

DATE: January 16, 2020

TO: WCA Governing Board

FROM: Jane Tsong, Project Manager

THROUGH: Mark Stanley, Executive Officer

SUBJECT: Item 16: Consideration of a resolution to authorize the Chair and/or designee to negotiate and enter into a professional services contract to provide a Biological Survey of Watershed Conservation Authority's Vasquez II Property and interim management guidelines for Vasquez I and II.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Watershed Conservation Authority (WCA) Governing Board authorize the Chair or designee to negotiate and enter into a professional services contract to provide a Biological Survey of Watershed Conservation Authority's Vasquez II Property (8684-024-001) and to develop interim management guidelines for Vasquez I (8684-024-907) and II for a not-to-exceed amount up to \$50,000.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The Spring Biological Resources Survey and Report of WCA's Vasquez II property, acquisition to be completed by January 31, 2020, will document biological resources on site, assess their quality and significance, recommend approaches for restoration and management of such resources. Services to be provided include survey and mapping of wildlife and vegetation communities, and documenting observed and potential species of conservation interest. The results will be compiled into a report that includes a summary of the regulatory setting, description of survey methodology, comprehensive list of biological resources on site, significance of site within wildlife corridor/travel routes, resources management recommendations, evaluation of site potential for mitigation banking.

The survey and recommendations from Vasquez II and I (for which a survey funded by RMC16001 was conducted in Spring 2019) will be incorporated into interim management guidelines that encompass both sites. Interim management guidelines to encompass both sites will include these elements:

- Recommendations for invasive management, with timeline and cost estimates
- Recommendations for biological resources protection, with timeline and cost estimates
- Recommendations for habitat enhancement, with timeline and cost estimates
- Evaluation of how public use, such as various proposed trail alternatives, would be expected to impact site biological resources
- A framework for stewardship and community science development activities in consideration of anticipated public access

BACKGROUND: Vasquez lands form part of the scenic heritage of foothills communities and contribute to the scenic viewshed as one enters the San Gabriel River Canyon. 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). Vasquez lands are called out as priority parcels for

conservation in the San Gabriel Mountains and Foothills Open Space Acquisition Master Plan, funded by RMC17019. **Exhibit A- Vasquez lands in WCA Territory; Exhibit B- Vasquez I and II and public conservation lands; Exhibit C-Site Photos of Vasquez I and II including photos from Spring Biological survey of Vasquez I.**

The Vasquez trail has relatively accessible grades and traverses a variety of ecotones on the way to several dramatic viewpoints that look over the Azusa plain and San Gabriel River Canyon. For these reasons, the Vasquez lands are well positioned for stewardship building and nature programming.

Under RMC16001, Tidal Influence, a Long Beach-based ecological consulting firm, conducted a biological survey of Vasquez I in Spring, 2019. The team mapped the plant communities on site and recorded the presence of 101 plant species, of which 71 were native and 18 were classified as invasive. Annual species were found to make up 24% of the native plant species richness, which confirmed the importance of performing a springtime survey. Wildlife cameras captured the presence of foxes, mountain lions, deer, and coyotes.

The biologists observed patterns of recovery after the 2014 Colby Fire, such as the re-sprouting of large fire-adapted coastal sage shrubs, the reestablishment of other native species via the existing seed bank, and the use of post-fire snags as perches by resident birds, and avian breeding activity.

