

Hills For Everyone

Friends of the Puente-Chino Hills Wildlife Corridor

Newsletter No. 16

Summer 2006

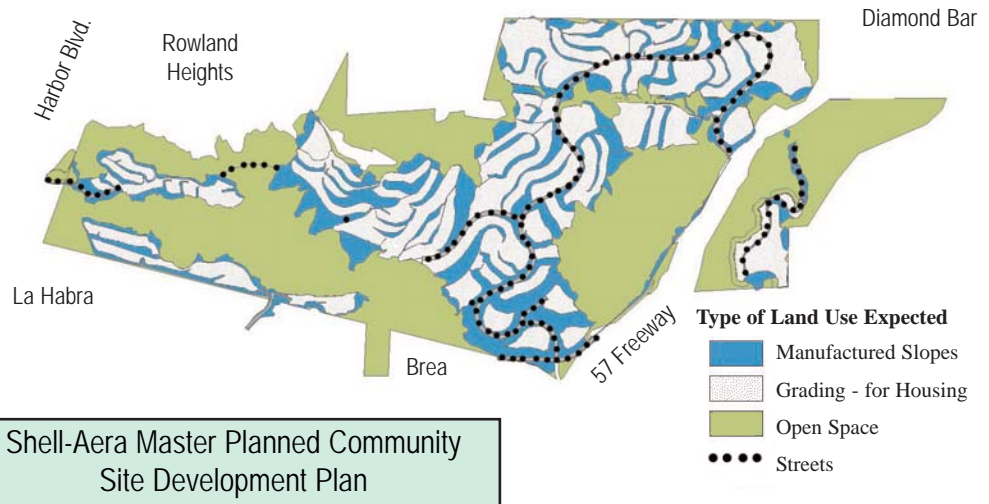


SHELL-AERA PROJECT TRIPPED UP

One of the many steps that Shell-Aera needs to complete as it attempts to gain approval and entitlements for its massive housing project in the hills between Harbor Blvd. and the 57 Freeway is approval by a Los Angeles County Regional Planning Committee called SEATAC.

As you may recall, 90% of Shell's 3,000 acres lies within Los Angeles County and most of that acreage has been classified a "Significant Ecological Area" (SEA). This designation in the L.A. County General Plan recognizes the biological values of the extensive oak and walnut woodlands. SEATAC, the Technical Advisory Committee that advises the L.A. County Planning Commission on projects proposed in SEA's did not approve Shell-Aera's plan. It is our understanding that this outcome is rare. SEATAC stated that Shell-Aera's plan for 3,600 housing units is inconsistent with the values of SEA's. This denial is very good news for those of us working to save the hills.

Shell-Aera now has two choices: (1) proceed to the L.A. County Regional Planning Commission with a County staff report that declares the project out of compliance with the General Plan rules or (2) redesign the project to bring



it into compliance. Shell-Aera has said it will not redesign its plan.

SEATAC has reviewed all of the biological studies that have been written regarding the proposed development. This includes an independent study by the Conservation Biology Institute. Hills For Everyone facilitated the awarding of a grant to the Institute to study the biological significance of the "Missing Middle" of the Puente-Chino Hills Wildlife Corridor. Apparently, the Institute's conclusions were taken seriously by SEATAC and played an important role in the denial of Shell-Aera's project.

Among other things, a project proposed in a SEA should be designed to:

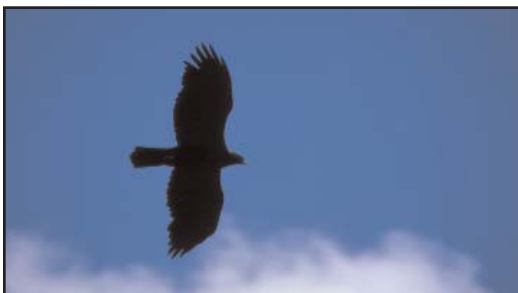
- "Be highly compatible with the biotic resources present, including the setting aside of appropriate and sufficient undisturbed areas, and
- Maintain water bodies, watercourses, and their tributaries in a natural state,

- So that wildlife movement corridors (migratory paths) are left in an undisturbed and natural state; ..."

In essence, Shell-Aera's plans were out of compliance on every one of these criteria.

