

2008 SUMMER



parklands

Your voice for Parks

A publication of the California State Parks Foundation



In This Issue

Go Outside and Play!

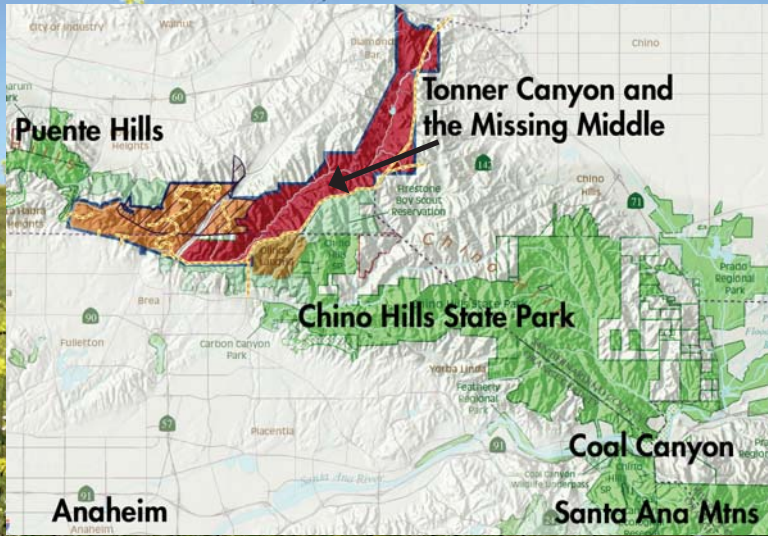
Closures Averted,
New Proposal Emerges to
Increase Park Access

Largest Turnout Ever for
Park Advocacy Day 2008

Southern California Update

Science in the Parks:
*Vital Connections—Chino
Hills State Park*

Supporting CSPF
and MORE



Vital Connections —

Chino Hills State Park, © Steve Anderson; base map provided by Hills for Everyone.

At first glance, Chino Hills State Park may not appear extraordinary to the casual observer or first time visitor. Tucked away in Southern California, where the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, and Riverside converge, it seems like another expanse of grass, chaparral and scattered oaks. Rising to almost 1,800 feet northeast of Yorba Linda and Anaheim, the park looks out over the vast coastal plain stretching down to Huntington Beach and the Pacific Ocean beyond.

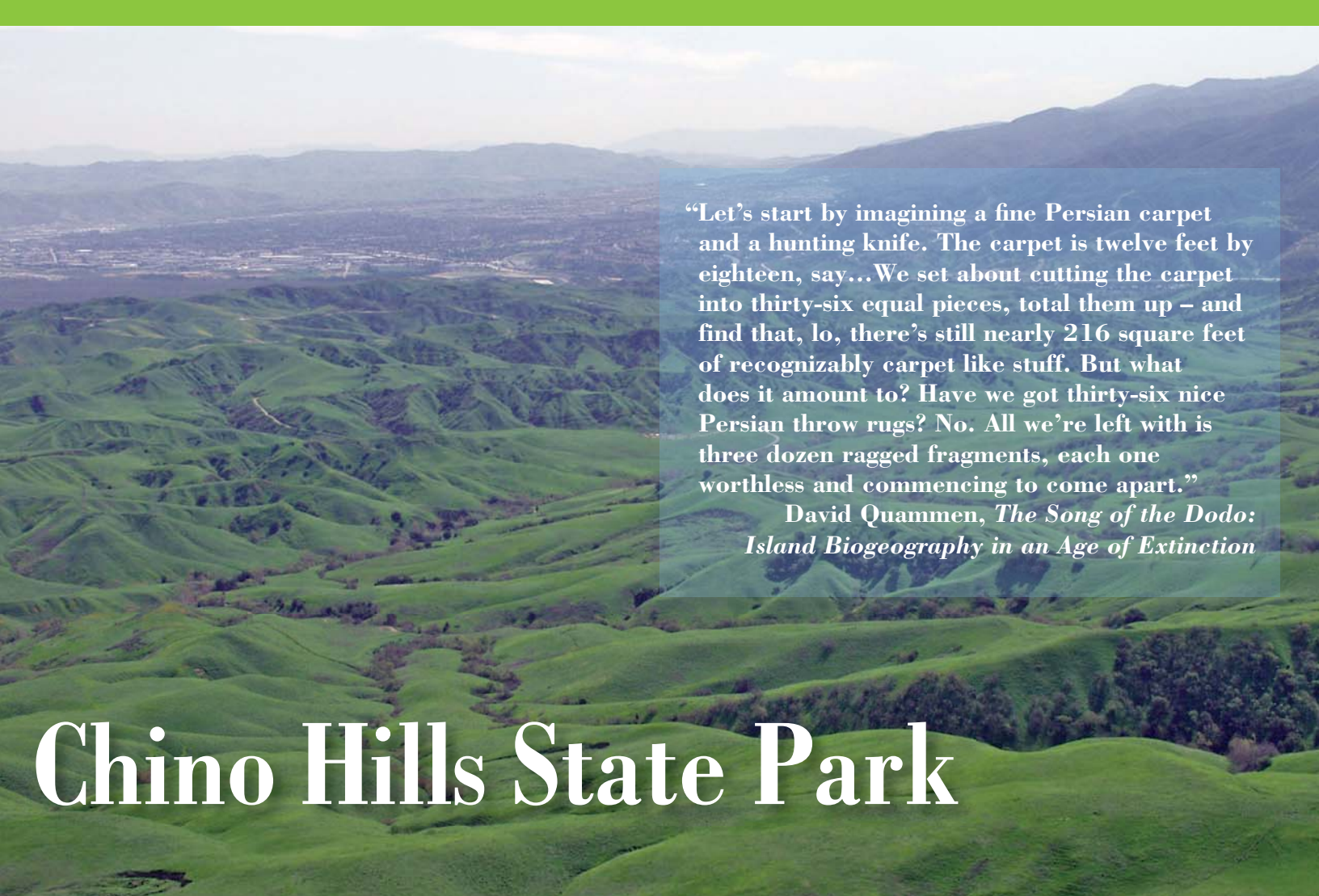
But well trained eyes observed something else back in the 1970s. “It wasn’t really sexy,” recalls Claire Schlotterbeck, Executive Director of Hills for Everyone, a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the Puente-Chino Hills region. “It is a more pastoral landscape, but it appealed to the nearby urban population. It was also a park of the future, so to speak. It is close to a very large urban area that had been under-served, it is surrounded by freeways, and it’s easily accessible.”

