

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
August 5, 2010

COLD CREEK HIGH TRAIL ACQUISITION

File No. 10-005-01
Project Manager: Bob Thiel

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$573,000 to the Mountains Restoration Trust to acquire 78 acres of undeveloped property in the Cold Creek watershed of the Santa Monica Mountains for habitat and open space preservation and compatible public access as a component of the Cold Creek Preserve.

LOCATION: Santa Monica Mountains, Los Angeles County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Reservation of Significant Coastal Resource Areas

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project location](#)
 - Exhibit 2: [Regional map](#)
 - Exhibit 3: [Site and acquisition parcel maps](#)
 - Exhibit 4: [Regional trail map](#)
 - Exhibit 5: [Site photos](#)
 - Exhibit 6: [Project letters](#)
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RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31117 and 31350-31356 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed \$573,000 (five hundred seventy-three thousand dollars) to the Mountains Restoration Trust (the MRT) to acquire approximately 78 acres of property in the Cold Creek watershed of the Santa Monica Mountains in Los Angeles County, commonly known as the Cold Creek High Trail Property (and consisting of Los Angeles County Assessor Parcel Numbers 4455-021-034, -052, -068, -069, and -076; 4455-050-005 and -006; and 4455-024-007) to protect significant coastal resource lands. This authorization is subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of funds for acquisition, the MRT shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy all relevant acquisition documents, including but not limited to the appraisal, environmental assessments, agreement of purchase and sale, escrow instructions, and documents of title necessary to the acquisition.
2. The MRT shall pay no more than fair market value for the property.
3. The MRT shall permanently dedicate the property for habitat and resource protection, open space preservation, and public access in a manner acceptable to the Executive Officer.
4. Subject to the prior written approval of the Executive Officer, the MRT may transfer interests in the property to a public agency or nonprofit organization deemed acceptable by the Executive Officer, provided the public agency or nonprofit organization agrees to hold, manage and operate these interests for the purposes stated in condition number 3, above; and
5. The MRT shall acknowledge Conservancy funding by erecting and maintaining on the property, or at another approved location, a sign that has been reviewed and approved by the Executive Officer.

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with Section 31117 and with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 8 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31350-31356) regarding reservation of significant coastal resource areas.
2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the current Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines”
3. The Mountains Restoration Trust is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the California Public Resources Code.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

This project would provide funds to assist the Mountains Restoration Trust in acquiring fee title to approximately 78 acres of undeveloped property known as the Cold Creek High Trail Property in the Cold Creek watershed of the Santa Monica Mountains of Los Angeles County for habitat and open space preservation and compatible public access.

The acquisition involves the purchase of 12 legal parcels located northwest of Stunt Road and about one-half mile south of Mulholland Highway, between Malibu and Calabasas and four miles north of Pacific Coast Highway. The 12 parcels are designated by eight Los Angeles County Assessor Parcel Numbers: 4455-021-034, -052, -068, -069, and -076; 4455-050-005 and

-006; and 4455-024-007.

Acquisition of the Cold Creek High Trail Property will conserve a critical segment of an east-to-west wildlife corridor that links Topanga State Park with Malibu Creek State Park (Exhibit 2). Its inclusion within the MRT's Cold Creek Preserve is integral to the preservation of Cold Creek, an undeveloped and scenic tributary to Malibu Creek, the largest watershed in the Santa Monica Mountains. Conservation of these parcels will add valuable habitat, linkages and refugia to a 3500-acre core of parklands under public ownership and management within the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA), the country's largest urban national park system.

Conserving this component of the Cold Creek watershed will protect a diverse assemblage of species and habitats, as well as one of the most critical headwater areas of Malibu Creek. The property encompasses an undisturbed combination of scrub, chaparral and perennial riparian communities that are rapidly disappearing from most of Southern California.

