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50 Year Vision of Protecting Eastern Ridgelines Advances with State, Regional and Local Partnerships

March 24, 2023, CHINO HILLS - Today, the Power In Nature Coalition and Hills For Everyone announced alongside the California Natural Resources Agency, the Wildlife Conservation Board, State Senator Kelly Seyarto (R-32), State Assemblymember Phillip Chen (R-55), and local leaders plans of an 842-acre acquisition adjacent to Chino Hills State Park. This acquisition furthers the original vision to protect the Park's eastern ridgelines planned nearly 50 years ago. It also demonstrates Southern California's commitment to stay on track furthering the state's efforts to protect 30% of lands and waters by 2030.



A view looking east over the natural ridgelines, some protected and some not yet protected. PHOTO CREDIT: HILLS FOR EVERYONE

In 2021, Governor Newsom and the California Natural Resources Agency [set a bold](#) goal for the conservation of land and waters in the state to safeguard six million more acres of land and half a million more acres of coastal waters. The "30x30" initiative prioritizes the protection of natural resources, addresses environmental inequities, promotes climate resilience, and boosts regional economies. Achieving this goal requires bipartisan, bicameral support and strong partnerships with committed funding toward conservation and climate resilience projects, as exemplified by this acquisition.

"We are grateful for partners like State Parks, Hills For Everyone, Power In Nature, the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, and The Conservation Fund who are working to advance regionally led conservation like protecting Chino Hills State Park's eastern ridgelines," said **Dr. Jennifer Norris, California Natural Resource Agency Deputy Secretary for Biodiversity and Habitat**. "Projects like these move us closer to 30x30, by protecting biodiversity and expanding access for all."

Hills For Everyone (HFE) was formed in 1970 with the goal of creating Chino Hills State Park. The organization designed the park along ridgeline boundaries to protect the water quality for wildlife and the views for visitors. **Claire Schlotterbeck, Executive Director of HFE** said, “Announcing the plans of this ridgeline acquisition has been a long time coming. This has been our vision since the beginning of the effort in the 1970s. It aligns with the State Park’s General Plan and fulfills what so many people have worked toward for so long. We are grateful for all of the visionary thinkers who made this a priority.”

Benefits of Chino Hills State Park

The 14,100 acre Chino Hills State Park lies at the juncture of four of Southern California’s most populous counties: Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, and Riverside, making it one of the most accessible parks in California.

“Chino Hills State Park is a wilderness at the junction of four Southern California counties and offers respite for urban residents that long to experience varied species, wildflowers and views,” said **Senator Kelly Seyarto**. “No doubt many of the 18 million people within an hour’s drive would be surprised to find such a place right in their backyard.”

Chino Hills: A Refuge for Biodiversity

The Park is managed to protect natural lands and safeguard the plants and animals. Visitors can spot mule deer, coyotes, bobcats, and gray foxes, as well red-tailed hawks and golden eagles. The Park also provides habitat for several endangered species, including the California gnatcatcher and Least Bell’s vireo. From stream corridors to oak and walnut woodlands, Chino Hills State Park offers a unique opportunity to observe and appreciate the natural beauty of Southern California’s landscapes close to home.



A mule deer walks across a hillside within the 842 acre conservation area. PHOTO CREDIT: HILLS FOR EVERYONE

“Wildlife Conservation Board is proud to have been a partner in previous phases of this ridgeline protection effort,” said **Rebecca Fris, Assistant Executive Director of the Wildlife Conservation Board**. “Chino Hills State Park serves not only as an anchor parcel in the Puente-Chino Hills Wildlife Corridor, but also provides the opportunity for additional conservation investments and expansion of important habitat for multiple plant and wildlife species.”

Critical Local and Statewide Partnerships

Chino Hills State Park was created through collaboration between legislators, government agencies, non-profits, and community members. These efforts continue to be essential in protecting the Park's

natural resources and expanding visitor services. In 2021, SB 266 was signed by Governor Newsom allowing Chino Hills State Park to grow by protecting the eastern ridgelines.

“I’m excited that the next phase of preserving and celebrating this unique public asset is finally underway, and I’m very proud to have played a role, as author of SB 266, in the acquisition and preservation of an additional 1,500 acres of open space as Chino Hills State Park,” said **Senator Josh Newman (D-29)**. “Acquiring and preserving precious local open space will offset habitat fragmentation in our densely populated region while assisting the state's larger effort toward preserving 30 percent of land and coastal waters by the year 2030.”

Plans for Acquisition

When the state wasn’t ready to add the lands into the State Park system, but a willing seller finally emerged, HFE coordinated with the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority to hold title as an interim owner and manager while the entire 1,500 acre of ridgelines were purchased in phases. Presently, the Authority manages roughly 700 acres contiguous to the Park.



The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority would add these and neighboring hills and canyons into its ownership temporarily.

PHOTO CREDIT: HILLS FOR EVERYONE

First National Investment Properties sold the first 320 acres for preservation in 2021. There are approximately 842 acres from the same landowner available for this next phase. Securing these lands would complete the eastern ridgelines and begins to solidify the east-west connection to Prado Basin.

The Conservation Fund is steadily working on the negotiations for the remaining acreage with the intent to add the land into the Authority’s ownership. Once all the pieces are purchased, which is anticipated near the end of the year, the land will begin the process of being transferred into the State Park system as required by Senate Bill 266.

“I’m grateful for the partnership my office has had with Hills For Everyone and the longtime investment made in acquisitions of this park. In partnership with Senator Newman, I co-authored a bill—SB 266—that allows the expansion of Chino Hills State Park,” said **Assemblymember Phillip Chen**. “With a willing seller in place, and the tenacity to get things done working together—I can’t wait for the news that the acquisition has closed escrow.”

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Conservation Acquisition Adjacent to Chino Hills State Park

