

# MOUNTAIN

C O U N T R Y



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Photo by Rorie Skei

**Coal Canyon, a top priority acquisition in Orange County, stretches toward Cleveland National Forest. Local community members and wildlife corridor staff tour the site.**

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## **KEEPING THE SPIRIT ALIVE**

### **Wildlife Corridor Connects Four Counties**

**by  
Ruth  
Taylor  
Kilday**

#### **The Present**

*When all you see in Southern California is pavement and concrete and you know that people don't care about nature or the natural world around you, try this one on for size...*

If nature survives in the most populated area in Southern California, it does so...both *in spite of* and *because of* its people. But a combination of demands by the public, individual efforts and public agency cooperation could make possible a potential 30 mile-long, 30,000 acre wildlife corridor linking pockets of open space that connect the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino and Riverside.

## The Partners

The Wildlife Corridor Conservation Authority was established under the Joint Exercise of Powers Act, Government Code Section 6500 *et seq.* by agreement with the Cities of Whittier, Brea, La Habra Heights, Diamond Bar, and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy.

## The Place

Carved from land settled by Shoshonean speaking Indians (later called Gabrielino), this corridor can best be identified by the numbered freeways and roads that border or intersect the land: 91, 71, 57, 39, 605 as well as the 90 and the 60.

The wildlife movement corridor is extremely slim in areas and the status of viable habitat linkages across, through, and under freeways, roads, culverts and other man-made features are fragile. But specific properties contain intact year-round water sources and riparian woodland comprised of oak, sycamore, California black walnut and willows and, in some areas, grassland and coastal sage scrub. Connections to large core habitat areas such as Angeles and Cleveland National Forests are essential to maintain the populations of mountain lions, American badgers, bobcats, grey fox and mule deer.

The geographic areas included in this new cooperative effort are the Whittier/PuenteHills area, and the Chino Hills connecting to the Santa Ana Mountains and Cleveland National Forest. The San Gabriel River serves as the northern connection to the San Gabriel Mountains and Angeles National Forest. Included in the

study area are the 12,000-acre Chino Hills State Park, Schabarum Regional Park, Tecate Cypress Ecological Reserve (owned by the CA Department of Fish and Game), privately-owned Powder Canyon and portions of Tonner Canyon (Firestone Scout property) both of which are included within Los Angeles County's designated Significant Ecological Areas (SEA).



**Although the average home-range size of mountain lions is 150 square miles, a single dominate male may distribute his genes in an area three times that size. He may need to walk as far as 20 miles on a single night.**

*Preserving Communities & Corridors*

by Defenders of Wildlife



Another property adjoining the Fish and Game Reserve is known as Coal Canyon. Coal Canyon, a high priority acquisition, acts as an integral part of the Santa Ana Mountains core habitat and supports a broad range of vegetative communities and includes land important for wildlife movement at freeway undercrossings.

Those of you without a Southern California map in hand should note that the Cleveland National

Forest connects with the designated San Mateo Canyon Wilderness Area which in turn links to the thousands of acres at Camp Pendleton in San Diego County.

## The Vision

This vision - which takes the concept of "urban and wildland interface" to a new dimension - is to be implemented by individuals, organizations, four cities, and three State of California agencies working within four counties. Under the rubric of "Wildlife Corridor Conservation Authority" (WCCA) formed by a joint powers authority act, the work is spearheaded by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy at the request initially of Bob Henderson from the City of Whittier. The Conservancy has experience in creating corridors between the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area and Los Padres and Angeles National Forests and creating connections among the five mountain ranges within the Rim of the Valley Corridor - an ongoing and long-term process.

The purpose of the WCCA "...is to provide for proper planning, conservation, environmental protection and maintenance of the habitat and wildlife corridor between the Whittier-Puente Hills and Cleveland National Forest in the Santa Ana Mountains. As a further necessary and integral purpose of this agreement, the acquisition...and protection of lands for conservation, natural open space, and recreational purposes is contemplated where such acquisitions can be accomplished within the prudent fiscal policies of each of the member jurisdictions."

