

# Hills For Everyone

Friends of the  
Puente-Chino Hills Wildlife Corridor



Newsletter No. 43

Fall 2020

## Aera's Project of 3,600 Houses Withdrawn



Melanie Schlotterbeck

The majority of Aera's development would have been in this valley. For reference, the 57 Freeway is on the far left side and Brea is in the distance.

In 2002, Aera Energy, a subsidiary of Shell and ExxonMobil, proposed 3,600 houses on its 3,000 hillside acres. This land is the backdrop for Brea and Rowland Heights and extends from the 57 Freeway over to Harbor Boulevard. Ninety percent of the land lies in unincorporated Los Angeles County, while the rest is in unincorporated Orange County. Much of the land in LA County had an extra layer of protection over it (as a Significant Ecological Area [SEA]) because of the many natural resources—like oak woodlands. In August, new rules governing SEAs tripped Aera up and it withdrew the housing proposal. Here is how it unfolded:

Aera originally sought approval for 3,600 houses and a commercial site. Together this would have generated an additional 50,000 vehicle trips per day on local streets and roads. Back then, it was turned down at the first approval step because of the extensive destruction of oak trees the development would have caused. In 2005, with prospects looking dim with LA County, Aera took an almost identical project to the City of Diamond Bar in hopes that it would be annexed into this development-friendly city. But negotiations fell through there as well.

In the meantime, residents stood on street corners opposing the project and attended meeting after meeting. A coalition of concerned cities was formed and set aside

funds to fight Aera's overreaching plans. The Hillside Open Space Education Coalition (HOSEC) was created. It is composed of the cities of Brea, La Habra, La Habra Heights, Whittier, and the communities of Hacienda Heights and Rowland Heights. Scientifically conducted public opinion surveys showed overwhelming support for protecting the Aera land.

The project went quiet for many years, during which time the County of Los Angeles strengthened its SEA ordinance. In August, with stronger SEAs in place, the County scheduled a hearing and recommended denying the dormant Aera project since it was so outdated and violated so many existing rules and laws. Before the Planning Commission could vote, Aera withdrew its project application.

The good news is, whatever Aera comes up with next will need to have a much smaller footprint than its previous proposal.



Melanie Schlotterbeck

# 320 Acres Protected

Melanie Schlotterbeck



After various fits and starts associated with t's being crossed and i's being dotted, the 320-acre Eastbridge property was added to the inventory of protected lands. Since the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) has not been acquiring land, the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, one of our partners on the Wildlife Corridor Conservation Authority, agreed to take title until DPR returns to its mission of saving land.

DPR always intended to add this land to Chino Hills State Park, since the Park almost entirely surrounds the property. In addition, the Parks' General Plan calls for this acquisition.

We are in the process of working on acquiring the remaining 80 acres of the Eastbridge property.

# Hidden Oaks

The Hidden Oaks property owners originally proposed 107 units and then reduced it to 53 units. Now the land is for sale. Back in the 1990s, the landowner at the time cut down hundreds of full-grown oak trees. Outraged residents united, and so began the culture of Chino Hills' residents caring for their beloved oaks. The abuse of this land is what spurred the residents of Chino Hills to write and then pass Measure U in 1999. This measure limits the number of units that can be built in the City to those allowed in the General Plan unless the developer wants to take the project to a vote of the people.



