

Hills For Everyone

Friends of the
Puente-Chino Hills Wildlife Corridor



Newsletter No. 50

Spring 2024

Happy 30th Birthday Habitat Authority!



Melanie Schlotterbeck

Two hikers enjoy Powder Canyon, one of the Habitat Authority's lands, on a beautiful spring day.

By: Andrea Gullo, Habitat Authority's Executive Director

This year, the Puente Hills Habitat Preservation Authority (Habitat Authority) is celebrating 30 years of preserving the Puente Hills. It has been an honor for our agency to play a role in supporting nature and the public good. Pending future funding, we hope to continue our support for years to come!

The Habitat Authority was formed as a joint powers authority—a partnership—between the City of Whittier, County of Los Angeles, Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County, and a public member representing Hacienda Heights. The Habitat Authority came into existence in 1994 as a condition of approval for the Puente Hills Landfill, our main funding source. The Authority manages over 3,880 acres in the Puente Hills as protected natural lands.

The Puente Hills Preserve is located within a globally recognized biodiversity hotspot (places rich in species variety, but threatened by development). The lands are home to a variety of habitats and wildlife such as bobcats, bats, birds, and reptiles and amphibians—many of which are threatened or rare. The Habitat Authority is actively working to protect this biodiversity through efforts such as restoring over 312 acres of habitat.

Melanie Schlotterbeck



These lands are accessible to thousands of people who enjoy the Preserve's 23 miles of trails via our six trailheads: Sycamore Canyon, Turnbull Canyon, Powder Canyon, Arroyo Pescadero, Hacienda Hills, and Hellman Park. The use of these trails for exercise not only improves physical and mental health, but also fosters social connections and strengthens community bonds. Our amazing volunteers contribute to this social fabric by hosting public hikes for all to enjoy. The Habitat Authority staff, rangers, and volunteers have provided outdoor education to over 33,000 youth and adults.

Additionally, the land itself contributes to our health by capturing carbon emissions, reducing flood risks, and lowering pollution levels. Open spaces are known to benefit local economies by increasing home values; attracting new residents and businesses which increase sales and tax revenue; and contributing to the local economy when recreational visitors use their purchasing power for equipment, food, and gas. Moreover, our rangers, who provide law enforcement and are trained in wildfire fighting, help keep trails clean and safe, which improves the local communities' quality of life.

Now that the Puente Hills Landfill is closed, our funding for maintaining this important work is limited. We're

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currently investigating new, long-term funding options to ensure these benefits remain accessible to the wider community.

On Saturday, April 20, the Habitat Authority welcomes your participation at our Earth Day event to celebrate all that the hills mean to us. Please see our flyer for details. All are welcome!

To sign up for our newsletter or register for a hike, and for more information about our history, funding options and challenges, and a detailed list of accomplishments, please visit: www.HabitatAuthority.org.

Earth Day Celebration

When: Saturday, April 20, 2024
9:00am-11:30am

Where: Hacienda Hills Trailhead
14600 Orange Grove Ave
Hacienda Heights, CA. 91745

Help protect the planet in honor of Earth Day 2024!

- Ecology and Clean-up hike, 9 am
- Weed removal project
- Fun craft for kids
- Sign up to stay informed about future events
- Learn about the Puente Hills Preserve and the Habitat Authority.

All children under 18 must be accompanied by an adult. Please wear sturdy close-toed shoes and outdoor appropriate clothing. Water will be provided.