In addition to four-tenths of a mile of blue-line streams, the Cold Creek High Trail Property contains 1.6 miles of informal social trails, which the acquisition would convert to public ownership and maintenance. Inclusion of these parcels within the Cold Creek Preserve will facilitate improved trail connections to other components of the Preserve and the SMMNRA and ultimately connect to the proposed Coastal Slope Trail along the Santa Monica Mountains. The Cold Creek High Trail connects with the Monte Nido trail system and the Backbone Trail into Malibu Creek State Park (see Exhibits 3 and 4). The Backbone Trail, a 55-mile trail from the Hollywood Hills to the Ventura County shoreline, traverses the Cold Creek watershed between Topanga Canyon and Malibu Canyon, while the 17-mile Calabasas/Cold Creek Trail crosses the Cold Creek Preserve from Calabasas Peak for 2.5 of its miles. Purchase of the High Trail Property will also allow the MRT to replace an existing trail alignment that crosses the fragile Cold Creek riparian corridor six times in less than a half mile with an upland route that would have minimal impact on the area's natural resources.

The proposed project would meet one of the major acquisition priorities of the Cold Creek Enhancement Plan, a planning effort funded and approved by the Conservancy in 2001. It would also continue the Conservancy's historical focus on protecting both the Cold Creek watershed and the larger Malibu Creek and Lagoon system of which it is a part. If MRT is unsuccessful in buying this property, it's likely that the site would be sold and developed into single family residences, causing habitat fragmentation and loss of potential trail connections. All 12 parcels have certificates of compliance, and the seller has received a number of offers to purchase portions of the property. Any residential development of the site would require constructing a road network through the property, severely impacting wildlife habitat and degrading the watershed.

The MRT has entered into a purchase and sale agreement with the sellers, under which the MRT is to acquire the High Trail Property for an amount well under the appraised value of the property as of August 2008. (Although the appraisal is being updated, no significant reduction in value is expected). The parties have opened escrow, but to capitalize on this bargain offer, the MRT must complete the purchase by December 1, 2010. In addition to the proposed

Conservancy grant, the MRT anticipates receiving \$1.3 million in funding from the County of Los Angeles, \$120,000 in monies from the federal Land and Water Conservation fund through the National Park Service, and in-lieu mitigation fees of \$512,500 from the Army Corps of Engineers. Private donations of \$45,500 pledged at a community fundraiser for the Cold Creek acquisition last fall will contribute the remaining money needed to buy the property. In total, over 77 percent of the purchase price will come from federal, county and private contributions (see “Project Financing” below).

The MRT would acquire and own the land, except for approximately 10 acres (a portion of APN 4451-021-076) which the MRT would transfer to the County of Los Angeles at closing. But the MRT would manage all of the property, including the County-owned segment, as part of the Cold Creek Preserve.

The MRT is a 501(c)(3) organization, formed in 1981 with assistance from the Conservancy, and is the largest nonprofit landowner in the SMMNRA. Its mission is to preserve, protect and enhance the natural resources of the Santa Monica Mountains, which it accomplishes through land acquisition, cooperative planning, restoration, education, and recreation programs. Since its inception, the MRT has protected over 6,000 acres that are now owned by MRT or its resource partners in the Mountains.

Site Description:

The Cold Creek High Trail Property is located within the heart of the Cold Creek watershed, one of the most biologically diverse areas of the Santa Monica Mountains. This diversity results in part from Cold Creek’s orientation and sun exposure. Most protected areas in the Santa Monica Mountains trend north-south. But Cold Creek’s east-west orientation creates a corridor with unusual characteristics. At its eastern end, it sustains a broad and open riparian forest. The steeper gradients and coarser substrates of the western reach form a cascading stream dominated by cobbles and boulders, with deep pools and riffles flanked by sycamore, arroyo willow and a dense vegetative understory. Many of north-facing slopes contain an impenetrable and diverse scrub oak/chaparral habitat, while the drier and hotter south-facing slopes are dominated by coastal sage scrub vegetation, grasslands, and rock outcrops that support an entirely different assemblage of plant and animal species.

According to a 2005 vegetation survey of the High Trail Property, the eastern parcels include an extensive riparian forest of coast live oak, California bay, California black walnut and western sycamore along a riparian area that includes a perennial waterfall. Understory plants include maidenhair fern, monkey flower, and California gooseberry. Within the western parcels is a small riparian woodland of coast live oak, arroyo willow, and understory plants such as California snowberry and poison oak. North-facing slopes on the Property feature dense mixed chaparral communities of ceanothus, scrub oak, hollyleaf cherry, coffeeberry, mountain mahogany, chamise, sugar bush, and manzanita. Coastal sage scrub communities on south-facing slopes include laurel sumac, California sagebrush, purple sage, deerweed, tarweed, and California buckwheat.

