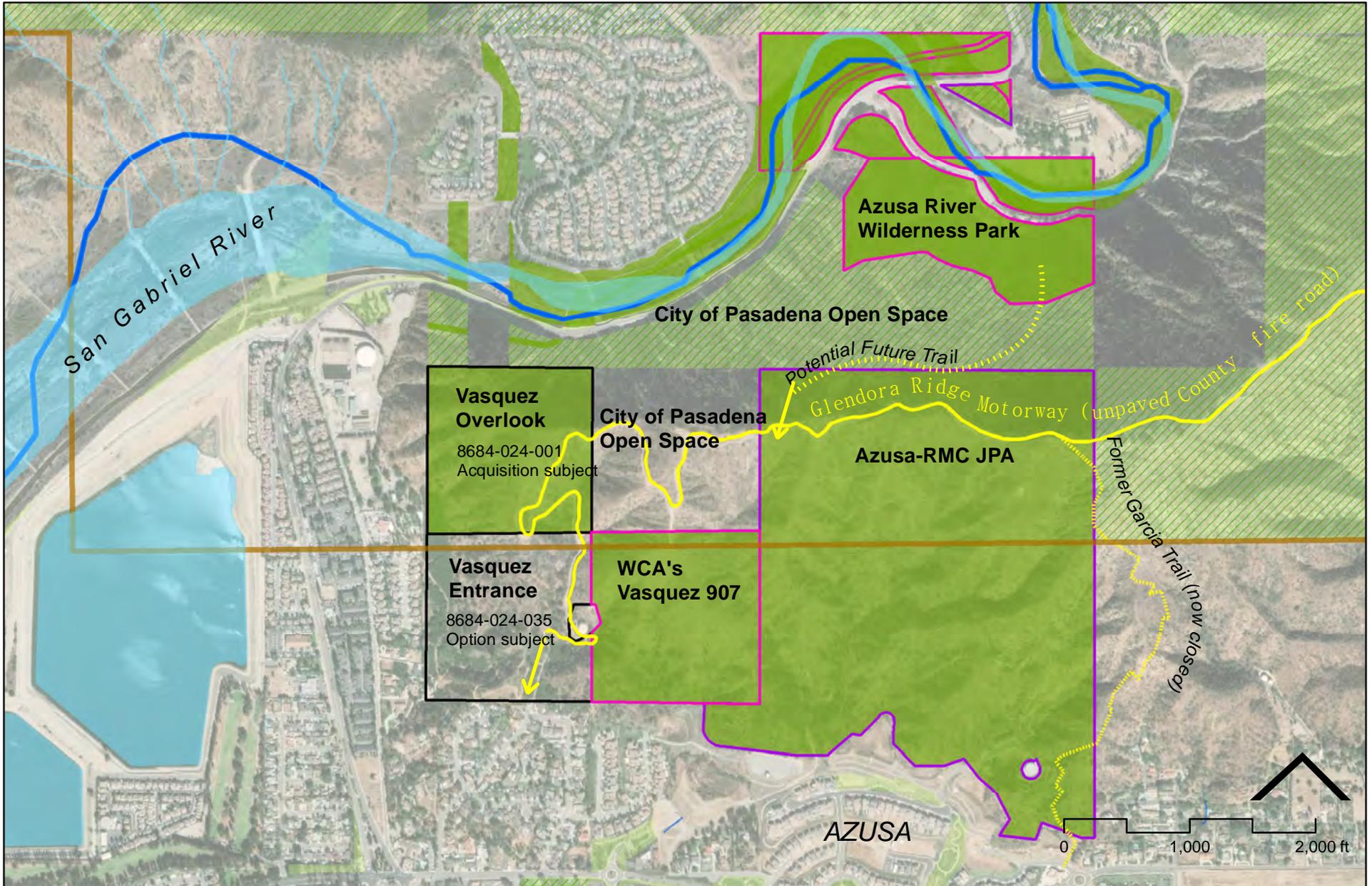
Additional funding shall be secured for any potential future public access and land management considerations that will come from the land management plan and stewardship program.



