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Hundreds Gather to Celebrate the Accomplishments and Retirement of Conservation Leader, Claire Schlotterbeck

Co-Founder of Chino Hills State Park Plans to Retire After 46 Years on the Job



CHINO HILLS, CA - After 46 years of dedicated and strategic work protecting natural lands across four Southern California counties, Hills For Everyone (HFE) Executive Director Claire Schlotterbeck will retire at the end of the year. Residents, supporters, donors, elected officials, family, friends, and board members gathered at Chino Hills State Park—the state’s largest urban wilderness park that she co-founded—to celebrate her accomplishments and pass the torch to the next leader. At this outdoor event, the rain steadily bounced off the tent setting an incredible ambiance against the State Park’s protected backdrop. At the end of the event there was a great horned owl released (rehabbed by the Orange County Bird of Prey Center) and sent



into the night by Scott Thomas of Sea and Sage Audubon Society.

Claire's involvement in HFE began in 1978 when she attended a meeting on behalf of the Olinda Village Homeowners' Association. It was there she was introduced to the fledgling nonprofit and where she first met the park's visionary—Dave Myers. That summer she volunteered for the conservation nonprofit accepting calls from the press about the plans to establish Chino Hills State Park.

Throughout the 1980s she worked closely with the State Legislature—specifically Republican Senator Ross Johnson and his Chief of Staff, Susie Swatt. Together they partnered for years to fund, support, and establish Chino Hills State Park. Claire learned early on that working with both sides of the aisle and both houses was essential to the creation and success of this multi-county effort.

“Ross said he never worked with anyone as persistent as Claire. She convinced him to go the extra mile to make Chino Hills a reality. Without her relentless fortitude and visions, the park would still be a dream,” Diane Johnson, Former Senator Ross Johnson's wife.

What started out as a volunteer effort eventually received committed funding from both private donors, as well as foundations. By the early 1990s, she was formally serving as HFE's Executive Director and leading the next essential project of connecting Chino Hills State Park to the Santa Ana mountains.

“As we go through life we get to know a handful of individuals who can change the course of events, who can shape policy and Claire is one of those very rare people,” says HFE Board President Michael Hughes. “Our local wilderness is larger, wilder and better protected because Claire was here. Give Claire a map and an hour and she can explain to a politician or regulator why a particular local wilderness is important to protect, why it's the right thing to do and why it's politically feasible.”



One of the most pivotal moments of the organization and for Claire occurred after reading David Quammen's book the [Song of the Dodo](#). It was then that Claire realized the State Park must be connected to other lands. She and State Park Resource Ecologist Geary Hund collaborated with State Parks, Chief of Natural Resources (and interestingly, long time family friend) Rick Rayburn to do what had never been done before.

The science indicated that landscapes needed to be connected to one another in

order for the ecosystems and the species within them to survive over the long-term. This was State Park's, and potentially California's first ever wildlife movement corridor.

After one of the most complicated set of acquisitions protecting Coal Canyon in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Chino Hills State Park was finally connected to the larger 135,000+ acre Santa Ana Mountains. Claire set her sights on ensuring connectivity across the entire Puente-Chino Hills Wildlife Corridor which spanned 31 miles across four counties and 12 cities. She began what has become a multi-decade effort to ensure the connectivity is not lost and in partnership with several other groups found three other chokepoints needing protection.

"Claire Schlotterbeck is proof that one person can truly make a difference. Her 45 years of advocacy helped protect Chino Hills State Park and the open spaces our Southern California families cherish. I'm grateful for her tireless dedication to preserving our public lands and wish her all the best in retirement," Representative Young Kim (R-CA40).

Across the many decades she helped residents, community groups, and other non-profits find and narrow their goals as well as implement strategic actions toward success. From running campaigns like Save Brea Hills, to litigating on projects that harmed the State Park or ensuring better policies were adopted at the local level—Claire consistently uses her expertise and degree in political science to her advantage. Her father taught her that you give the hardest projects to those who do not know it cannot be done. She lived by that credo.

The success of the organization and its priorities across the hills will be carried on by her daughter, Melanie Schlotterbeck, who has been working closely with Claire for the last 25 years. Passing the baton to Melanie will ensure the organization is rooted in the ways and wisdom Claire instilled both personally and professionally. The future is lining up additional successes with new energy and new skillsets.

During the ceremony on Saturday, Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority Chief Ranger Fernando Gomez presented her with a National Park Service Ranger "Smokey the Bear" Stetson hat. And, later in the evening, Inland Empire District Superintendent Kelly Elliott presented her with the California Parks & Recreation Commission Golden Bear award.

This is Claire's life's work and while she may be retiring, she has no intention of stopping. So the next time you're outdoors in nature: may the rustling of oak leaves in the trees above to the dancing of grasses on the hills in front of you or the burst of color in the wildflower blooms on the ridge lines remind you that somebody was behind protecting these lands, the lands you love. And, if you are in Chino Hills State Park, this particular somebody was Claire Schlotterbeck.



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About Hills For Everyone (HFE)

For more than 45 years, Hills For Everyone (HFE) has worked to preserve the unique and disappearing landscapes of the Puente-Chino Hills Wildlife Corridor. HFE founded Chino Hills State Park, which connects to the Cleveland National Forest at Coal Canyon Biological Corridor. Learn more at: HillsForEveryone.org.