



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

LAND USE AGENDA ITEM

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

NORA VARGAS
First District

JOEL ANDERSON
Second District

TERRA LAWSON-REMER
Third District

MONICA MONTGOMERY STEPPE
Fourth District

JIM DESMOND
Fifth District

DATE: April 10, 2024 and May 22, 2024

09

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

MOUNT OLYMPUS COUNTY PRESERVE – APPROVE ACQUISITION OF APPROXIMATELY 220 ACRES OF OPEN SPACE LAND AND RELATED CEQA EXEMPTION (MORITZKY TRUST) (4/10/2024 – SET HEARING; 5/22/2024 – HOLD HEARING) (DISTRICT: 5)

OVERVIEW

The Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) enhances the quality of life in San Diego County by preserving significant natural resources. A core aspect of DPR's conservation program is the acquisition of open space lands that support sensitive species and habitats. DPR has identified a 222-acre property (Property) adjacent to the existing Mount Olympus County Preserve in Pala-Pauma. If acquired, the existing 1,200-acre Mount Olympus County Preserve would be expanded to over 1,400 acres, providing large, connecting chaparral habitat for deer, mountain lions, and other sensitive species.

This acquisition enhances conservation under the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) set by federal and State requirements for special status species conservation and supports multiple County of San Diego (County) sustainability goals, habitats and biodiversity, biological connectivity, greenhouse gas reductions, and benefits to water and air quality.

Through the County's MSCP Program, the County has acquired over 46,200 acres of open space land for conservation within the three MSCP Subareas. The acreage of preserve lands within the three MSCP Plan Areas include approximately: 14,000 acres within the South County Plan Area, 25,000 acres within the draft North County Plan Area, and 7,200 acres within the proposed East County Plan Area. This acquisition would add 222 acres to the draft North County Plan Area and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 282 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent per year. Additionally, conservation of the property provides flood control benefits and protection of water quality.

The County implemented an Option Agreement with the Moritzky Trust (Seller) for the purchase of the Property for the appraised value of \$1,200,000 (approximately \$5,400/acre). The appraised value of the Property considers existing open space easements on the Property, which limit the Property's development potential.

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Today's request is for the Board of Supervisors (Board) to set a hearing for May 22, 2024 to consider approval of the purchase of the Property and direct the Clerk of the Board to provide public notice of the hearing. If the Board approves the request, on May 22, 2024, after making the necessary findings, the Board will be requested to authorize the purchase of the Property. The total one-time County cost, including property acquisition, staff time, and initial stewardship is \$1,640,500. Funds for this request are included in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023-24 Operational Plan of the MSCP Acquisition Fund. The annual costs to manage the Property are \$67,740, including ongoing stewardship, Resource Management Plan update, and supervision of the preserve. These ongoing costs are included in the FY 2023-24 Operational Plan of the Department of Parks and Recreation.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

On April 10, 2024:

1. Set a hearing for May 22, 2024, at which time the Board of Supervisors (Board) may authorize the Director, Department of General Services (DGS), to exercise the option to purchase Assessor's Parcel Numbers (APNs) 109-351-16, -18 and -19 for the appraised value of \$1,200,000.
2. Direct the Clerk of the Board to provide notice of the May 22, 2024 hearing via publication and posting as required by law.

If, on April 10, 2024, the Board takes the actions recommended in Items 1-2 above, then on May 22, 2024:

1. Find that the proposed acquisition of APNs 109-351-16, -18 and -19 is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15301, 15304, 15311, 15313, 15316 and 15325 of the CEQA Guidelines.
2. Authorize the Director, DGS, or designee, to exercise the option to purchase APNs 109-351-16, -18 and -19 for the appraised value of \$1,200,000.
3. Authorize the Director, DGS, or designee, to execute all escrow and related documents necessary to complete the purchase of APNs 109-351-16, -18 and -19.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The Department of Parks and Recreation conservation program's acquisition of properties with high-quality habitat is anticipated to result in positive public health impacts by improving water and air quality for all residents. The Property is within the Pala-Pauma and Rainbow community areas and its acquisition will contribute acreage to multiple sustainability efforts, including expanding the draft North County Multiple Species Conservation Plan preserve area by 222 acres and reducing greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 282 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent per year.