These plant communities provide important food sources for a variety of birds and mammals. The Cold Creek watershed is home to large mammals such as bobcat, coyote, gray fox, striped

skunk, mule deer and bush rabbit. Radiotelemetry observations by the National Park Service have tracked mountain lion traversing the watershed. Bird diversity is high, with characteristic native species such as western scrub jay, California thrasher, canyon wren, black-headed grosbeak, ash-throated flycatcher and acorn woodpecker. Rock outcroppings on the High Trail Property offer vital nesting and roosting areas for raptors, such as red-tailed hawks.

Because of its water clarity and purity, Cold Creek has a healthy population of amphibians, including newts and California and Pacific tree frogs. Cold Creek is a subwatershed to the Malibu Creek watershed, which drains a 109-square mile area of the Santa Monica Mountains and Simi Hills into Malibu Lagoon and Santa Monica Bay. Malibu Creek and Lagoon provide important habitat for birds migrating along the Pacific Flyway. The Malibu Creek watershed also provides habitat for southern steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*, a federally-listed endangered species), tidewater goby, Pacific lamprey, striped mullet and arroyo chub.

The High Trail Property contains 0.4 stream miles of two perennial, blue line tributaries that feed Cold Creek. The property also includes a wetland formed by a perennial spring and geologic diversity represented by five soil classifications. The topography of the Cold Creek High Trail Property is severe, with an elevation gradient that ranges from 787 feet above mean sea level (MSL) at the bottom of the stream to 1710 feet above MSL along Stunt Road. (The gradient of the Cold Creek Preserve as a whole ranges from 787 feet to 2526 feet at the top of the ridgeline). The diversity of soil types, an elevation variation of 1000 feet and varying aspects create many more niches and micro-climate areas than would be expected from the size of the property. The characteristics of the High Trail Property suggest that it could be particularly valuable in the face of climate change, because it offers movement corridors and other linkages that would allow species to migrate or disperse to more favorable habitat as climate conditions change. The extensive topographic relief of the High Trail Property provides areas that could be very resilient to climate impacts because they feature a variety of exposures, habitat niches, and vegetation communities across gradients.

With the exception of hiking trails that traverse the site, the Cold Creek High Trail Property has historically remained free of development. A review of aerial photographs from 1928 to the present as part of a 2008 Phase I environment assessment show only unpaved roads and a shared driveway on the site. Land in the vicinity of the site is sparsely populated with residences generally located only along or near major roads. One adjacent property to the south is used for residential purposes but neighboring parcels to the north, east and south are undeveloped. The High Trail Property itself is zoned light agriculture, a classification that permits single family residences and agricultural crop production. All parcels are within the M2 (Mountain Land) category of the County's Local Coastal Program, which generally restricts development to one residential unit per 20 acres. But since the subject parcels are smaller than 20 acres and either have certificates of compliance or are existing separate lots, they are considered 12 separate legal parcels.

The Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, which surrounds the project site, is the nation's largest urban national park, encompassing 153,000 acres of scenic mountains and coastline within Los Angeles and Ventura counties. The SMMNRA is home to a number of rare and endangered species, such as steelhead trout; it also provides habitat for over 450 vertebrate

animal species, including mountain lion, coyote, and bobcat. The park includes more than 500 miles of recreation trails and 47 miles of beaches, all adjacent to a metropolitan region of more than 17 million people. The SMMNRA was created in 1978 as a unit of the National Park System but it is managed through a cooperative partnership among federal, state, local, private, and nonprofit groups who share stewardship of the Santa Monica Mountains. Parks within the National Recreation Area draw over 33 million annual visitors. People of all ages and backgrounds visit the SMMNRA to hike, horseback ride, bicycle, camp, and surf.

