

# Hills For Everyone

Friends of the  
Puente-Chino Hills Wildlife Corridor



Newsletter No. 49

Fall 2023

## L.A. County Steps Up, O.C. Trips Up!



*A view of the unprotected Aera Energy lands with the snow covered mountains of the Angeles National Forest beyond.*

Remember how horrified we were when Aera Energy proposed 3,600 houses on its 3,000 acres of natural lands between Brea and Rowland Heights? Those hills serve not only as a beautiful backdrop to both communities, but as a key link in the Puente-Chino Hills Wildlife Corridor. Aera's proposal, if approved, would have denuded and levelled those hills, severing the linkage. The designation as a Significant Ecological Area (SEA) offered some protection, but not enough.

Residents across the hills stood up (literally, see photo below) to fight the project. When Los Angeles County asked Aera to redesign the project, Aera changed tack in 2005 and sought approval in Diamond Bar instead. This was unsuccessful.

The project languished for many years, during which time L.A. County began strengthening its ordinances on SEAs. In August of 2020, L.A. County Planning recommended denying the dormant Aera project since it was so outdated and violated so many newly revised rules and laws. Before the Planning Commission could vote, Aera withdrew its project application. This means any new proposal would be evaluated against the current, stricter laws—a victory in itself.

L.A. County continued updating its land use for its various unincorporated communities (called Area Plans), including Rowland Heights where the Aera Energy property lies. By now, the County would only allow up to 1,400 units or so.

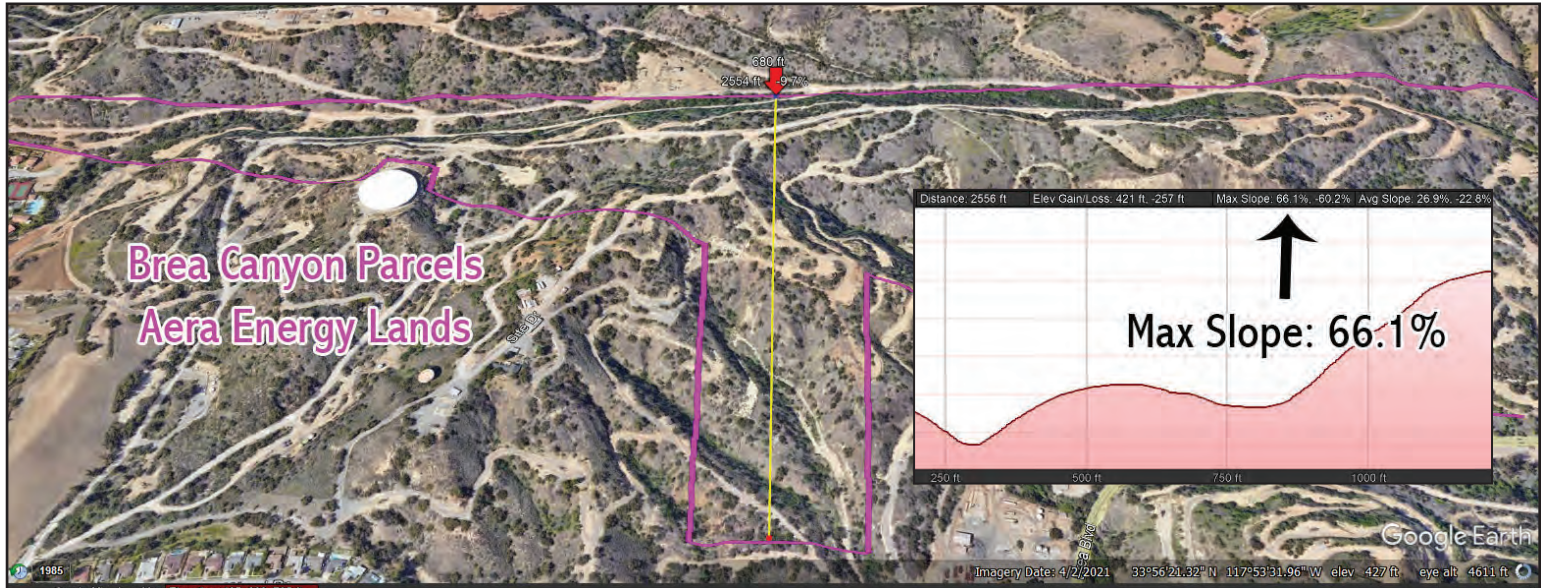
Yet, one more update occurred this summer. More zoning changes proposed to reduce the number of houses from over 1,400 to just 65 (one unit per 40 acres). This change would make L.A. County's planning documents consistent with one another (as required by state law), aligning various elements of the General Plan (e.g. Housing, Natural Resources, Safety, and Circulation). In addition, these newer policies strengthened the SEA designation and the evolving Community Wildfire Protection Ordinance. This will make building in the hills far more difficult for developers.