Service groups please RSVP to Marlyn at info@HabitatAuthority.org

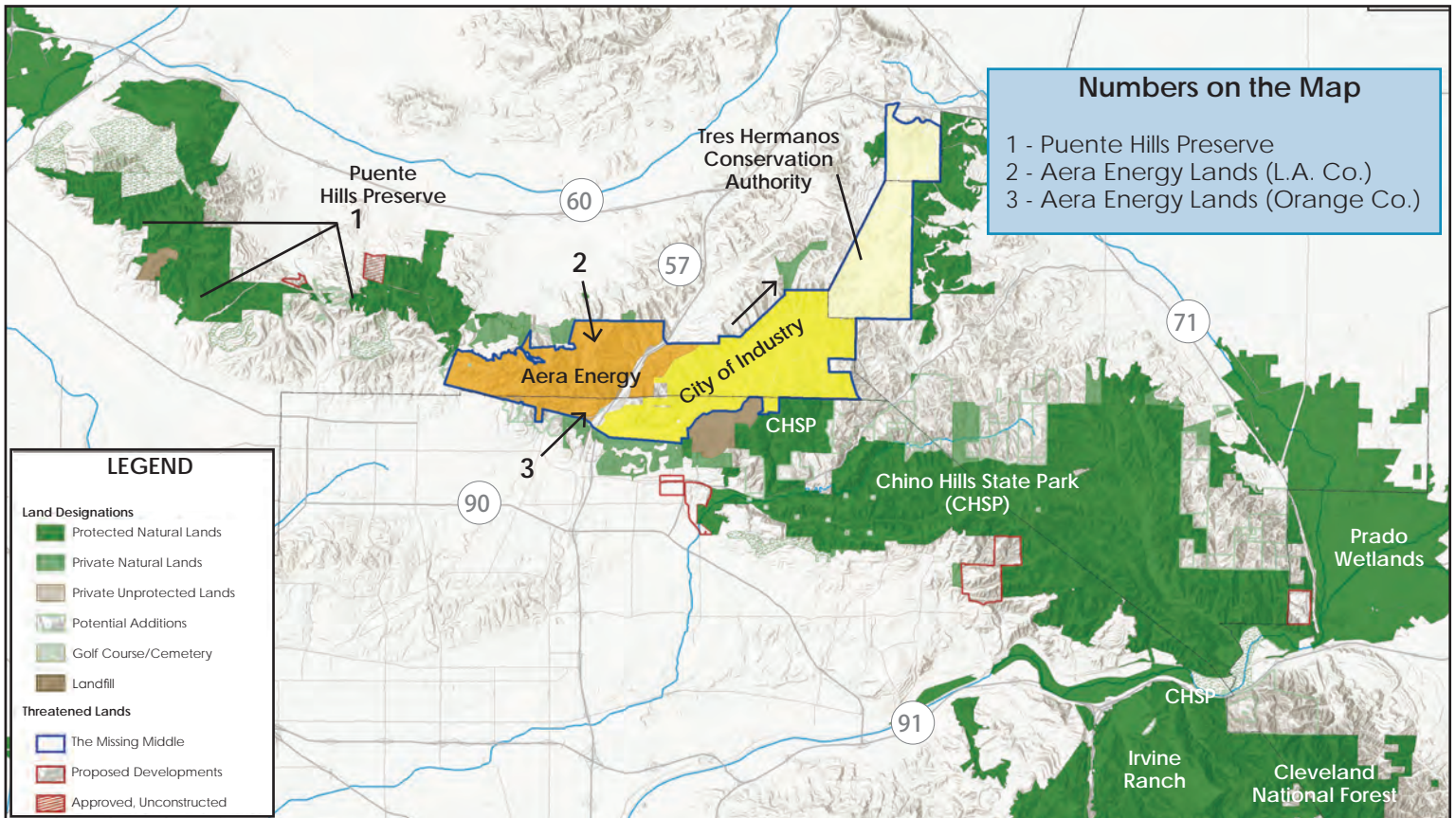
For additional Earth Day Celebration information contact Marlyn info@HabitatAuthority.org or call 562-945-9003.



Melanie Schlotterbeck



Mapping the Corridor Projects



Key Linkage Gets a New Layer of Protection

Melanie Schlotterbeck



and grasslands along the 57 Freeway between Brea and Diamond Bar.

Hills For Everyone and many organizations throughout the state have been working to protect lands through a statewide initiative called 30x30. After being evaluated for inclusion, Aera's land was deemed a top priority for acquisition due to its biodiversity, climate resilience, and access.