Well trained eyes also discovered that the Chino Hills are home to not only a unique combination of scrub and coast live oak grassland, native walnut and riparian vegetation, but over 500 animal and birds species, and rare, threatened or endangered species. Biologists have shown that the diversity of native plants and animals found within the park, and beyond, is greater than in any other area of comparable size in the United States. So much for casual observations.

A variety of threats to the hills activated local communities. Against formidable odds, feasibility studies began in the late 1970s, and with the help of the newly formed Hills for Everyone and an impressive collection of interested groups and communities, Chino Hills State Park was created in 1984. After years of incremental acquisitions, the park’s acreage now totals some 14,000 acres.

By the late 1980s activists and biologists began looking beyond the borders of the state park and thinking about the larger landscape. To the west, various sections of the Puente Hills had been preserved by the city of Whittier and other regional agencies. Together with the park, these lands totaled some 40,000 acres. To the southeast, the Santa Ana Mountains and the Cleveland National Forest stretch out across 473,000 acres. However, these two areas of protected lands were separated by the Riverside Freeway and a mountainous area known as Coal Canyon.

In 1991 953 acres of upper Coal Canyon were protected by the California Department of Fish and Game. The next year, the remaining tract—653 acres—was slated for 1,550 homes. Just about the same time biologist Paul Beier was conducting studies on mountain lions in the Santa Anas and the national forest. He was interested in Coal Canyon and its potential use as a wildlife corridor between the Santa Anas and the Puente-Chino Hills. After collaring and radio tracking several mountain lions, Beier



“Let’s start by imagining a fine Persian carpet and a hunting knife. The carpet is twelve feet by eighteen, say... We set about cutting the carpet into thirty-six equal pieces, total them up – and find that, lo, there’s still nearly 216 square feet of recognizably carpet like stuff. But what does it amount to? Have we got thirty-six nice Persian throw rugs? No. All we’re left with is three dozen ragged fragments, each one worthless and commencing to come apart.”

David Quammen, *The Song of the Dodo: Island Biogeography in an Age of Extinction*

Chino Hills State Park

Chino Hills State Park, © Melanie Schlotterbeck, *Hills For Everyone*

did indeed find two young animals who were frequently using Coal Canyon and an abandoned vehicle underpass below the Riverside Freeway to move between the Santa Anas and the Puente-Chino Hills. His results were sufficient to convince people of the importance of Coal Canyon. “It was a dramatic illustration of scientific research applied to conservation,” says Beier, now at Northern Arizona University.

With the housing development on hold, and Beier’s pivotal study in hand, Schlotterbeck knew they had to get to work. Several years later Geary Hund, a Resource Ecologist at the time with State Parks, came to Chino Hills with Rick Rayburn, State Parks Natural Resources Division Chief. Hund had just finished reading David Quammen’s 1997 book *Song of the Dodo* about the theory of Island Biogeography, and the issues of habitat fragmentation, and species loss. Schlotterbeck read it, Rayburn read it, and a light went on. They needed Coal Canyon as a wildlife corridor.

“Rick knew how to make it happen,” remembers Schlotterbeck. Rayburn pulled in three world renowned biologists to study the importance of Coal Canyon to the larger parcels of protected land: Paul Beier, from the mountain lion studies, Bill Shaw, an urban edge expert, and Reed Noss, the “King of Conservation Biology.” The three of them arrived one day, and together with Geary Hund, went to Coal Canyon for an extensive tour. The group saw endangered gnatcatchers, and

golden eagles performing a mating ritual flight—all within this highly urbanized area with trucks zooming by on the freeway. They were impressed. After additional research the three scientists produced a report: “Evaluation of the Coal Canyon Biological Corridor.”