The project proposes the destruction of 100% of the southern one-third of the property where much of the oil wells and associated processing equipment such as lines, storage tanks, etc. are located. This destruction poses a serious problem because it coincides with the location of valuable habitat including sensitive streambeds, walnut and oak trees and coastal sage scrub.

The Shell-Aera plan also badly fragments the remaining open space. Though the company has made a big deal that nearly 50% (or 1,500 acres) of its land will remain as open space, this "open space" includes landscaped areas, medians, sport fields, and a golf course. The arrangement of biologically



Golden eagles soar over Chino Hills State Park and forage across the hills. Photo by: Dr. Jeff Hansen

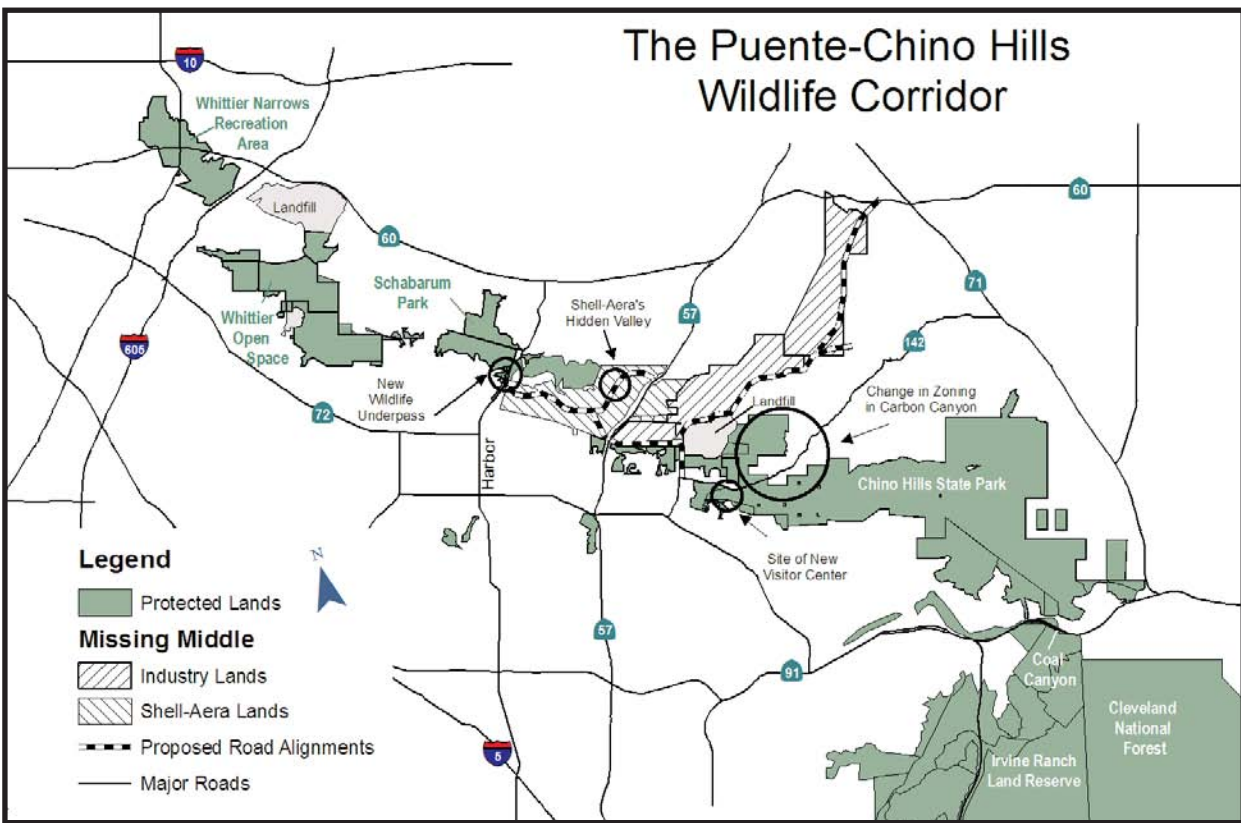
significant natural open space is not very functional. The major valley on the property, Hidden Valley, is where the majority of the housing would be built. Many of the biologists we have consulted believe that Hidden Valley is the more logical movement area for wildlife because of its width and gentle slope.