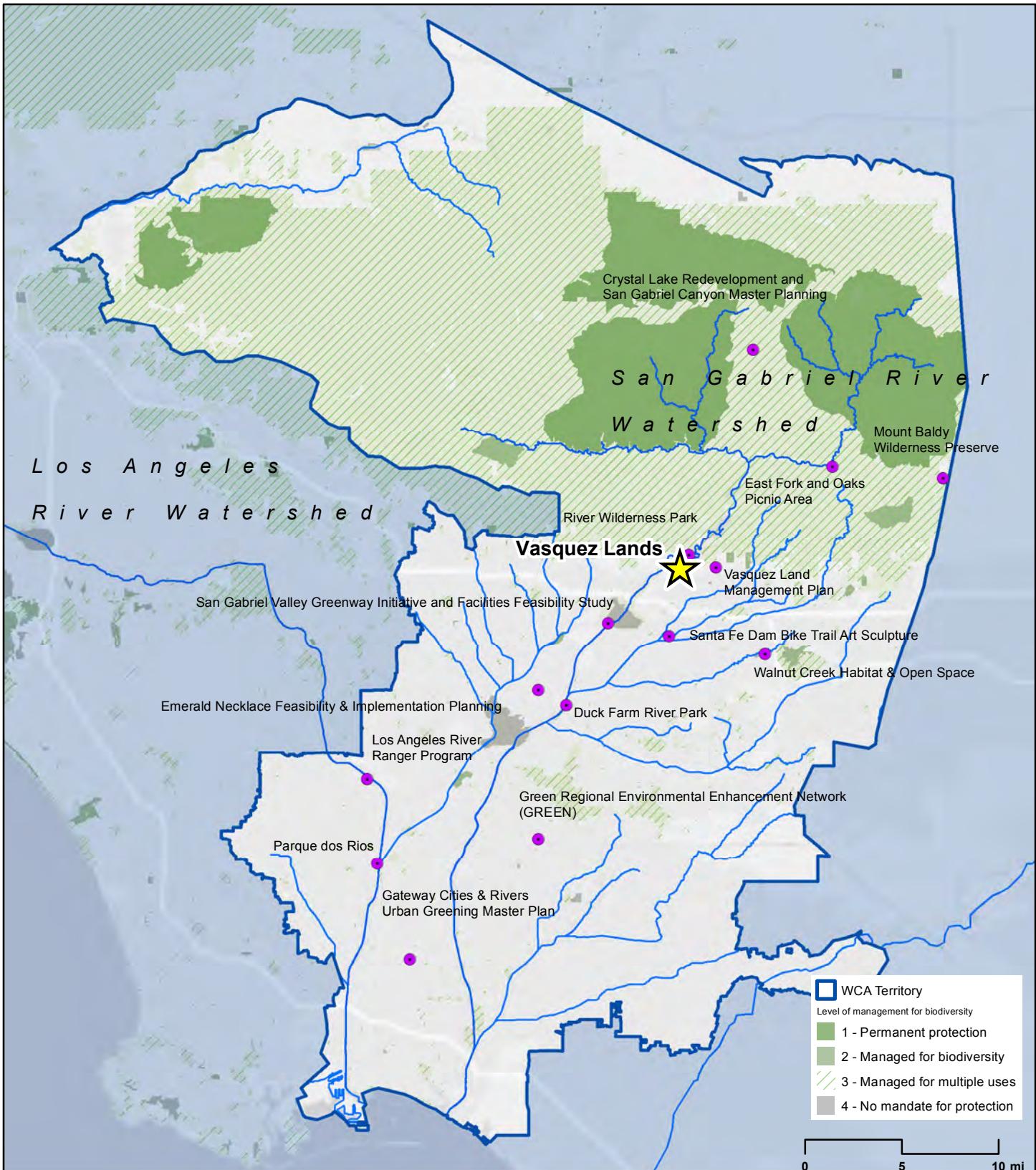
"The results of the biological surveys indicate that the Vasquez property boasts an intact and thriving ecosystem with limited disturbances despite its relatively proximity to the urban edge. This lack of disturbance has much to do with the site's inaccessibility resulting from the steep slopes, dense vegetation, and connection to vast contiguous natural open space on all edges and formerly private ownership. Much of the property's vegetation is recovering from a fire that occurred just five years ago, but this natural disturbance was far from devastating, and the ecological communities are clearly recovering at a promising rate. While the succession of the ecological communities should be monitored, the need for intensive intervention through habitat restoration is limited."