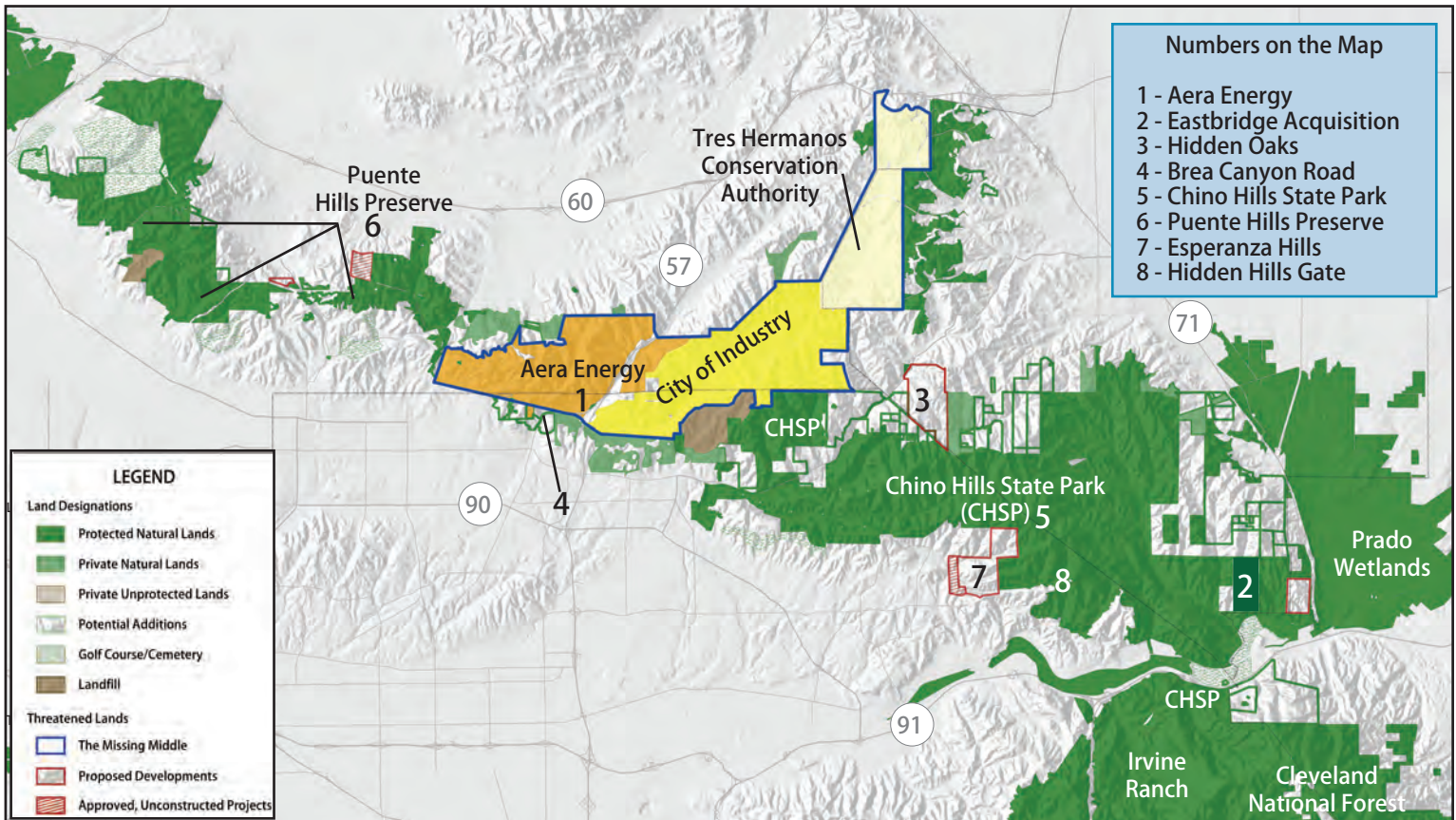
Ron Nadeau

# Ralphs Fundraiser

Register your Ralphs award card yearly. Go to [Ralphs.com](http://Ralphs.com), click on Community, Community Contributions, and then Participant, and register there. Our organization code is 91199.



# Mapping the Corridor Projects



## Brea Canyon Road

The County of Orange continues its study of the widening of Brea Canyon Road from two-lanes to four. The road connects Brea with the City of Diamond Bar and parallels the western side of the 57 Freeway. The expansion is proposed to only occur from Brea City limits near Central up to the southbound entrance of the 57 Freeway. It, however, remains two lanes into Diamond Bar. We know this area is the only place that wildlife can migrate between the Chino and the Puente Hills under the 57 Freeway. Under pressure from us and the Habitat Authority, the County of Orange embarked on a wildlife movement study that is now underway.

