

Hills For Everyone

Friends of the Puente-Chino Hills Wildlife Corridor



Newsletter No. 40

Spring 2019

Making Progress in Tonner Canyon



Melanie Schlotterbeck

The rolling hills of Upper Tonner Canyon, looking south, flying over the 60 freeway in Diamond Bar.

Over the last 40 years, the City of Industry bought four large parcels of land comprising 6,300 acres in Tonner Canyon—all of which is outside its city limits (see map, page 2). The land is all within the Missing Middle of the Wildlife Corridor. Industry had planned to build a series of massive dams on its land.

The first acquisition in 1978 was the 2,450-acre Tres Hermanos Ranch in upper Tonner Canyon. Since the land was bought with redevelopment agency money, and since redevelopment agencies were discontinued in 2012, every city was forced to sell off its agency-owned land.

In September 2017, Industry tried to buy the land from its own redevelopment agency for \$41.6 million, which is the appraised price if the land were to be used for open space, recreation, and public use (as opposed to housing).

Industry had signed a lease agreement with the San Gabriel Valley Water and Power LLC to develop a solar factory (a public use). The lease also included Middle Tonner—the thick oak woodland of the former Boy Scout Reservation. If this sale and lease had gone through, the land use decisions would have been governed by the California Public Utilities Commission in San Francisco rather than by the cities where the land was located—in Chino Hills and Diamond Bar. That infuriated the residents and governments of those cities.

Both cities sued Industry to stop the sale, alleging violations of redevelopment law, the California Environmental Quality Act and the Public Records Act. Suddenly, Industry was fighting six lawsuits, three from each city. Chino Hills was leading the effort and finding lots of suspicious activity in the public records. Industry also found itself under the spotlight by the state auditor. A second state audit was still finding irregularities.

The lease agreement with the LLC expired December 31, 2018. At that point Industry was supposed to have clear title to the land—but it didn't because of the six lawsuits.

As part of the lease, Industry gave the LLC \$20 million to develop plans for the solar factory. When no plans were produced, Industry's relationship with the LLC soured. Under new staff and elected leadership, Industry decided it wanted to cut its losses and reach a settlement agreement with Chino Hills and Diamond Bar.

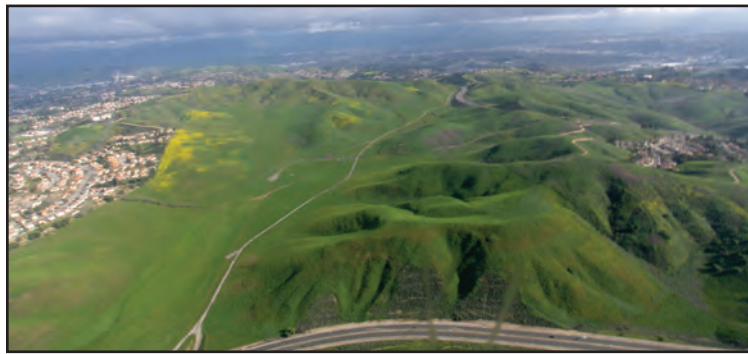
The lawsuits were dropped, allowing Industry to complete the purchase of the land for \$41.6 million. The other two cities put in 10% of the cost of the land, prorated based on the acreage in each city. Industry transferred title of the land to the existing but retrofitted Tres Hermanos Conservation Authority (THCA). They reformatted

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THCA so that now all three cities need to contribute a vote on any proposal on the land. Industry needs to contribute two votes. That way, no two cities can gang up on the third. Even if a proposal is approved by THCA, it still has to go through the planning process of the city in whose jurisdiction the project lies. The project also has to be in compliance with the planning and zoning codes of that city. So if a developer proposes a housing development and it gets approved by THCA, but rejected by the five-member city council, the proposal is dead.

This is a great outcome given what could have happened. At the very least, this stops the massive reservoir project dead in its tracks.