## WCA Projects and Territory

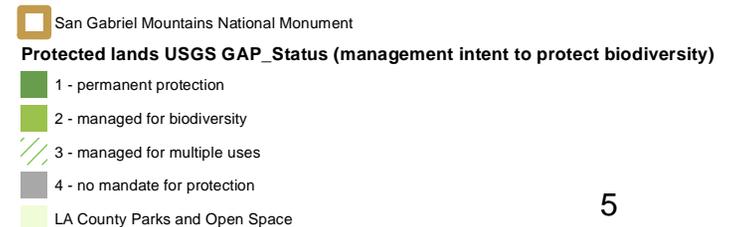
The WCA is a joint powers authority (JPA) of the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC) and the Los Angeles County Flood Control District whose mission is to provide for a comprehensive program to expand and improve the open space and recreational opportunities for the conservation, restoration, and environmental enhancement of the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers Watershed areas.

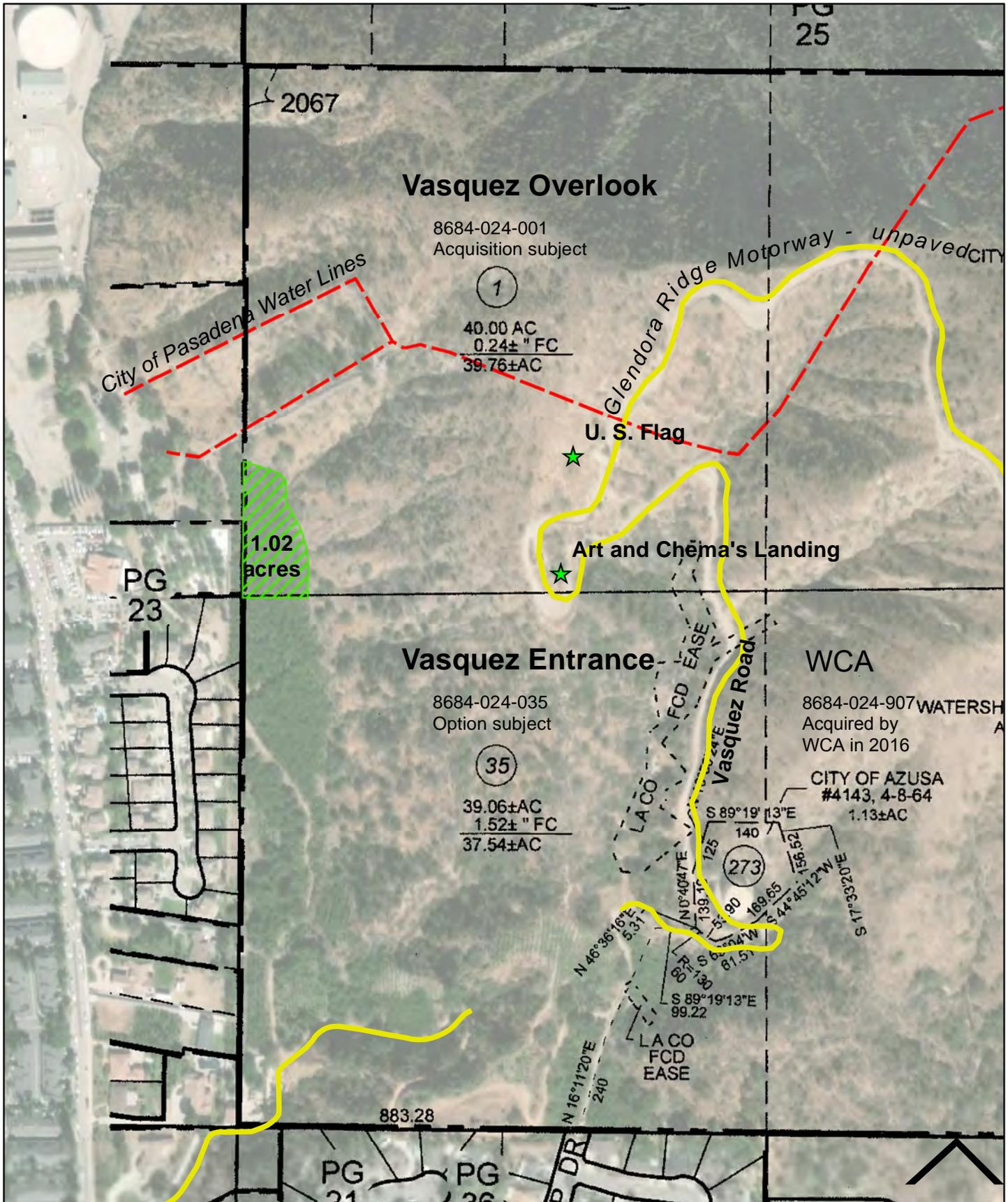




### Vasquez Overlook and public conservation lands

Transfer of Vasquez Overlook into public ownership will augment a series of public land holdings in the Azusa foothills which are part of a multi-jurisdictional vision to preserve the biological and hydrological assets of foothills lands while focusing public use on areas where such use is may be the most manageable, rewarding, and sustainable.





# Vasquez Overlook

 Lease area on APN#: 8684-024-001: A 1.02 acre flat area currently planted as avocado grove and watered by off site water to be leased back to Vasquez Ranch LLC for organic avocado farming according to terms of the lease.



Views of Azusa and former Asuksa-gna lands from "Art and Chema's landing" at Vasquez Overlook, March, 2019



View from Glendora Ridge Motorway, an unpaved fire road on Vasquez Overlook, March, 2019



View of former Asuksa-gna lands and San Gabriel River plain from Vasquez Overlook, March, 2019



Near “Art and Chema’s landing” at Vasquez Overlook, March, 2019



Organic avocado orchards at foot of slope. The contiguity of foothills habitat to these productive organic orchards tells a story about the productive relationship between conservation and sustainable food production , June 2019

November 21, 2019 - Item 12

