

Hills For Everyone

Friends of the
Puente-Chino Hills Wildlife Corridor



Newsletter No. 29

Fall 2013

Puente Hills Landfill to Close: Park Planning to Begin



Looking toward downtown in LA with the landfill on the right and protected lands of the Puente Hills Preserve on the left.

By: Michael Hughes

The 56 year old Puente Hills Landfill is finally closing. For many neighbors, it's been a long and difficult struggle and October 31st can't come soon enough. Originally opened as a private landfill, the Los Angeles County Sanitation District purchased 1,214 acres of the original landfill property from the Pellisser family. In 1981, an additional 151 acres were added to bring the landfill to its current total of 1,365 acres.

Upset by the ongoing impacts to the local wilderness and wildlife, Hacienda Heights residents fought the landfill extension in 1992. As a result, one condition for continued operation was the creation of a mechanism to mitigate the impacts of the landfill. And so the Puente Hills Habitat Preservation Authority was created.

For the past 20 years the Authority has received one dollar for each ton of trash dumped at the landfill, with funds used to protect, preserve, and restore the hills in the vicinity of the landfill. The Habitat Authority now manages approximately 3,860 acres of preserved public open space, of which 1,878 is owned by the Authority. Many of the residents in communities surrounding the landfill are celebrating the end of the noise, dust, and odors created by the hundreds of trash truck deliveries each day. However, the closure also ends the funding for the Habitat Authority.

Once closed, a new 950 acre regional park will take shape. On the fill site itself there will be a Los Angeles County regional wilderness park approximately 600 acres in size. Of this, 114 acres will be available for low impact recreation. Three canyons consisting of 225 acres have been designated as a native preservation area to be under the purview of the Habitat Authority. The 24 acre Ecology Canyon is designated as native habitat to be used by the staff and students of Rio Hondo College. Approximately 100 acres of oak tree mitigation planting areas and the riparian habitat restoration area are protected and will be maintained as natural open space.

The process of decommissioning the landfill and designing and constructing a regional park is a painfully slow process so we should not anticipate hiking the new trails and enjoying the open space in this new park for several years. With the landfill's closure the views from Schabarum Trail are going to be a little nicer, the wilderness will be a little quieter, and we are all a little closer to that long promised new park.

This unique conservation funding idea (\$1 per ton of trash) has been mimicked at other landfill sites and offers another tool to permanently protect natural lands.