Project history

The Coastal Conservancy has been a partner with the MRT and other resource agencies in the Santa Monica Mountains for three decades. The MRT was actually formed by the Conservancy and the Coastal Commission in 1981 in order to facilitate a mitigation and transfer of development credit program within the Santa Monicas. The area then included a large number of substandard, poorly located, but potentially developable lots. To counter the threat of development, the Conservancy developed a Cold Creek watershed lot retirement program and helped create the MRT as a local land trust to carry out the program and protect conservation lands in the mountains. Since that time, the MRT has become the largest non-governmental landowner in the Santa Monicas. It has helped protect over 6,000 acres, consisting of over 350 parcels that are now owned by MRT or government agencies to protect wildlife corridors and buffer critical habitat areas.

The Cold Creek Preserve was created in 1984 when its original 525 acres were transferred to the MRT by The Nature Conservancy. Today the Preserve encompasses 1,065 acres, all of which are owned or managed by the MRT. During the past 25 years, the Coastal Conservancy has contributed more than \$1,775,000 in funding to the MRT for planning or acquisition projects related to the Cold Creek Preserve. The Conservancy has also provided grants totaling \$241,000 to the MRT for control of invasive species in the Malibu Creek watershed.

In addition to the MRT's trail and habitat management programs in the Cold Creek Preserve and other properties, the MRT conducts a series of educational programs on the Preserve. For two decades, its Cold Creek Docents have given environmental education hikes to over 5,000 children a year at the Cold Creek Preserve and UCLA's adjacent Stunt Ranch Reserve. The Docents' comprehensive field trip and classroom programs help children discover nature---some for the first time---by engaging them in the natural, scientific, cultural and historic aspects of the mountains through hands-on programs that include geology, Chumash studies, ethnobotany and chaparral ecology.

As part of its adaptive management program for the Cold Creek High Trail Property and other components of the Cold Creek Preserve, the MRT intends to participate in a regional effort being organized by the National Park Service to monitor the impacts of climate change in the Santa Monica Mountains and vicinity. Among other things, the monitoring effort will track changes in phenology (such as budding and migration) and community structure. It will build on extensive baseline data that the Park Service and its partners have collected on flora, fauna, water and other ecological features for the Cold Creek watershed and the region. To help fund this effort, the MRT will utilize a non-wasting endowment of \$110,000 that the Corps of Engineers will establish as a part of the in-lieu fee mitigation funding that will also help finance the purchase of

the Cold Creek High Trail Property (see “Project Funding” below). The monitoring program will be one component of the MRT’s comprehensive adaptive management program to address climate impacts. That effort will include the early detection of and rapid response to exotic, invasive species at key migration points to remove and block their invasions so that the resources of the Cold Creek Preserve are better able to resist, or are more resilient to, the influences of climate change.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$573,000
County of Los Angeles	1,300,000
Army Corps of Engineers in-lieu fee program	512,500
Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund	120,000
Private donations	45,500
Mountains Restoration Trust	\$7,500
Total project cost	\$2,558,500

The anticipated source of funds for this project is an appropriation to the Conservancy from Proposition 84---the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Public Resources Code Sections 75001 *et seq*). Consistent with the purposes specified in Section 75060 of that bond act, the acquisition of the Cold Creek High Trail Property would protect natural habitat values of coastal lands in the Santa Monica Mountains, as well as promote access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources of the state.

In evaluating acquisition projects for the purpose of natural resource protection under Proposition 84, the Conservancy is directed by Section 75071 of the bond act to give priority to projects that meet one or more of the five criteria specified in Section 75071. Acquisition of the Cold Creek High Trail Property by the MRT would meet at least three of those criteria:

1. “Properties that link to, or contribute to linking, existing protected areas with other large blocks of protected habitat. . .” [§75071(a)]. As discussed above, the acquisition of the Cold Creek High Trail Property would help protect a critical wildlife corridor within the Santa Monica Mountains linking Topanga State Park and Malibu Creek State Park.
2. “Properties that support relatively large areas of under-protected major habitat types” [§75071(c)]. The proposed acquisition would help protect a segment of coastal sage scrub, an ecological community whose losses in Southern California have exceeded 90 percent of its original extent.
3. “Properties for which there is a non-state matching contribution toward the acquisition, restoration, stewardship or management costs.” [§75071(e)]. As shown above, the federal, local and private contributions toward this acquisition would represent more than 77 percent of the purchase price for the entire 78 acres.