The usefulness of Shell-Aera's proposed single movement corridor route was also questioned since it was quite narrow and traverses steep terrain. The Committee was particularly critical of the fact that Shell-Aera had not planned for secondary wildlife movement paths and areas where smaller animals could reproduce. While it is easy to think of the Corridor as a pathway for large mammals, in order for it to be functional over the long term the habitat needs to be a large enough area for small animals that may take generations to disperse across. In addition to biological issues, Shell-Aera has yet to solve the traffic impacts of 40,000 additional vehicle trips a day that will be generated by the project.

We continue to highlight the importance of the biological values in the hills because it is the quality and rarity of these natural resources that elevate the interest of decision makers when they decide where to spend money to protect land. Land is not saved from development because it is pretty or because development would cause too much traffic. Money is spent to save land because the land contains biological resources that are worth saving.

Two possible sources for funding the purchase of the Shell-Aera land are emerging. They both hinge on success at the ballot box in November. Stay tuned as more information becomes available.

Supporters of preservation need to continue to urge Shell-Aera to enter into a meaningful discussion about a possible sale. If your homeowner association or community group wants to send postcards to Shell-Aera urging them to sell the land for preservation, Hills For Everyone will supply you with them. Email us at: info@HillsForEveryone.org to let us know how many postcards you need.



USEFUL WEBSITES TO CHECK OUT

Hills For Everyone - Recently upgraded
www.HillsForEveryone.org
www.SaveTheMissingMiddle.org

Chino Hills State Park Interpretive Association
www.ChinoHillsStatePark.org
Hacienda Heights Improvement Association
www.hhia.net

Hillside Open Space Education Coalition
www.hosec.com
Puente-Chino Hills Task Force of the Sierra Club
www.SaveTheWildlifeCorridor.org
Puente Hills Landfill Native Habitat Preservation Authority
www.HabitatAuthority.org
Rowland Heights Community Coordinating Council
www.rhccc.net/firms.com/home.htm

- Hillside Happenings -

CHINO HILLS STATE PARK

For those of you fearing more housing on Carbon Canyon Road next to Carbon Canyon Regional Park in Brea - fear not. Removal of the lemon trees is the first step in the State Park's plan to build a Nature Center there. Some of the lemon wood was bundled and sunk at Lake Perris State Recreation Area to provide habitat for fish. Other wood was donated to Chino Hills State Park Interpretive Association - the volunteer support group for the State Park. The Association will sell it to campers to help prevent wood gathering (for campfires) in the Park. Proceeds will go to interpretive programs.



Claire Schlotterbeck

LOST TREASURE - STEVE FELD

Sometimes in our lives we are blessed by knowing a steady, calm, generous soul. Such was Steve Feld. As the Los Angeles County representative to the Wildlife Corridor Conservation Authority (WCCA) since its inception, he was a leader in the effort to save the hills. As a long time Sierra Club member he arranged scores of outings over the years. These outings served to both provide recreation as well as to raise funds. Steve died of an apparent heart attack on May 7 while on an excursion to South America. With his death, the Wildlife Corridor and those who have worked with Steve to save it, have lost a treasured human being and friend who spoke up for the hills he loved. We are grateful to those who helped shape and share this wonderful man.

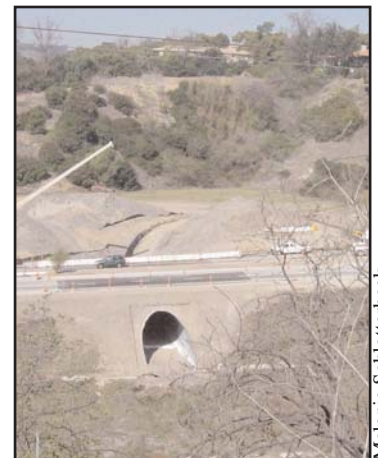


Photo Courtesy of the Feld Family

We'll miss you Steve!

HARBOR BLVD. WILDLIFE PASSAGE

After five years of planning, the new wildlife underpass at Harbor Boulevard in La Habra Heights is now open for wildlife to use. This is the first one of its kind in Los Angeles County. Though the \$1.2 million project caused traffic delays during its construction, the added safety for motorists and wildlife will prove invaluable for all who pass by the area. In fact, we already know that wildlife are using it because of their tracks.



Melanie Schlotterbeck

For those of you who have asked how the wildlife will know to use this underpass, it will likely be proof positive of natural selection. Animals that use the highway will not live to reproduce at the same rate as those who safely cross under the highway, thereby living to see another day and producing offspring.