Biologists recommended selective control of *Pennisetum setaceum* (crimson fountain grass), the most numerous and aggressive invasive on site. Biologists also recommended enhancement and expansion of Oak Woodland (which used to be more extensive on site before the Colby Fire), and enhancement of an existing population of native walnut trees which also appears to be recovering from the fire.

A biological survey of Vasquez II is expected to yield a similar wealth of knowledge about local foothills ecosystems. Such knowledge will inform future decisions about trail locations and public access and will also provide content for interpretive materials and programming for stewardship development.

WCA will conduct a competitive RFP process for biological consultants. A consultant will be chosen from candidates who can demonstrate substantial field experience in the San Gabriel Mountain foothills as well as insight into regional and site level biological opportunities in WCA territory. The contracted services are targeted to begin in early March 2020 to capture the biologically critical springtime period.

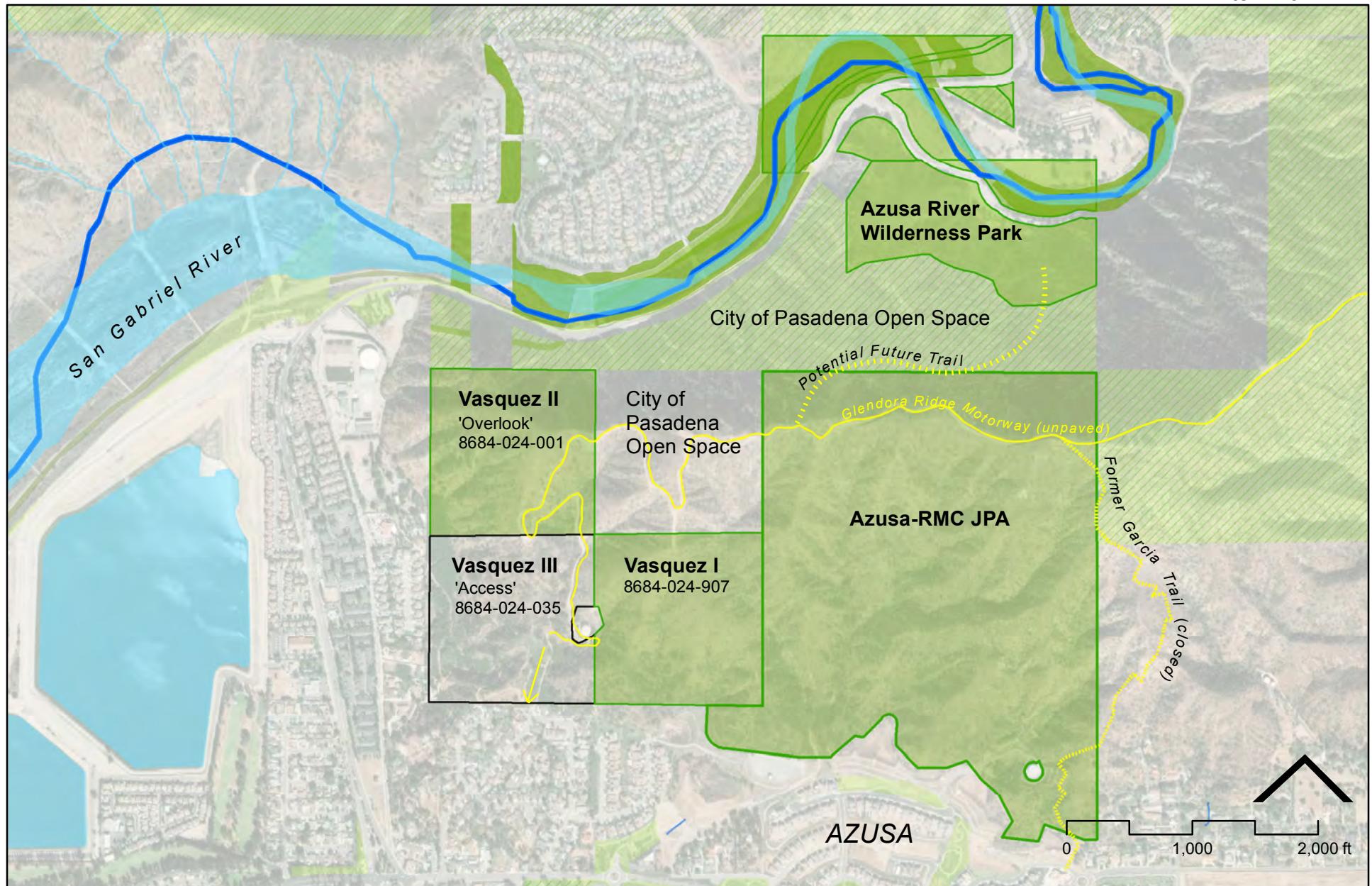
FISCAL INFORMATION: This resolution for approval includes a not-to-exceed value of up to \$50,000, which would be funded by the existing grant RMC19006 for the Vasquez Overlook Acquisition Project.