## The Past

The Shoshonean speakers/Gabrielino lived in this area. They had a strong sense of community and themselves. They possessed a highly developed sense of ritual. The Gabrielino practiced cremation which accounts in part for the lack of archaeological evidence in the area. They practiced the Great Mourning Ceremony, based on the belief that there is an afterlife where what is used in this life (weapons, clothing, household implements) will be used again. Those belongings are burned with the body to break the spirit in order to reincarnate to the next life.

Diaries of the Spanish Portolá Expedition of July 1769 note that their exploring party was greeted by friendly Indians who traded their baskets, feather work and animal skins for a good supply of trade beads and ribbons.

Lieutenant Miguel Costansó spoke of the Indian village:

*We pitched our camp on the left bank of the river. To the right there is a populous Indian village; the inhabitants received us with great kindness. Fifty-two of them came to our quarters and their captain asked us by signs which we understood easily, to remain there and live with them. [He said] that they would provide antelopes, hares, or seeds for our subsistence, that the lands which we saw were theirs, and they would share them with us. (Teggart 1911:177).*

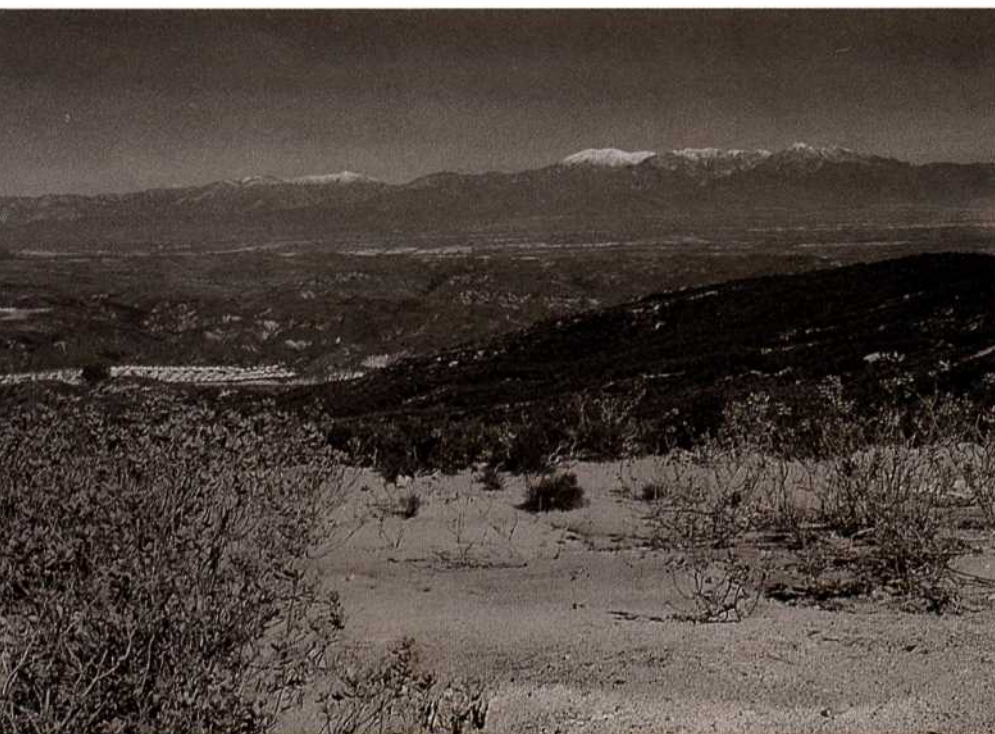
The diaries reflect their naming the San Gabriel River the *El Rio del Dulcísimo Nombre de Jesus de los Tremblores*, River of the Sweetest Name of Jesus of the Tremblers [sic]...needless to say, the Gabrielino and the Portolá party experienced some of California's seismic theatre while crossing the river. The party came across large bubbling pools of liquid tar or "brea." Thinking that the brea was an underground stream of lava, some men declared that the hills they had to cross had volcanoes ready to erupt.