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SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The proposed acquisition supports multiple County of San Diego (County) Sustainability Goals. Acquisition of the 222-acre property supports County Sustainability Goal No. 3 and the County’s Climate Action Plan by contributing to greenhouse gas reductions by approximately 282 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent per year through preservation of open space. The proposed acquisition site supports County Sustainability Goal No. 4 by expanding opportunities for community members to access outdoor recreation and nature and County Sustainability Goal No. 6 by expanding open space adjacent to native ecosystems and habitats.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds for this request are included in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023-24 Operational Plan of the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) Acquisition Fund. If approved on May 22, 2024, this request will result in total one-time project costs for the Property of \$1,640,500 in FY 2023-24, itemized as follows: \$1,200,000 for property acquisition; \$62,500 for staff time and appraisal reports to complete the transaction; \$8,000 for closing and title costs; and, \$370,000 in one-time land improvement costs (which includes \$348,000 for the preparation of a preserve specific Resource Management Plan and initial species monitoring, and \$22,000 to conduct initial stewardship that features signage, access control, and vegetation management, land surveying, and other supplies and services and ongoing management). The funding source is available prior year General Fund fund balance (\$1,640,500).

Total annual ongoing costs for assessments, monitoring, and operations and management of the Property are estimated at \$67,740, itemized as follows: \$7,940 for fixed charged assessments for vector control, road maintenance, and water availability; approximately \$12,800 for adaptive management and biological monitoring; and, \$47,000 for annual total operating costs for managing the site. Ongoing costs are included in the FY 2023-24 Operational Plan in the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR). The funding source is existing DPR General Purpose Revenue. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

The Department of Parks and Recreation’s (DPR) mission is to enhance the quality of life in San Diego County by providing exceptional parks and recreation experiences and preserving significant natural resources. The San Diego region has one of the most diverse habitats in the United States with more than 200 special-status species inhabiting the region. These species are listed or candidates to be listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act, California Endangered Species Act, State Species of Special Concern, or are found on other watch lists. In support of DPR’s mission and to conserve these biologically valuable native habitats and wildlife for current

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and future generations to enjoy, DPR focuses on conservation through many different program elements. A key element in DPR's conservation program is acquisition, management, and monitoring of open space lands to protect and preserve sensitive resources and to provide additional opportunities for passive recreation to enhance the quality of life for San Diego residents and build healthier communities.

The County of San Diego (County) identified 222 acres of open space land (Property) in the Pala-Pauma and Rainbow communities that met the criteria for conservation. The Property contributes to regional conservation due to the high-quality habitat and biodiversity, biological connectivity, access, and value. The Property is directly adjacent to the existing Mount Olympus County Preserve. The Property provides connectivity to public lands by expanding the existing Mount Olympus County Preserve to the south. If acquired, the existing 1,200-acre Mount Olympus County Preserve would be expanded to more than 1,400 acres, providing large, contiguous chaparral habitat for deer, mountain lions, and other sensitive species.

This acquisition meets the DPR standard for conservation under the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) set by federal and State requirements for special status species conservation. DPR evaluates multiple factors when considering open space land for potential acquisition and inclusion into County Preserves, including biology, connectivity, accessibility, and value. The Property includes quality habitat that supports regional biodiversity and is within the draft North County MSCP Plan Area. Connectivity is another factor DPR considers. The Property's connectivity to the existing Mount Olympus County Preserve makes long-term management and stewardship more efficient because the same operational team can perform those functions. The contiguity between the Property and Mount Olympus County Preserve allows for conservation of the habitat and wildlife corridors. Accessibility to acquired lands is another factor considered. DPR must be able to access all its lands to meet stewardship and monitoring requirements as well as potential access to the public for passive recreation and environmental education, where appropriate. The Property is accessible for proper stewardship, monitoring, and management needs. Lastly, DPR considers financial and economic value to ensure that public resources are wisely invested. The value of the Property is \$1,200,000 (approximately \$5,400/acre), which has been determined to be fair and reasonable.