Oil Drilling Update in the Puente Hills Preserve

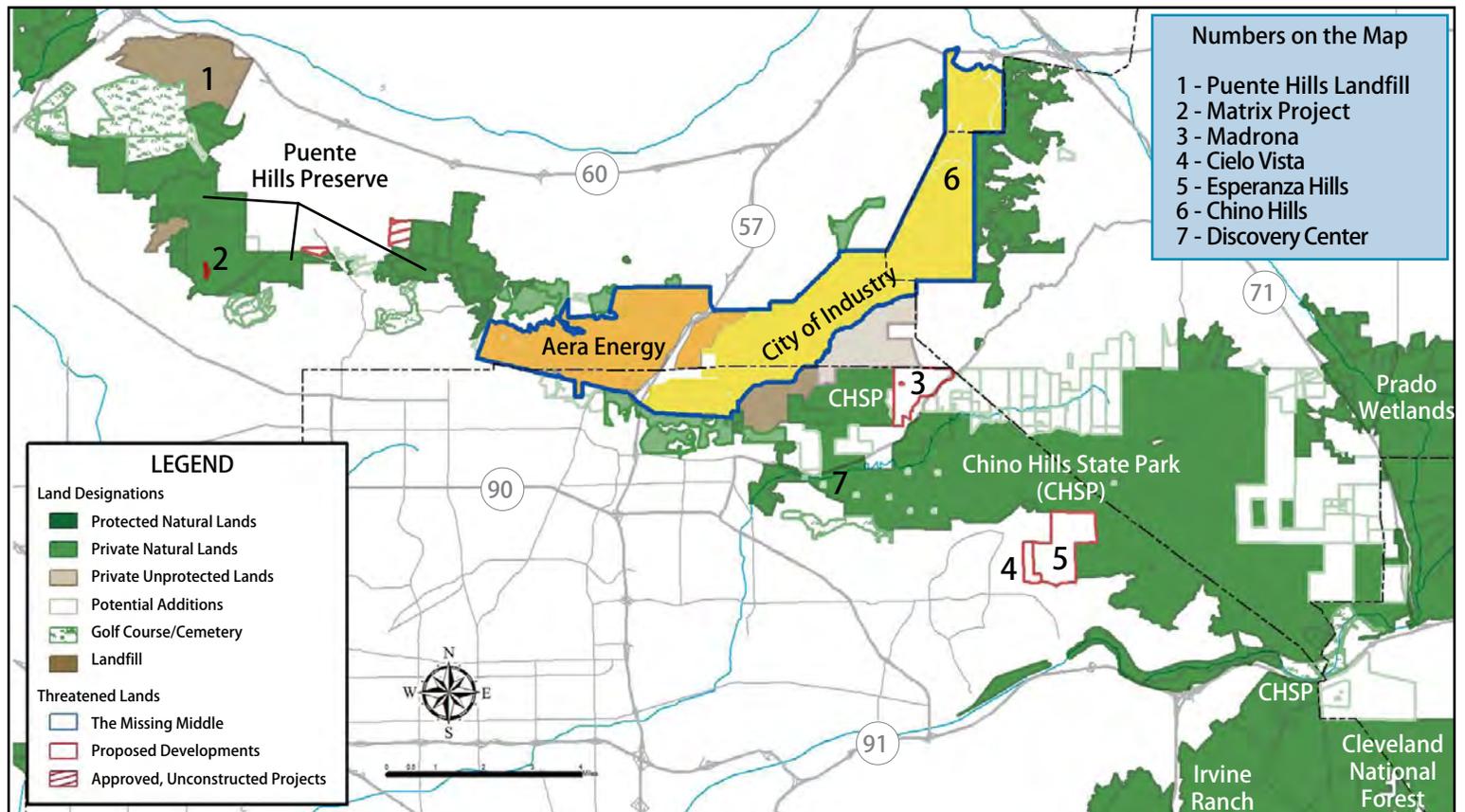
The disturbing Matrix Oil drilling project on “protected” lands in Whittier has cleared one more legal hurdle. The Mountains Recreation & Conservation Authority (MRCA) settled its lawsuit against the City of Whittier over the oil drilling project. MRCA has “standing” because it briefly held funds from Proposition A, L.A. County’s voter approved park bond act, that provided the funds to buy the land. Along with the County of Los Angeles, MRCA filed suit arguing that since the land was purchased with Prop. A park funds the land had to stay as open space in perpetuity.

After winning a preliminary decision, MRCA decided to settle with the City and will receive a percentage of the oil revenues. The funds will be used for the benefit of the open space and parks that they manage. MRCA will receive a maximum of \$11.25 million per year. The County has not settled and they are still trying to stop the project. A judge’s ruling in early October will settle the issue. Depending on his decision, drilling could start in a few months or not until 2015. Oil drilling was allowed since Prop. A language did not put any restrictions on sub-surface rights. While the County believes that land

must be held “in perpetuity” the judge pointed out that bond documents end all County control after 2015. Whittier is putting a conservation easement on all the rest of its Prop. A holdings to guarantee that no activities other than open space will be able to take place in the future on other land.

If and when oil is found, the City of Whittier will receive 30% of the gross income until a certain income level is reached and then it scales up to as high as 50%. The City has also agreed to share 4% of that income with the Habitat Authority up to a maximum of \$2 million per year. The Habitat Authority will oversee mitigation provided by Matrix during the life of the project. That amount could reach about \$100 million, including a \$15 million land purchase fund, revegetation projects, a half million dollar multi-year bobcat study, and new animal tunnel under Colima Boulevard. All income is dependent on actual revenues earned from mineral extraction (i.e., oil and natural gas). All other funds belong to the City. Hills For Everyone provided substantive legal comments on this project throughout the environmental review process.