The Portolá expedition passed through an opening or "la habra" in the temporary bridge or "puente" by placing poles across an arroyo. The surrounding plains were then called "Llano de la Puente." A land grant title picked this up later. La Habra and La Puente are now names of local towns and the surrounding hills are called La Puente.

In 1776, when Juan Bautista de Anza's colonizing party camped on San Antonio Creek, Father Font noted that the "only timber and firewood found on these plains were the sycamores growing abundantly along the creek."

Now under administrative authority of the National Park system, the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail is to be signed along the 1,200 miles of the historic route of this colonizing trip and the recreational route, including areas near the proposed wildlife

Photo by Rorie Skei



**The San Gabriel River acts as the wildlife corridor between chaparral-covered hillsides and the snow-capped San Gabriel Mountains.**

corridor. The national historic trail designation adds other important educational and interpretative aspects to the wildlife corridor conservation effort.

The earliest recorded settlement in the Chino Hills vicinity occurred in 1810 when Jose Antonio Yorba, a member of Portolá's expedition, and Juan Peralta were granted Rancho Santiago de Santa Ana (later Rancho Canon de Santa Ana). Although Mission San Gabriel protested, stating it had always used the area as grazing land, in 1834 Yorba and Peralta were granted a legal land grant. The Yorba family continued to pursue land grant claims eventually acquiring 213,331 acres of the Santa Ana watershed of Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties. It was one of the largest cattle holdings known in Southern California.

## Participation

The strong sense of community held by the Shoshonean, their value of the land, and their respect for wildlife and other living creatures are now being carried forth by individual and cooperative efforts in the new Wildlife Corridor Conservation Authority. We'll keep you informed of the progress in their cooperative efforts for more liveable cities. ■

### Profile Claire Woodson Schlotterbeck President, Hills for Everyone Citizen Activist and Public Member Wildlife Corridor Conservation Authority

"Think Globally, Act Locally." Claire Schlotterbeck is the epitome of a citizen activist. With an undergraduate degree in Political Science from UCLA, a masters from Purdue University and, in 1994, a teaching credential from Cal Poly Pomona, Claire has greatly enhanced the quality of life in her neighborhood by thinking globally and working locally.

She coordinated citizen and government efforts through the nonprofit Hills for Everyone which founded in 1980 what is now Chino Hills State Park. One of the state's first urban wilderness parks (an earlier effort is the 8,862 acre Topanga State Park within the City of Los Angeles, purchased in 1972-74), Chino Hills now consists of approximately 12,000 acres. The park boundary was specifically designed to protect the views and buffer the sounds of urban life. From 1982 until its classification as a state park in April 1984, Hills for Everyone leased the land from state General Services to open it before state funds were available. To ensure funding for the park, they involved themselves with every Park Bond Act since 1984. Claire sought and managed grants which funded initial clean-up and park development.

The City of Brea has also directly benefitted from her efforts. As a member of the Parks, Recreation and Human Services Commission, she helped achieve funding approval for the construction of three new city parks, the renovation of four existing parks, and the creation of the Brea Senior Center and the Brea Community Center.

## The Wildlife Corridor Conservation Authority

Bob Henderson, Chair, City of Whittier  
Glenn Parker, Vice Chair, City of Brea  
Carole Engelhardt, La Habra Heights  
Gary Miller, City of Diamond Bar  
Steve Feld, Public Member  
Claire Schlotterbeck, Public Member

Jerry Daniel, SMMC  
Cheryl Heffley, CA Fish & Game  
Dave Vincent, CA Parks & Recreation

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Joseph Edmiston, AICP, Executive Officer  
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