

Oases amid the concrete

EDITORIAL

IT'S September and the chaparral-covered hills are brown as dirt, choked with thick, dirty yellow brush. Yet, despite their dormant appearance, they stare back at us with life as it used to be.

These mountains, with their rugged slopes and hidden canyons, define our region. Perhaps, they are more integral to us than any other piece of wild land is to another part of Southern California. To let them disappear would be cheating ourselves, our children and our grandchildren.

But that's what is happening. Drive south on the Orange (57) Freeway and there's another ridgeline that has turned to dust and soon, into red-tiled roofs.

It takes longer to escape up Highway 2 as the suburban sprawl extends further north. And soon, the hills of north Azusa will be consumed by a massive housing project.

Change direction. Pan over to the Whittier/Puente Hills — a marvelous east-west expanse of wild lands that stretches from the San Gabriel River (605) Freeway to the Riverside (91) Freeway in Orange County and beyond; a strip of untouched land that serves as a corridor for wild animals and birds to roam, hunt and reproduce.

This amazing vestige has been saved, parcel by parcel, (including the 400,000-acre Chino Hills State Park) by the hard work of environmental groups such as Hills For Everyone, and by many elected officials.

Last week, the Assembly, Senate and Gov. Pete Wilson agreed to use \$3 million from the state budget surplus to

help pay for the final link: a 32-acre Coal Canyon parcel that, if purchased from a Fontana council member, would complete a land bridge for wild animals that live in the midst of millions of people.

We are pleased the governor saw the importance of the funding and withheld his blue pencil. And we are thankful

Thanks to state officials' foresight, the wildlife corridor stretching through the Whittier/La Puente hills will finally be completed.

to longtime supporters, such as Assemblyman Martin Gallegos, D-Baldwin Park and Sen. Hilda Solis, D-La Puente. Solis has played a role in preserving other Puente

Hills parcels.

It is also interesting to note that this small but significant purchase came at the same time the Legislature and the governor were finalizing plans to buy the Headwaters Forest, 7,500 acres of ancient redwoods in Humboldt County. Though many of us would likely drive north to the redwoods with backpack and camper in tow before we would visit Chino Hills State Park a few miles east, we believe both should be preserved.

It's truly a great time for preserving our hills — and the forest up north — from the permanent scar of development or logging. And using part of the state surplus now for these purposes was a wise and beneficial move.

We know, as we look up again at these brown grasses and oak-studded landscapes, that there lies the promise of green and new life with the rains of winter.

Either way, dry or wet, brown or green, we are glad at least some of the hills will remain locked in that natural cycle that preceded mankind.

Glad for ourselves, our children and our grandchildren.