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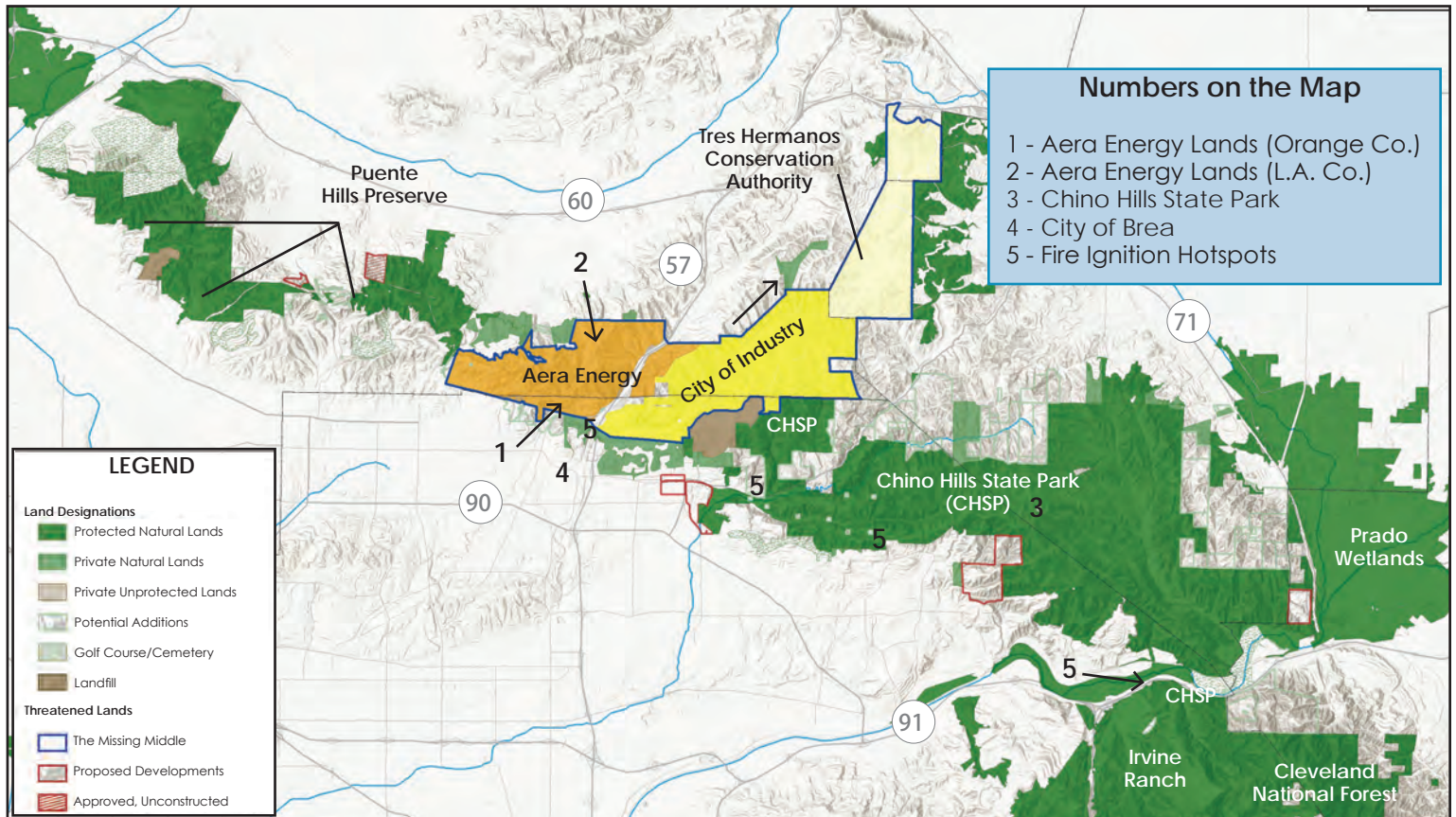
At a meeting in August, the Regional Planning Commission unanimously supported the new restrictive zoning. The next stop is the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors in January. The project lies in Supervisor Solis's District. Please take a moment to express your support for the downzoning of the Aera land by emailing Supervisor Solis at [FirstDistrict@bos.lacounty.gov](mailto:FirstDistrict@bos.lacounty.gov).

