

Hills For Everyone

Friends of the
Puente-Chino Hills Wildlife Corridor



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Spring 2020

Saving Land at Long Last



Melanie Schlotterbeck

Lands targeted for decades are finally moving forward with conservation acquisitions.

After 40 years of hoping to add the ridgeline property known as Eastbridge to Chino Hills State Park, we are closing in on doing just that. We needed a willing seller, funds to purchase the land, and an agency to take title to it. The big stumbling block has been the California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), which has not been acquiring new parkland for the last 10 years. Thankfully, the door cracked open in January when Governor Newsom included park acquisition money in his proposed 2020-2021 budget.

As it turns out, we don't even need State Park funding because we found funds elsewhere. The Wildlife Conservation Board (the acquisition and funding arm of the Department of Fish and Wildlife) has allocated a portion of its funds to acquire this land contiguous to the State Park. These funds will serve as a match for a federal grant, enabling acquisition of 320 acres of the 400-acre Eastbridge property. Our goal is to finalize the acquisition for the rest of the property early next year.

So, we secured the funds, and we had located a willing seller, but there was no entity to take ownership of the land. Then, due to our outreach, a conservation partner stepped forward to own and manage to property. The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, one of our partners on the Wildlife Corridor Conservation

Authority, agreed to take title until DPR returns to its mission of saving land.

As you can see from the map, DPR always intended to add this land to the Park, especially considering the Park's ownership nearly surrounds the property. In addition, the Parks' General Plan calls for this acquisition.

This is a step in the right direction, but we need to acquire more land to safeguard the eastern ridgeline and prevent development from intruding into the Park.



County Sues Sanitation Districts over Park Plans

A park has long been promised atop the now-closed Puente Hills Landfill. Before it closed in 2013, the 1,365-acre landfill was once the country's largest, roughly the size of New York City's Central Park.

Local residents, who suffered the traffic, odor, and dust impacts of the landfill, were promised a low-key, wildlife-friendly park. Instead, the L.A. County Parks Department went hog wild in laying out a master plan virtually ignoring all local input. It approved gondola rides, zip lines, BMX tracks, giant slides, and cafes.



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The price tag for development of the high-intensity park comes in at \$238 million, but the Sanitation Districts only set aside \$37 million for a passive park. So the Parks Department decided to spend taxpayer money suing the Sanitation Districts to try to get the additional funds. Stay tuned.