In Phase II, the Habitat Authority would like to add fencing along Harbor Blvd. to more definitively direct the animals into the tunnel. In the meantime, the revegetation efforts will encourage use of the underpass because it provides cover for smaller animals.

CAN YOUR BUSINESS HELP SAVE THE HILLS?

Kudos to Nancy Wells and Diane Caliva of Tarbell Realtors in Chino Hills. For every closed listing or sale they make, they will donate \$500 to Hills For Everyone. If you know anyone who will soon be listing a house in the eastern part of the hills, email Nancy or Diane as follows: nlwells@tarbell.com or dianecaliva@tarbell.com.

As a point of history, back in 1981 Nancy pulled together the sale of the very first property that was secured for Chino Hills State Park. Diane served as treasurer for "Save Our Canyons." This group helped pass Measure U in Chino Hills, which restricts the City from increasing housing over the General Plan level without a vote of the residents.

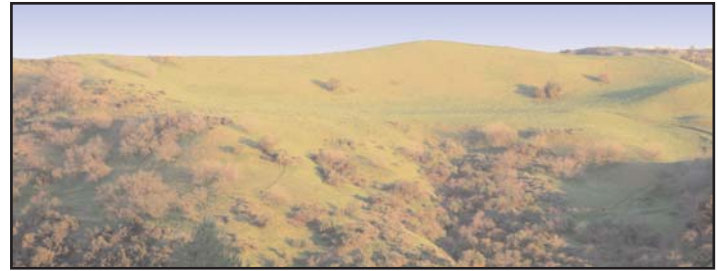
If you have a business that can actively support the hills, let us know and we will highlight it as well.

STRICTER STANDARDS FOR BREA HILLSIDES?

In 2000, residents in Brea stood up to tell their City Council that they wanted better protection of the hillsides. This message had been sent many times during the previous 15 years - in the visioning for the new downtown, in the Brea Project and at every city sponsored gathering asking for residents' input. Though Measure N did not succeed at the ballot box, it succeeded in waking city leaders up to the reality that unless they took action, the natural hillsides treasured by so many people would be covered with houses and shopping centers and lost forever. The City responded admirably in many ways:

- Brea joined with other cities to support preservation of the undeveloped hills in our area.
- A strong ridgeline ordinance was adopted.
- They reduced housing density across the board in the hillsides to acknowledge that additional road capacity was no longer on the books to support more houses.
- With strong community input, the General Plan was updated and contains policies that reflect community values of preservation. It also calculates housing density based on steepness of slope in the hills within the City's Sphere of Influence.

Since 1985 development in Brea's Carbon Canyon area has been governed by the Carbon Canyon Specific Plan that allowed an optimistic potential of 1,685 units.



Melanie Schlotterbeck

Locals call it God's chair; geologists call it an unstable hill.

Plan is closer to 840. For example, one project currently working its way through Brea's approval process proposes about half the allowable density.

Brea chose not to apply the new strict General Plan standards to Carbon Canyon until it undertook further environmental review. That review is now complete and the constraints of traffic congestion, and slope steepness and instability are finally being acknowledged. When the standards that are in place for other hills in Brea are applied to Carbon Canyon, the allowable density drops to about 103 units.

Good reasons to limit development in Carbon Canyon abound. With slopes averaging 36% and fire trucks needing grades of no more than 10%, it is difficult to ensure public safety. With only one road in and out of the area (and rated at Level F), public safety is jeopardized further. With landslide potential high, Brea hopes to protect future home buyers and taxpayers from paying the price that cities like Anaheim Hills, Diamond Bar, Yorba Linda and Laguna Beach are paying.

Inflammatory and erroneous newspaper editorials have politicized this land use issue. The Brea Planning Commission is currently considering the changes that will bring Carbon Canyon into compliance with the rest of the City, but the City Council will ultimately decide Carbon Canyon's fate.

Steepness of slope was not considered when this number was developed. Rather, planners treated the Canyon as if it were flat land. A more realistic estimate under the Specific

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NEWSLETTER RECIPIENTS

If you don't know why you are receiving this newsletter, you either donated funds, signed a postcard or live in a neighborhood impacted by projects covered in this issue. If you wish to be removed from the list: email us at info@HillsForEveryone.org or call 714-687-1555 or and give us your name and address.



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**Want 40,000 more cars on our roads?
 Neither do we !**