Melanie Schlotterbeck

Stunning Poppy Bloom

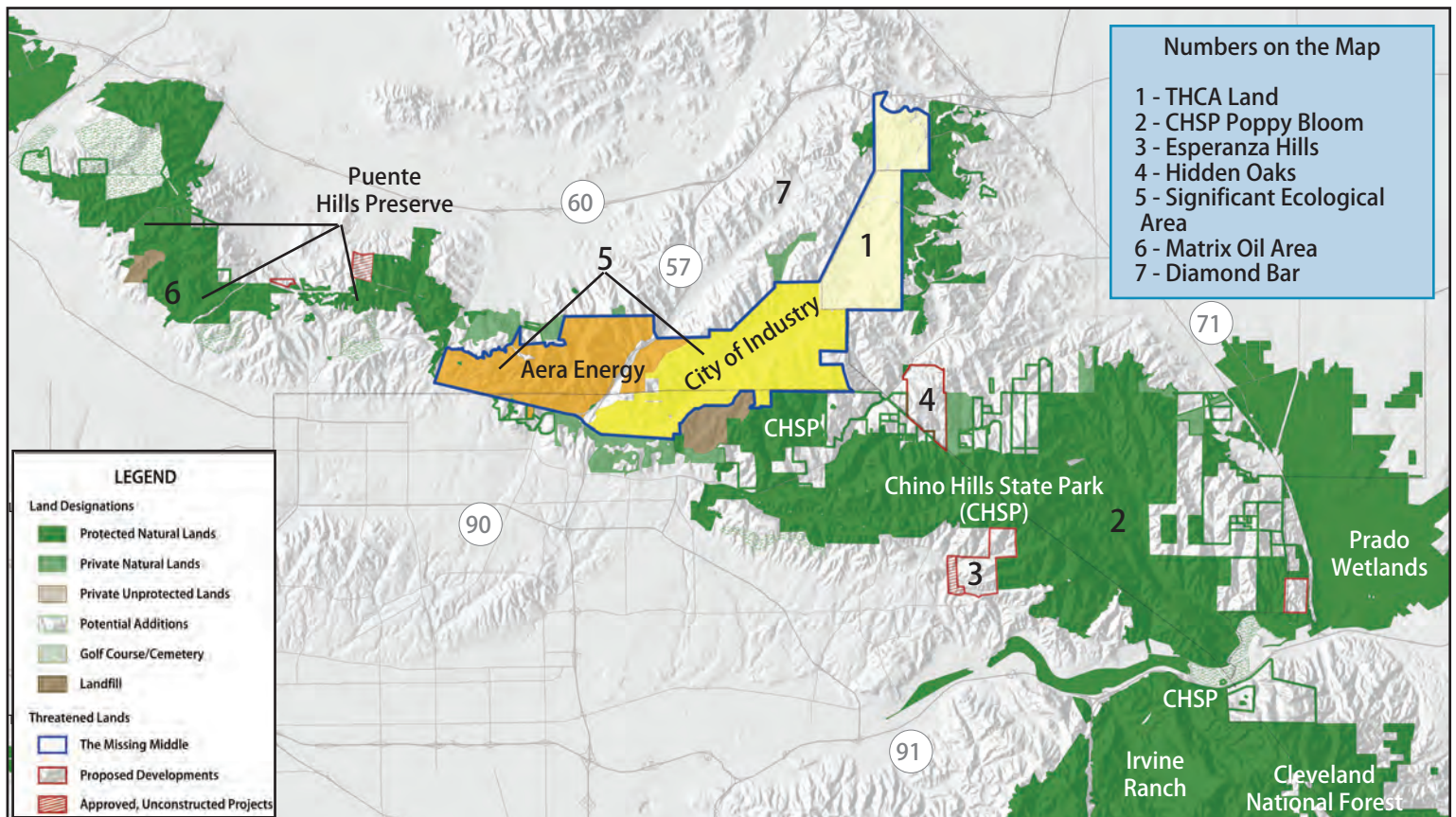


Melanie Schlotterbeck

This winter's storms brought welcome relief to our parched hills, trees, and water table. They also brought a stunning array of wildflowers including California's state flower—the poppy. Hilltops were covered with poppy fields in places never seen before, which means those seeds sat dormant for at least half a century, waiting for the right conditions to bloom at last.

Unfortunately, overenthusiastic visitors trampled some of the hills, destroying many of the plants which will prevent them from going to seed and blooming next year.

Mapping the Corridor Projects



Esperanza Hills

Conservationists keep winning lawsuits in court and losing at the Orange County Board of Supervisors—but this has not stopped the determined residents of Yorba Linda. Four conservation groups, including Hills For Everyone, have fought alongside them because of the endangered species and sensitive habitats on the land next to Chino Hills State Park.

After the 340-unit Esperanza Hills project in the hills above Yorba Linda was approved for a third time by the Board of Supervisors last fall, residents and conservation groups filed yet another lawsuit to challenge the project.

