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**Escrow Closes on Key Ridgelines
Adjacent to Chino Hills State Park**

Brea, California—The second of two acquisitions funded in May 2021 by the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) closed escrow on Wednesday, August 18th, thus permanently protecting 320 acres as parkland. The land, named after its owners: First National Investment Properties (First National), includes ridgelines visible from the popular Lower Aliso Canyon Overlook. In addition, the second and final phase (80 acres) of the Eastbridge acquisitions finished the ridgeline protections identified in Lower Aliso Canyon earlier this summer. Both properties have been on the “must have” list for Hills For Everyone (HFE) and the California Department of Parks and Recreation for over 40 years. The conserved ridgelines now protect two important natural features: the viewshed and the watershed. With the ridgelines and the watershed protected, wildlife are safer from the pollution generated by nearby homes (i.e., pesticides, herbicides, chemicals, etc.).

Both First National and Eastbridge parcels were identified early on during the State’s Feasibility Study for the creation of Chino Hills State Park in the late 1970s. Since the Park was designed along ridgeline boundaries, both of these properties were needed because they contain the majority of the eastern ridgelines of what would become the State Park. Original plans included using the First National land for the main entrance of the Park. Those entrance plans were set aside because the previous property owner was unwilling to sell the land at fair market value (a requirement when using state or federal funds). Instead, the Park’s entrance road was built in Bane Canyon. When the land was purchased by First National, discussions quickly began with The Conservation Fund to protect it in three phases.

“For the last 12 months, Hills For Everyone has worked in tandem with the Fund to secure all the appropriate funding, reviews, documentation, and approvals needed for protecting the land,” said Claire Schlotterbeck, Executive Director of Hills For Everyone. “In fact, it is only because of partnerships that the land is in park status—thanks to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA).”

Funding was secured, along with willing sellers, but State Parks was unwilling to accept ownership. To ensure we didn't miss a long-awaited opportunity, HFE worked closely with MRCA to become an interim owner and manager of the properties. MRCA already owns and manages 400 acres of the Eastbridge property; 320 acres of which closed in July 2020 and the remaining 80 acres closing on June 28, 2021.

These acquisitions not only protect important habitats, but also build on east-west connections between the State Park and Prado Wetlands. These movement corridors are especially important during wildfires when animals need to move between protected areas quickly. Both properties burned in the October 2020 Blue Ridge Fire.

Schlotterbeck added, "These two acquisitions bring us closer to completing the original vision of protecting the ridgelines. We look forward to continuing our partnership with The Conservation Fund and MRCA on the final two phases of the First National acquisitions. Over the last two years 720 acres have been protected because of our efforts and collaboration."

These properties were identified in the Park's General Plan from 1999, and the long-term goal is to add these properties into state ownership to grow Chino Hills State Park. See the acquisition map and photos.

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*For more than 40 years, **Hills For Everyone** has worked to preserve the unique and disappearing landscapes of the Puente-Chino Hills Wildlife Corridor.*