On October 28, 2020 (6), the Board directed staff to develop a plan for the draft North County MSCP Plan Area, like the plan that is currently in place for the South County MSCP Subarea Plan. The draft North County MSCP Plan covers the northwestern portion of the unincorporated area and is anticipated to be complete by Fiscal Year (FY) 2025-26. The eastern portion of the unincorporated area is covered by the future East County MSCP. Each MSCP Plan is designed to meet the needs of the habitats and species located within its respective Plan area's unique geography. All three MSCP Plans comprise the County's MSCP Program.

Through the County's MSCP Program, the County has acquired over 46,200 acres of open space land for conservation within the three MSCP Subareas. The acreage of preserve lands within the three MSCP Plan Areas include approximately: 14,000 acres within the South County Plan Area,

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25,000 acres within the draft North County Plan Area, and 7,200 acres within the proposed East County Plan Area. This acquisition would add 222 acres to the draft North County Plan Area and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 282 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent per year.

DPR’s analysis of potential open space acquisitions includes a sustainability perspective with a cross-departmental Acquisition Roundtable team consisting of staff from the Land Use & Environment Group, the Department of General Services (DGS), the Department of Public Works (DPW), the Department of Environmental Health and Quality (DEHQ), Planning & Development Services (PDS), and Agriculture, Weights and Measures. This coordination will ensure alignment with the County’s sustainability efforts including habitat and species conservation, connectivity, public access, flood and stormwater control, fire risk reduction, groundwater conservation, water and air quality, and achievement of greenhouse gas emission reductions and other climate goals under the Climate Action Plan (CAP) update and Regional Decarbonization Framework. The Property was presented to the Acquisition Roundtable and received support from PDS, DEHQ, and DPW as the proposed acquisition of open space would have positive benefits to these programs. DGS is an Internal Service department and supports the real estate tasks associated with the Acquisition Roundtable. PDS confirmed that acquiring this property supports the 2018 CAP Measure T-1.1 goal of preserving 438 acres of open space land per year that could otherwise be developed and reducing greenhouse gas emissions as well as adding preserve acreage to the draft North County Plan Area. DEHQ reviewed the site and confirmed that it is environmentally sound. Additionally, conservation of the property provides flood control benefits and protection of water quality.

Today’s request is for the Board to set a hearing for May 22, 2024 to consider approval of the purchase of the Property and direct the Clerk of the Board to provide public notice of the hearing. If the Board approves the request, on May 22, 2024, after making the necessary findings, the Board will be requested to authorize the purchase of the Property. The total one-time County cost, including property acquisition, staff time, and initial stewardship is \$1,640,500. Funds for this request are included in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023-24 Operational Plan of the MSCP Acquisition Fund. The annual costs to manage the Property are \$67,740, including ongoing stewardship, Resource Management Plan update, and supervision of the preserve. These ongoing costs are included in the FY 2023-24 Operational Plan of the Department of Parks and Recreation.

ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

Acquisition of the Property and associated actions are exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Sections 15301 (Existing Facilities), 15304 (Minor Alterations to Land), 15311 (Accessory Structures), 15313 (Acquisition of Lands for Wildlife Conservation Purposes), 15316 (Transfer of Ownership of Land in Order to Create Parks), and 15325 (Transfers of Ownership of Interest in Land to Preserve Existing Natural Conditions and Historical Resources).

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Section 15301 is applicable because initial stewardship activities may include repair of existing fencing and signage. Additionally, fuel management activities will be performed to ensure conformance with applicable fire code standards. Sections 15304 and 15311 are applicable because new on-site signage and the associated minor land disturbance may be needed. The Sections 15313 and 15325 are applicable because the land is being acquired for preservation of natural resources. Section 15316 is applicable because the land is being acquired for park purposes, the land is in natural condition, and no management plan has been prepared.

The project is not subject to any of the exceptions to Categorical Exemptions listed in Section 15300.2 of the CEQA Guidelines. Any new uses of the Property will be subject to funding and environmental review.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's proposed action to acquire land for supports the Sustainability Initiative in the County of San Diego's 2024–2029 Strategic Plan by protecting natural resources, diverse habitats, and sensitive species as well as providing recreational opportunities that enrich residents' quality of life.

Respectfully submitted,



DAHVIA LYNCH
Interim Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT(S)

Attachment A – Location Map

Attachment B – Site Map