As also mandated by Section 75071(f) of the bond act, Conservancy staff has submitted to the Resources Agency, and has posted on the Conservancy's website, an explanation of how the proposed acquisitions meet the criteria established in Section 75071.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 8 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31350-31356), regarding reservation of significant coastal resource areas.

PRC §31350 vests in the Conservancy the authority to ensure the reservation of significant coastal resource areas that would otherwise be lost to public use. Under Section 31351, the Conservancy is to cooperate with nonprofit organizations [such as the Mountains Restoration Trust] to ensure the reservation of such properties for park, recreational and wildlife habitat purposes in order to meet the objectives of a certified local coastal plan or other local plan. As discussed below under the section "Consistency with Local Coastal Program Policies," the acquisitions of the Cold Creek High Trail Property would be consistent with the policies of the Local Coastal Program for the Santa Monica Mountains of the County of Los Angeles.

The proposed authorization would also be consistent with PRC §31352, which states that the Conservancy may award a grant to a nonprofit organization for a purpose specified in Section 31351 if (as is the case with this project) that organization would otherwise be unable, due to limited financial resources, to acquire such property. Without the Conservancy funding proposed here, the MRT would lack the additional funding needed to acquire the Cold Creek High Trail Property.

In accordance with Section 31117 of the Public Resources Code, the Conservancy has notified the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy of the Coastal Conservancy's proposed funding of this acquisition.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2007 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective G** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project would secure property that would facilitate development of inland trails to connect with the Coastal Trail.

Consistent with **Goal 4, Objective A** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project would protect over 78 acres of significant coastal watershed lands. Consistent with the strategies identified in the Strategic Plan, this project would connect existing protected lands to provide large, contiguous blocks of habitat; protect habitat and wildlife corridors; and help implement a regional plan for natural resource protection. The MRT has been identified as an appropriate entity to own and manage the property.

Consistent with **Goal 5, Objective C** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project would preserve wildlife corridors between core habitat areas along the coastal slopes of the Santa Monica Mountains.

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective B** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project would help preserve an important coastal watershed of the Santa Monica Mountains.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY

The proposed project is consistent with the *Coastal Conservancy Policy Statement on Climate Change*, adopted on June 4, 2009, which recognizes that "protection, restoration, and enhancement of habitats, ecosystem processes, and open space is essential to minimizing threats from global warming to California's biodiversity. . ." By securing significant linkages among existing habitat areas within the Santa Monica Mountains, the proposed acquisition will protect potential migration corridors, promote the survival of listed and other native species and biodiversity, and help preserve key ecosystem processes within the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area.

In addition, the Policy Statement on Climate Change directs Conservancy staff to consider climate change in evaluating which projects to fund and the manner in which projects are selected. Staff has taken into account the relevant considerations in connection with its proposal for funding the acquisition of the Cold Creek High Trail Property, as detailed in the discussion in both the "Site Description" and "Project History" sections above and in the "Consistency with Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria & Guidelines" section, below.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on September 20, 2007, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

- 1. Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
- 2. Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
- 3. Support of the public:** The project is supported by Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, State Senator Fran Pavley, Assembly Member Julia Brownley, US Congressman Henry Waxman, and others. Letters of support are provided in Exhibit 6.
- 4. Location:** The proposed project is located within the coastal zone of Los Angeles County.
- 5. Need:** Acquisition of the Cold Creek High Trail Property is needed to help complete the Cold Creek Preserve and protect a critical linkage between core habitat areas within the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. Without funding from the Conservancy, this acquisition would not be possible in time to close on the property by December 1 as required by the MRT's purchase and sale agreement with the sellers. Without such funding, the seller will terminate escrow and the MRT will lose almost \$2 million in matching funds for the acquisition.
- 6. Greater-than-local interest:** This project will add to and connect preserves within the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, the nation's largest urban national park. The

park includes more than 500 miles of recreation trails and 47 miles of beaches, all adjacent to a metropolitan region of more than 17 million people. Parks within the national recreation area draw over 33 million annual visitors. The Cold Creek Preserve itself hosts thousands of school children annually from across the Los Angeles Basin to the MRT's educational programs. The Santa Monica Mountains also support a number of rare and endangered species, such as the steelhead trout, and provide habitat for over 450 vertebrate animal species, including coyote, bobcat, and mountain lion.