“The Puente-Chino Hills–Santa Ana Mountains complex comprise an archipelago of natural open space thrust into one of the world’s largest metropolitan areas,” the trio wrote. “Coal Canyon clearly represents the last viable opportunity to maintain and enhance a critical ecological linkage between the Puente-Chino Hills and the Santa Ana Mountains. These two areas are naturally connected; indeed, they are fundamentally one ecological system. It is only the very recent, intensive, and unsustainable activities of humans in this region that threaten to sever this natural connection. If such a severance is allowed to proceed, the biological, ecological, educational, recreational, and spiritual impacts will be substantial.”

“The neat thing about using science in our conservation plans,” says Beier, “is that it is completely transparent and open to everyone. It’s not like we were saying ‘buy this land because we told you to.’ We were saying ‘buy this land because we believe it is going to ensure connectivity for a variety of species. Here are our models, kick the tires, look under the hood, and see what in the heck we’ve done.”

If parks and reserves become isolated—if they become ►



© Ron Garrison and Joan Embery, Embery Institute for Wildlife Conservation

“islands” surrounded by urban areas—they begin to decay. If top-level predators such as mountain lions and bobcats disappear, a phenomenon scientists call an “ecological cascading effect” kicks in. Mid-level predators (raccoons, foxes, skunks) increase in numbers, as do non-native species such as feral cats. These mid-level predators begin to reduce bird populations (lions and bobcats tend to leave birds and bird nests alone). With fewer birds, seed dispersal is interrupted, and insect populations change. In the long run, plant communities also suffer. “It has been proven that if a smaller park is fragmented off from a larger protected area,” states Division Chief Rayburn, “you can lose up to half your species in the smaller park. It is best to pay attention

to that now instead of when those species start going extinct.”

The scientists’ study showed that the wildlife corridor would work if Coal Canyon was preserved and the vehicle underpass was restored (the pavement removed and native vegetation planted). But the acquisition and the restoration was going to be costly. Was it worth it? An analysis demonstrated that all the open space to the northwest was moderately valued as a \$200 million public investment, all within 60 minutes of half of California’s population. That was a large investment, and if the cost of the deal was approximately \$20 million, was it worth 10 percent of the overall investment to actually secure the overall investment? Rayburn and his colleagues thought so. By 2001 the last piece of Coal Canyon was secured thanks to nine different funding sources (the eventual purchase price rose closer to \$60 million). By 2004 the Riverside Freeway vehicle underpass was deconstructed to create a wildlife friendly corridor—the first time this was ever done in the United States.

“On the grand scale, the Chino Hills aren’t one of the big linkages,” states Beier. “However, in terms of illustrating what can be done, Chino Hills State Park is tremendously important. It was really the first time in California that we decided to connect some of our big wildland investments, that we were going to spend money to buy land that is not so much valuable for what is in it, but for what it does in the larger landscape. We bought this land not for its content, but for its context.

“And,” he continued, “it is important to note that both the California State Parks and the California State Parks Foundation have been partners in quite a few other linkage efforts. This entire process has been highly collaborative. We have over 25 partners in these projects and they now spread across southern California.”

Chino Hills State Park now connects over 31 miles of protected lands to the vast protected areas to the south. There are many victories to celebrate across the Puente-Chino Hills but the people involved are not complacent. There is still a lot to learn about wildlife corridors. And, there are still fights to be won, and a vision to complete. Imagine one day being able to hike across the Puente-Chino Hills to the Santa Anas, then north to the San Gabriel and San Bernardino mountains, and beyond that the Sierra Nevada or over to Joshua Trees National Monument and perhaps even the Sierra Madres. It may sound crazy, but not to everyone. 🐾

Jerry Emory, Director of Communications, CSPF

The Fight Continues

A large piece of the Puente-Chino Hills puzzle known as Tonner Canyon is in jeopardy (see map p.10). Hills for Everyone calls it the “Missing Middle.” It is comprised of two large parcels straddling State Route 57 between the state park and the Puente Hills to the west. The first is owned by Shell, ExxonMobil, who plan to build 3,600 houses on its 3,000 acres. The second property is owned by the City of Industry and they want to build three large reservoirs with over a dozen dams on its 6,000 acres. Groups across the hills are working to complete the wildlife corridor by acquiring the lands.

Resources

Chino Hills State Park: <http://www.parks.ca.gov/> (“Visit a Park”)

Chino Hills State Park Interpretive Association:
<http://www.chinohillsstatepark.org/>

Hills for Everyone: <http://www.hillsforeveryone.org/>

Save The Missing Middle:
<http://www.savethemissingmiddle.org/>

South Coast Wildlands: <http://www.scwildlands.org/>