Mapping the Corridor Projects



Corridor Updates

Madrona (Formerly Canyon Crest) Drags On

Over 13 years ago a 162 unit housing development was proposed in Brea's rural Carbon Canyon. It has stumbled, faltered, burned down, and gone bankrupt. But it is still gasping for approval. And we know more than we did 13 years ago.

We now know the ridge top site has burned down four times in the last 30 years. We now know the latest fire science says that the best predictor of where the next fire will burn is where fires have already burned. We now know the City has neglected to analyze future traffic impacts that would allow this private development access through Chino Hills State Park on a long standing but recently uncovered public road easement.

The ridge top project would be visible throughout much of Orange County, would destroy 1,400 oak and walnut trees, and be built on landslide prone hills. It will require three times the water use as an average Brea household because of the need to revegetate and maintain a landscaped buffer zone to protect against wildland fire.

Adding insult to injury the State of Idaho is pursuing the project through a trustee in hopes of recovering funds for investors from the new and also bankrupt deed holder, Old Standard Life Insurance. Brea Council members have all the tools they need to turn the project down—by “finding” that the unmitigatable impacts of bad traffic, harm to natural resources, and poor air quality do not outweigh the benefits of the project. Hearings on the project are expected to begin in November. Hills For Everyone has been fighting this project since it was first proposed.



PowerPoints Available

Hills For Everyone representatives provide interesting presentations to local groups, clubs, and organizations. Topics may include biodiversity, achievements, threats or possibilities, and fires history of the Puente-Chino Hills Wildlife Corridor. Schedule a presentation by emailing us at: info@HillsForEveryone.org.

Cielo Vista & Esperanza Hills Update

Many of the same issues plague two side by side projects on the hills above Yorba Linda, in territory governed by the County of Orange. Projects on these properties are also challenged by the mere lay of the land. These properties burned down (for the third time) in the Freeway Complex Fire.

If approved they would add almost 500 houses and about 5,000 additional vehicle trips a day to local streets. The owner of the larger project has sued the smaller project to “clarify” issues of access. Many residents are concerned about the added traffic, particularly in times of emergency since they already experienced gridlock conditions evacuating in the last fire. We are still awaiting release of the environmental documents.



Chino Hills General Plan Update

The City has embarked on a General Plan update. Currently the natural lands, owned by the City of Industry, along Grand Avenue are zoned for about 300 houses. In the initial public meeting Chino Hills has proposed increasing that to about 1,000 housing units. The first draft of the Plan is due out this fall.

Discovery Center Exhibits Delayed

The long awaited exhibits at the new State Park Discovery Center are, well, still waiting completion. Visitors can peek over the yellow caution tape to get a glimpse of what is installed but the more technical electronic portions of the exhibits are not yet finished. We are hoping for a grand opening in January.

The new native plant nursery is also under way. These plants will, at some point, help restore other areas of the Park.



Email Updates

If you have not heard from us lately via email please be sure we have your correct email address by emailing us at: info@HillsForEveryone.org.



Hills For Everyone
P.O. Box 9835
Brea, CA 92822-1835
www.HillsForEveryone.org

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Why Do Dogs Howl?

Excerpted from The Nature of Wildworks:

“Have you ever left your dog at home, only to have the neighbors complain that he howled the whole time you were gone? Both wild and domestic dogs howl to summon the pack. So your dog was just trying to call you (his pack) back home. Likewise, when coyotes howl, they are communicating with other members of the pack.

A common misconception is that coyotes howl when they are attacking prey -- which, when you think about it, wouldn't be a very good hunting strategy. Coyotes are silent when they are in attack mode.”

The Nature of



Wildworks.



Dr. Jeff Hansen

Register at Ralph's

Every September Ralph's Supermarket asks its customers to sign up anew for their community benefit program. When you register your Ralph's award card with them please select Hills For Everyone—we will receive a donation from them.

The more you shop there, the more they donate to us. Go to www.Ralphs.com click on Community, click on Community Contributions, click on Participant and register there. Hills For Everyone's organization code is 91199.

This is such an easy way to support the hills every time you shop for groceries. Thank you.



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