While policy work can be yawn-inducing, it is where land conservation begins. Having a good plan and zoning in place reduces the likelihood of development—making it easier

to protect the land. Conservation negotiations and agreements begin with settling on an acquisition price. Figuring out that fair price includes determining the "developability" of the land. An appraiser considers what is called the "highest and best use" for the property.

If 3,600 houses were allowed (like Aera Energy had proposed), the land would be valued considerably higher. If the rights to build (aka entitlements), had been approved, it would be even higher. However, with the ESGVAP in place, and with only 65 units as the potential for development, the land's appraisal value drops significantly. With that lower price, assembling funds for acquisition as parkland becomes much easier.

A collective sigh of relief could be heard across the hills when the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved an ordinance making development in our hills much more difficult.

The five-member Board unanimously approved the East San Gabriel Valley Area Plan (ESGVAP). Area Plans are a tool to guide development in L.A. County. The ordinance included rezoning of much of Aera Energy's lands from one housing unit per acre down to one unit per 40 acres. Only about 65 housing units will be allowed.

You may recall, Aera Energy owns the natural ridgelines that serve as the backdrop of North Orange County and Southeastern Los Angeles County. They total 3,000 acres with 2,700 of these located in Los Angeles County. These lands are the beautiful oak-studded hills

Saving 30% of Earth by 2030

Scientists consider California a global biodiversity hotspot—a place where a rich variety of life forms collide with threats like land development and climate change; that's why our work has a disproportionately large impact on global conservation efforts. Last year, Governor Newsom took a strong leadership stance by signing an Executive Order committing California to the 30x30 initiative. It sets the goal to protect 30% of California's lands and coastal waters by 2030 and is called 30x30.

But his efforts wouldn't outlast his administration unless this commitment were codified by legislation—which is exactly what happened last fall when he signed Senate Bill 337 into law. This legislation elevates conservation work to a whole new level. The next step is funding this statewide conservation work, likely through a climate bond. We partner closely with the Power In Nature Coalition to advance 30x30 work with non-profits up and down the state.



We Can't Do This Alone!

Hills For Everyone can't do this conservation work alone. That's why we often partner with other non-profits, local governments, leadership, and supporters to achieve our goals. Here is a list (in alphabetical order) of some of our recent partners:

- Chino Hills State Park Interpretive Association
- Endangered Habitats League
- Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks
- Friends of the Whittier Hills
- Hacienda Heights Improvement Association
- Hillside Open Space Education Coalition
- Pomona Valley Audubon Society
- Puente-Chino Hills Task Force of the Sierra Club
- Puente Hills Habitat Authority
- Responsible Land Use
- Rowland Heights Community Coordinating Council
- Sea and Sage Audubon Society
- Wildlife Corridor Conservation Authority





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Truck Storage Approved

In November, Hills For Everyone appealed a decision by the Orange County Planning Commission to allow truck storage at a site located on Aera Energy land. The site is important because it is near the mouth of a linkage where wildlife emerge after crossing under the 57 Freeway bridge. Even though the County itself designated the spot a "Wildlife Habitat Area," it opted not to conduct an environmental review.

Despite the efforts of Supervisors Katrina Foley and Vicente Sarmiento to add conditions of approval to make the site safer for wildlife and decrease environmental impacts, the O.C. Board of Supervisors voted 3-2 to deny our appeal. In the end, Supervisor Doug Chaffee, whose district includes this project, refused to accept any changes to his motion. He, along with Supervisors Andrew Do and Don Wagner, voted to deny the appeal.

Though we lost the appeal, there was one positive outcome: three of the Supervisors (Chaffee, Foley, and Sarmiento) all spoke publicly and repeatedly of their desire to see the Aera Energy lands saved. That is welcomed news in our efforts to preserve the Missing Middle.

We are grateful to the many residents who responded to our call to action to write to the L.A. and O.C. Board of Supervisors on the items that were before each of them. Your responsiveness, by sending emails to the two Boards of Supervisors, was amazing and impactful. Thank you!

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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