

Whittier hires consultants to study drilling in habitat area

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WHITTIER — Two consulting firms have been hired to advise the City Council as it considers a conditional use permit for Matrix Oil, which plans an oil extraction project on seven acres of the city's 1,000-acre open space reserve in the Whittier Hills.

To assure that native plant and wildlife are protected in the habitat, the city hired Community Conservancy International to review the project and monitor it for the first two years should council approve the oil drilling request, City Manager Steve Helvey said.

Matrix Oil of Santa Barbara last fall obtained a lease from the city to drill for oil, natural gas and water on the site, but can't proceed until the CUP is approved.

That might not be until later this year when the studies are complete and a public hearing is held, Helvey said.

The contract with Community Conservancy International is an extension of one approved in 2009 to review the Unocal and Chevron properties for a fee of \$15,000, Helvey said in a written report to the City Council.

The firm's new duties are to review the proposed Matrix project and report back to City Council by Aug. 1, Helvey said.

That fee will be \$65,000 plus up to \$10,000 for expenses. Should the project be approved, Community Conservancy International will receive \$120,000 over the next two years for monitoring the project.

Monitoring would include monthly checks on the site to review extraction operations in the habitat and make quarterly reports of findings and recommendations, Helvey said.

He noted that the initial fee will come from the city's general fund. If the extraction project is approved funds for monitoring would be determined at that time.

The second contract is with Esther Feldman and Associates to represent the city should issues arise on the use of Los Angeles County Proposition A funds, which went to purchase much of the wilderness area.

Because the initial county agreement called for open space, changes may be needed for the seven-acre drilling site, Helvey said.

Feldman will work for eight months at \$15,000 a month for a total of \$120,000. That fee will be paid by Matrix Oil, he added.