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.





Azusa foothills conservation lands

Transfer of Vasquez II 'Access' 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.

Protected lands USGS GAP_Status (management intent to protect biodiversity)

- 1 - permanent protection
- 2 - managed for biodiversity
- 3 - managed for multiple uses
- 4 - no mandate for protection
- LA County Parks and Open Space



Vasquez II 'Overlook': Wildflowers along Glendora Ridge Motorway, an unpaved fire road, March, 2019.



Vasquez II 'Overlook': Wildflowers along Glendora Ridge Motorway, an unpaved fire road, March, 2019.



Vasquez II 'Overlook': Art and Chema's Landing.



Vasquez II 'Overlook': Art and Chema's Landing.

Exhibit C



Item 16



Vasquez I Spring Biological Survey: White lined sphinx moth caterpillars (*Hyles lineata*) (L), and *Calochortus* (R).



Vasquez I Spring Biological Survey: Wildflowers.



Vasquez I Spring Biological Survey: Checking the herpetological cover board (L), and mountain lion caught on camera (R).



Vasquez I Spring Biological Survey: Gopher snake.

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RESOLUTION 2020-07

**RESOLUTION OF THE WATERSHED CONSERVATION AUTHORITY TO
AUTHORIZE THE CHAIR AND/OR DESIGNEE TO NEGOTIATE AND ENTER
INTO A PROFESSIONAL SERVICES CONTRACT TO PROVIDE A
BIOLOGICAL SURVEY AND REPORT FOR WATERSHED CONSERVATION
AUTHORITY'S VASQUEZ II PROPERTY (8684-024-001) AND INTERIM
MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR VASQUEZ I (8684-024-907) AND II.**

WHEREAS, the Watershed Conservation Authority (WCA) has been established to facilitate joint projects between the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy and Los Angeles County Flood Control District; and

WHEREAS, The Watershed Conservation Authority has 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 authorizes the Chair or designee to negotiate and enter into a professional services contract to provide a biological survey and report for Watershed Conservation Authority's Vasquez II Property (8684-024-001) and interim management guidelines for Vasquez I (8684-024-907) and II; and

WHEREAS, this action is exempt from the environmental impact report requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

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.
3. **ADOPTS** the staff report dated January 16, 2020.
4. **AUTHORIZES** the Chair or designee to negotiate and enter into a professional services contract to provide a biological survey and report for Watershed Conservation Authority's Vasquez II Property (8684-024-001) and interim management guidelines for Vasquez I (8684-024-907) and II for a not-to-exceed amount up to \$50,000.

~ End of Resolution ~

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Resolution 2020-07

Motion: _____ Second: _____

Ayes: _____ Nays: _____ Abstentions: _____

Passed and Adopted by the Board of the
WATERSHED CONSERVATION AUTHORITY
On January 16, 2020

Herlinda Chico
Governing Board Chair

ATTEST: _____

David Edsall, Jr.
Deputy Attorney General