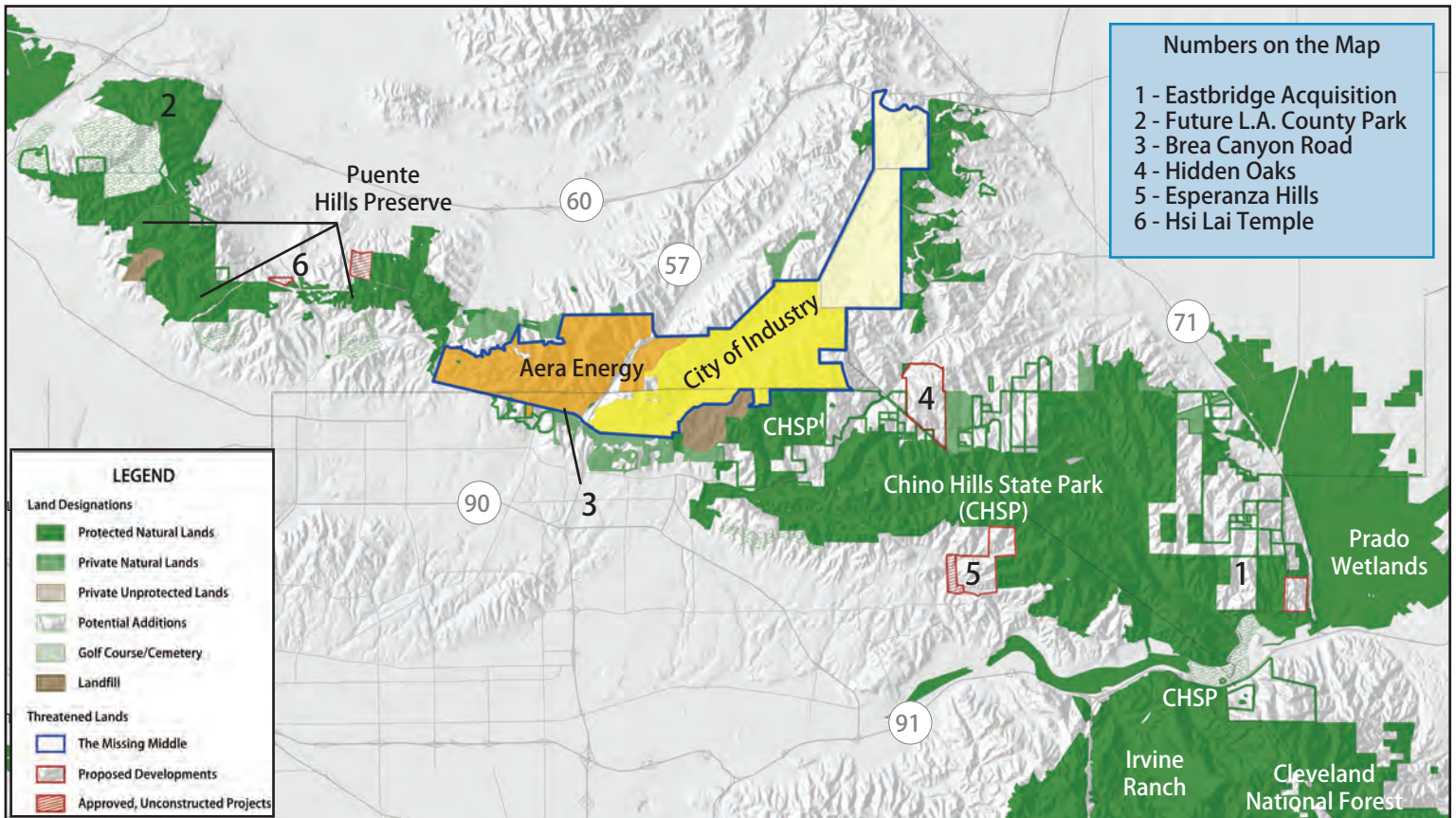
Brea Canyon Road



Claire Schlotterbeck

The County of Orange has proposed widening the two lane Brea Canyon Road that connects Brea with the City of Diamond Bar. The road parallels the 57 Freeway on the west side. This area (above) is the only place that wildlife can migrate between the Chino and the Puente Hills under the 57 Freeway. The Habitat Authority joined us in repeatedly pointing out in official comment letters how important this connection was for wildlife. Yet those warnings went unheeded. The Authority's public presentation at a Brea City Council meeting seemed to wake the County up. The County has now decided to perform a wildlife movement study to figure out what animals are crossing and where.

Mapping the Corridor Projects



Hidden Oaks

The project is currently in limbo. The General Plan allows 107 units, but the most recent proposal cut the number of housing units in half (to 53), which reduced grading and infrastructure costs. The new design consolidated the open space to the south, making it more usable for the abundant wildlife in the area while also protecting the water quality in the pristine Soquel Creek. The landowners may start over, increasing the number of units, or sell the property or project as is.

Esperanza Hills

Residents fighting the 340-unit housing project next to Chino Hills State Park lost their latest appeal of the project—their first loss in the Court of Appeal. Because of the numerous issues relating to public good, they decided to appeal the decision to the California Supreme Court. More legal pathways remain for local groups to oppose this dangerous project that only plans one curving and steep access road for all 340 houses in a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone.



Hsi Lai Temple

Twenty-five acres of land located directly across from the Hsi Lai Temple on Hacienda Blvd. is also owned by the Temple. The owners are planning a large retreat complex on the vacant land. Recently, they purchased two more parcels north of, and adjacent to, the site. The retreat center calls for a 400-seat auditorium, meditation halls, classrooms, and dormitories. Also planned is a five-story underground parking structure. We are deeply concerned that this intensive development with its noise and lights because it will negatively impact the adjacent Habitat Authority Preserve lands and wildlife movement areas. Stay tuned.



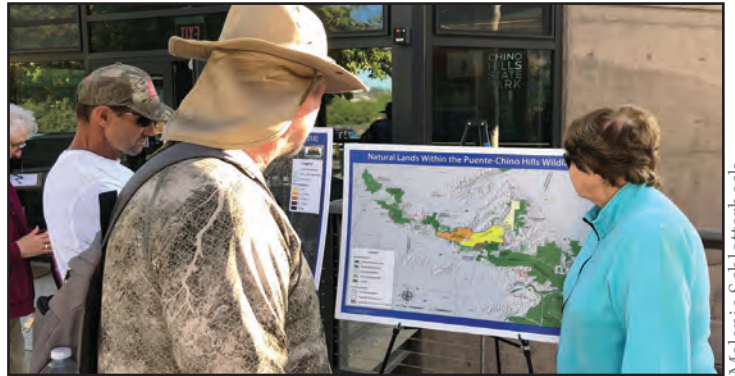
Wildlife Reminder



When we use the Park, we use it for pleasure—to relax, have fun, and exercise. Wildlife uses it to stay alive, battling every day to find food, avoid predators, reproduce, and care for and teach their young. Respect their needs by obeying park rules and hours. And, where possible, avoid contact with wildlife. Remember, they often use the same trails we do. And, many wildlife trails are often mistaken for recreation trails by people, which further disrupt their habits and impact the land. Please stay on designated trails.

Hike With Asm. Chen

Nearly 40 residents enjoyed a hike in Chino Hills State Park with Assemblymember Phillip Chen last November. This time, the hike started from the Discovery Center and headed up Telegraph Canyon. We all had fun!





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SoCal Mountain Lion

Two conservation groups filed a petition to list the subspecies of the mountain lion, in Southern California and Central Coast, under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). The Department of Fish and Wildlife has reviewed the petition and agreed with the evidence presented. The Fish and Game Commission voted 5-0 to add these populations as a candidate for listing under CESA.

Scientists estimate that our Southern California lion population will die out within a decade. Their already-low numbers are being further reduced by vehicle strikes, poaching, depredation permits, and inbreeding caused by increasing isolation on islands of habitat. Others die terrible deaths after consuming prey that have ingested toxic rodenticides.

Now that the mountain lion has been listed as a candidate for protection, further studies will be conducted. State and local agencies will have to work more carefully to manage threats to them. Road and development projects will have to include measures to preserve natural habitat links, such as wildlife crossings under freeways.



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