Hidden Oaks

The proposed 104-unit project off of Carbon Canyon Road at Canyon Hills in Chino Hills has been redesigned and reduced in size to 53 units. All houses will stay on the northern side of the ridgelines, thereby providing contiguous open space to the State Park and protecting Soquel Creek.



Melanie Schlotterbeck

Significant Ecological Area Ordinance

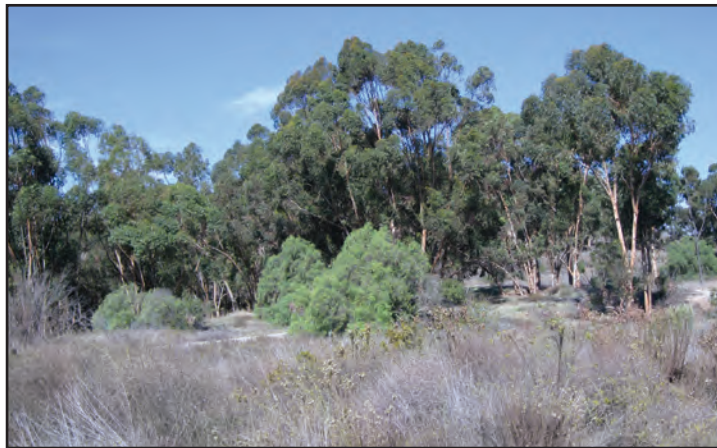
In May, the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors is poised to approve the updated Significant Ecological Area (SEA) Ordinance. This would provide a much-needed additional layer of protection for sensitive habitat areas, including 2,700 acres of Aera land above Rowland Heights and the 3,000 acre former Boy Scout Reservation in Tonner Canyon.

If approved, the new ordinance would provide a streamlined process and clearer goals for protecting habitats. For example, a minimum of 75% of natural open space is required for housing projects and the housing footprint must be placed in the least sensitive area. In addition, the design must be configured to reduce edge effects which harm wildlife (like lighting).

In another positive step, the proposal to enlarge SEAs (aka Conceptual SEAs) will now become full SEAs with all of the protections that follow. Previously, only a portion of Aera was in an SEA, now the entire Los Angeles County portion is an SEA.

Matrix Oil Drilling Stalled

The Appellate Court decision last summer stalled the effort to drill on Habitat Authority land. For one thing, the lease agreement between Matrix Oil and the City of Whittier has now expired. Though the Conditional Use Permit and Environmental Impact Report are still valid, the Whittier City Council has not stepped forward to pursue the lease agreement further. Even if the lease were renewed, the revenue generated by the oil lease would need to be spent mostly on parks and recreation and not on general support as the City had aimed for.



Claire Schlotterbeck

Diamond Bar General Plan

Perhaps because city staff and the General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) adopted the majority of conservation-oriented General Plan language changes offered by citizen activists, the Diamond Bar City Council voted unanimously to disband GPAC and finalize the General Plan update themselves. This was needed, they claimed, because “unnecessary” citizen input was causing the General Plan update process to exceed budgetary expectations and scheduling deadlines. The Council never even thanked the volunteers on GPAC for their three years of service.

Congrats Mike Hughes!



Christina Hughes

Congratulations to HFE President Mike Hughes. He was recently honored by the Whittier Audubon Society as Conservationist of the Year. He was also just elected Chairman of the Habitat Authority Board.

Email Updates

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



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2008 Freeway Remembered

Residents across the hills visited the State Park Discovery Center in Brea to remember the terrible 2008 Freeway Complex Fire and learn about the safety improvements that have been implemented since. The fire burned 30,000 acres in four counties, including nearly 300 homes and more than 95% of Chino Hills State Park.

At the commemoration event, visitors enjoyed a presentation by Nature of Wildworks, a non-profit that rescues and rehabilitates wildlife that can no longer live in the wild.

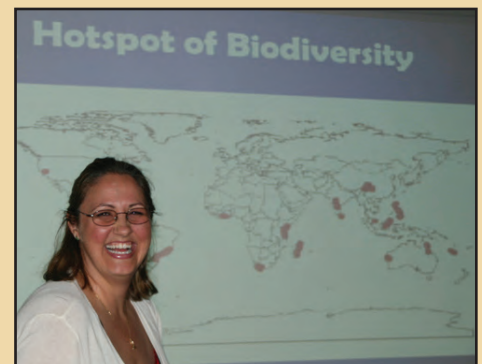
Chino Valley Independent Fire District and Brea Fire Department brought fire trucks, including Brea's new off road rescue vehicle.

All Photos: Melanie Schlotterbeck



PowerPoints Available

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



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