**RESOLUTION 2019-47**

**RESOLUTION OF THE WATERSHED CONSERVATION AUTHORITY TO 1) ACCEPT A GRANT FROM THE RIVERS AND MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY PROP 68 PROGRAM (RMC19006); AND 2) AUTHORIZE THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER TO NEGOTIATE THE ACQUISITION OF REAL PROPERTY KNOWN AS 'VASQUEZ OVERLOOK' WITHIN THE FOOTHILLS ABOVE AZUSA, ASSESSOR PARCEL NO. 8684-024-001, FROM VASQUEZ RANCH, LLC.**

**WHEREAS**, the Watershed Conservation Authority (WCA) 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 1) will authorize the acceptance of grant funds from the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy for the acquisition of Vasquez Overlook; and 2) will authorize the Executive Officer to negotiate the acquisition of the Vasquez Overlook property, Assessor Parcel No. 8684-024-001, from Vasquez Ranch, LLC, by assignment and assumption of purchase and sale agreement by and between Vasquez Ranch, LLC and Watershed Conservation Authority. Property Owner: Vasquez Ranch, LLC.; WCA Negotiator: Mark Stanley, EO; 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; and
2. **FINDS** that the actions contemplated by this resolution are exempt from the environmental impact report requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA); and
3. **ADOPTS** the staff report dated November 21, 2019; and
4. **ACCEPTS** a grant of up to \$1,064,200 from the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy for the acquisition of real property Assessor Parcel No. 8684-024-001; and
5. **AUTHORIZES** the acquisition of real property within the foothills above Azusa, Assessor Parcel No. 8684-024-001, from Vasquez Ranch, LLC.

*~ End of Resolution ~*

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Resolution 2019-47

Motion: \_\_\_\_\_ Second: \_\_\_\_\_

Ayes: \_\_\_\_\_ Nays: \_\_\_\_\_ Abstentions: \_\_\_\_\_

Passed and Adopted by the Board of the  
**WATERSHED CONSERVATION AUTHORITY**  
On November 21, 2019.

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Herlinda Chico, Governing Board Chair

ATTEST: \_\_\_\_\_  
David Edsall, Jr.  
Deputy Attorney General