- 7. Sea level rise vulnerability:** The elevation of the Cold Creek High Trail Property ranges from 780 feet above mean sea level (MSL) to 1710 feet above MSL. As a result, the property is not located in an area considered vulnerable to future sea level rise by the end of this century.

Additional Criteria

- 8. Urgency:** The MRT's purchase and sale agreement with the sellers specifies that the acquisition must close no later than December 1, 2010. If the MRT is unable to acquire the Property, these parcels face a significant threat of residential development, which could fragment habitats, grade landforms, and strip native vegetation and cover in much greater excess than the actual size of the building footprint.
- 9. Resolution of more than one issue:** Acquisition of the Cold Creek High Trail Property will address coastal and watershed resource protection, habitat restoration, endangered species recovery, and public recreation and access.
- 10. Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
- 11. Readiness:** The MRT and the sellers have negotiated a purchase and sale agreement for the properties and are prepared to close by December 1, 2010 if adequate funding can be secured.
- 12. Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** As discussed in the "Project History" section above, the Conservancy has partnered with the MRT for 30 years to protect this critical part of the Santa Monica Mountains. Acquisition of the Cold Creek High Trail Property would be another step toward realizing the MRT and Conservancy's restoration and protection plan for the Cold Creek watershed.
- 13. Cooperation:** The SMMNRA is a cooperative venture among a number of agencies and nonprofit organizations, including the MRT, the National Park Service, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, California State Parks, the County of Los Angeles, the Mountains Restoration and Conservation Authority, and the University of California Natural Reserve System.
- 14. Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The proposed project involves only a transfer of title to existing open space and would not directly contribute to the generation of greenhouse gas emissions. The preservation of the Cold Creek High Trail Property as habitat and open space will help sequester carbon in the Santa Monica Mountains, although in amounts that are difficult to estimate at this time.
- 15. Vulnerability from climate impacts other than sea level rise:** As noted in the "Project History" section below, the MRT intends to participate in an extensive regional monitoring

and adaptive management program to address climate change. That program will include monitoring changes in phenology and community structure over time and the early detection and rapid response to invasive species to promote resistance and resilience to climate impacts.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The project is consistent with both the proposed and current Santa Monica Mountains Coastal Zone Plan of the County of Los Angeles, which designates Cold Creek as a significant watershed and environmentally sensitive habitat area and includes policies to protect indigenous riparian, oak woodland and associated upland habitats. The acquisition project is a priority of the current Work Program of the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project. It would also help achieve some key acquisition priorities of the Cold Creek Enhancement Plan and earlier acquisition and restoration plans for the Cold Creek Watershed prepared by the MRT under Conservancy grants. The purchase of the Cold Creek High Trail Property would be consistent with other local plans, including the Los Angeles County Interagency Trail Master Plan and the National Park Service's Land Protection Plan for the SMMNRA.

**CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN/
STATE WATER QUALITY CONTROL PLAN:**

The Malibu Creek watershed is the subject of a 1995 *Malibu Creek Watershed Natural Resources Plan*, developed by the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The plan addresses watershed resources, water quality and quantity issues and pollution reduction strategies for the Malibu Creek watershed. One of its highlights is a list of "44 action items" which were developed by stakeholders through a collaborative process to be the guiding principles for restoration of the watershed. Acquisition of the Cold Creek High Trail Property would be consistent with at least two of those principles: purchasing high priority watershed protection areas (Action Item 33) and protecting corridors between isolated open lands (Action Item 35).

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The acquisition of the Cold Creek High Trail Property is categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15313 and 15325 of 14 Cal. Code of Regulations (CCR). Section 15313 exempts acquisition of lands for fish and wildlife conservation purposes and for preserving access to public lands and waters where the purpose of the acquisition is to preserve the land in its natural condition. The proposed project is similarly exempt pursuant to 14 CCR Section 15325 because it involves a transfer of ownership in order to preserve existing natural conditions and open space.

Upon Conservancy approval of the proposed authorization, staff will file a Notice of Exemption for the project.