While good news abounds in L.A. County, sadly, the County of Orange revealed that it is open to allowing 1,857 houses on the 300-acre Orange County portion of Aera's land despite the extensive oil operations and steep slopes. Hills For Everyone is working with its legal team to push the County to remove or reduce the unit count.



This graphic shows that portions of the Aera Energy lands (purple outline) have steep slopes. In this case, its maximum slope is 66.1%.

## Mapping the Corridor Projects



# Healing Scars on the Land

For over a century, cattle grazed on the land that is now Chino Hills State Park. Nearly every 640-acre section was encircled by barbed wire to separate various cattle leases. Scores of miles of wire have been removed over the last 42 years of public ownership, but many more miles remain. Without cattle to eat the grasses, and with the re-emergence of native plants, much of the fencing has disappeared in the plant growth, making it more difficult to find and remove.

Much of the remaining fence lines that stretch across the Park were revealed when the land was laid bare by the 2020 Blue Ridge Fire. Thanks to an effort led by volunteer Mary Glaser of Yorba Linda, the remaining wire is now mapped on GPS. Now we know where it is hiding so we can find and remove it without waiting for a fire to denude the landscape!

Over the last two years, park staff and 41 volunteers have worked their way through the interior of the Park, removing 3.6 miles of fencing. It took seven days to just transport material out of the bush to a location where it

could be picked up on a road. The intrepid volunteers have occasionally been thanked by watchful deer.

Weather permitting, they plan to resume work on Fridays starting in late October. If you want to help remove this barrier to safe wildlife movement, email Mary at [Mary@ChinoHillsStatePark.org](mailto:Mary@ChinoHillsStatePark.org).



Claire Schlotterbeck

## Returning Board Member

Former Brea City Councilman Glenn Parker has rejoined the Board of Hills For Everyone. He served on Brea's Council from 1990–1998 and 2014–2022. Currently, he chairs the Wildlife Corridor Conservation Authority. Glenn brings many years of dedication and experience to the conservation effort, and we are glad to have him back on our Board.



Provided by Glenn Parker

## Fire Anniversary, Wake Up Call



Claire Schlotterbeck

Fifteen years ago, the Freeway Complex Fire scorched its way through our hills, burning over 30,000 acres and 300 homes. One fire started near Corona when a car pulled off the freeway into dry brush, while a second fire started in Brea when poorly maintained power lines sparked in the winds. As a result of those hot, dry, strong Santa Ana Winds, the two fires merged the following day.

This fire was a wake-up call for many of us. Hills For Everyone subsequently embarked on a study of fires in our hills. Though the fire departments of four counties and five cities have jurisdiction over portions of the hills, none of them were curious enough to take a high-level view of where, why, and how often fires were starting—so we did. Thanks to the study, we have identified three hot spots: the 91 Freeway around Gypsum Canyon; the Rimcrest area in Yorba Linda; and Carbon Canyon Road across from the State Park Discovery Center in Brea. We are now also watching a fourth location along the 57 Freeway north of Lambert Road.

We also learned that it is not usually the flame front from dry brush that burns houses down. Rather, it is the ember storm from other homes that burned down neighborhoods. Every home is fuel in and of itself.

## Brea Adopts Tree Policy



Melanie Schlotterbeck

This summer, Hills For Everyone (in partnership with Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks) supported the approval of a Native Tree Preservation Ordinance by the Brea Planning Commission and City Council.

The Ordinance, which took effect in September 2023 requires protection of native trees including oak, willow, sycamore, tecate cypress, black walnut, black cottonwood, Fremont cottonwood, and white alder. The ordinance applies to all commercial properties as well as all residential lots that are 1/2 acre or larger. Great job City of Brea—let's hope other cities and counties enact similar tree preservation policies.



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## Status Report on Legislative Bills

Wildlife depend on more than just sun, rain, and habitat. They depend on us to help them by enacting good laws. This past legislative session in Sacramento offered up some good and bad laws for wildlife and conservation. We want to thank you for your participation in responding to our alerts via our email notification whether it was to defeat a bad bill or support a good bill.

Bill Status:

- **SB 337:** Makes the 30x30 effort permanent. It passed the Legislature. We urged the Governor's signature.
- **AB 1633:** Allows developers to sue a city even before they have made a decision on a project. It passed the Legislature. We urged the Governor's veto.



Claire Schlotterbeck

## Get Involved

There are many ways to support HFE's work. In addition to these platforms, you can join our email list. We send out about one email a month and never sell, trade, or share our list. Subscribe on our website:



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