## Park/Preserve Hours

Chino Hills State Park and the Habitat Authority hours changed on October 1st. Here are the details:

Chino Hills State Park 8 AM - 5 PM daily

Habitat Authority Lands\* 9 AM - 5 PM daily

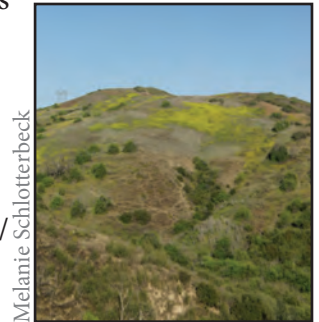
*\*This applies to: Sycamore Canyon, Turnbull Canyon, and Hacienda Hills.*

## Esperanza Hills

Residents fighting the 340-unit Esperanza Hills project in the hills above Yorba Linda still await a chance for their attorney to argue their last lawsuit in the Court of Appeal. Overturned three times, the project was most recently re-approved for the fourth time by the County of Orange in 2018. The pandemic put the final oral arguments on hold until mid-November.

In the meantime, the developer applied for a grading permit in August for his lone entry road in the City of Yorba Linda. The developer claimed he had legal rights to two parcels and planned to use up to 100' for his roadway.

However, residents believe agreements between previous owners confirm the access is only a 20-24 foot wide easement on one specific parcel. The City of Yorba Linda agreed and denied the permit. It is unclear what will happen next, as a 20-24 foot wide roadway is substandard for ingress/egress, fire access, police, and more.



## Chino Hills State Park Updates

### WATER LINE REPAIR

The campground is closed due to water line improvements that are underway. It should re-open in early 2021. The paved road may also experience periodic closures. There is no water below the kiosk so BYO Water.

### E-BIKES

E-bikes are considered motorized vehicles per the State Vehicle Code, as are dirt bikes and motorcycles. None of these are allowed on State Park trails. They are prohibited within the Park's General Plan. Considering the speed limit for the State Park is 15 MPH, e-bikes could easily turn the Park into a racetrack. The primary purpose of the Park is to protect the fragile resources. Rangers are ticketing e-bike users.

### DISCOVERY CENTER CLOSED

Dramatic cuts to the state budget have caused the Park to lose its seasonal maintenance staff and shut down the Discovery Center in Brea since the Park Interpreter was reassigned as a COVID contact tracer. A volunteer is opening the building on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday mornings from 9 AM to 1 PM. This allows emergency assistance in case someone is injured.

### HIDDEN HILLS ROAD FENCING

While not an authorized access into the State Park, regular users of the public road at Hidden Hills in Yorba Linda were surprised and dismayed to find it locked. A chain link fence with barbed wire cut off access to the Wire Springs Trail in Chino Hills State Park. The risk for visitors is that they don't know the exit is blocked and might have to backtrack many miles. This is particularly dangerous in the heat. Efforts are underway to inform relevant parties of this violation.





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## Email Updates

If you have not heard from us lately via email please be sure we have your correct email address by contacting us at: [info@HillsForEveryone.org](mailto:info@HillsForEveryone.org).

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## COVID & Our Conservation Work

When COVID came along, we took a deep breath to find our footing. Where does saving land fit in this new world? We learned it fits right in the middle of what likely caused this pandemic. Wildlife scientists have long warned of the dangers of extensive habitat loss for the planet and for humans alike. As we infringe on secluded habitats, we come into closer contact with wildlife, increasing our exposure to diseases our immune systems cannot fight. We also know that having parkland in the middle of our highly urbanized area has provided a much needed respite, as well as healing and relief for many.

There are millions of stories being written—some of us are in relative comfort, though inconvenienced. Others are in world of hurt with worry, pain or sickness. Please know, we understand that world all too well.

This moment has reminded us about the power of cooperation and nature's ability to heal. We know you are here with us—even if remotely. For now, we hope you and yours remain safe. Please be careful as the world begins to reopen: wear a mask and physically distance. You matter.

To continue to share our work and activities with you we are working on webinars. Now is a perfect time to join our e-mail list to learn about these when we announce them.

For us, the words of Albert Camus ring true: *“In the midst of winter I found there was, within me, an invincible summer. And that makes me happy. For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me, within me, there's something stronger—something better, pushing right back.”*

## Get Involved

There are many ways to support Hills For Everyone'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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