

# Outdoors

in Orange County

Laguna Beach

## LET ME COUNT THE WAYS... SAVING OPEN SPACE IN ORANGE COUNTY

By: Melanie Schlotterbeck

Here are some numbers for you:  
--- 18,000 --- 12 --- 5 --- 4,800,000 --- 65 --- 89 ---

What does it all mean?

- 18,000 - the number of acres in the Laguna Coast Wilderness Park.
- 12 - the number of funding sources it took to purchase the 649-acre Coal Canyon Wildlife Corridor.

- 5 - the percent of coastal wetlands that remain undeveloped in Orange County.
- 4,800,000 - the number of people living in the Santa Ana River Watershed.
- 65 - the number of conservation groups affiliated with the Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks' Green Vision Project.
- 89 - the number of bird species found at the Los Cerritos Wetlands.

As you can see conservation efforts involve a variety of numbers -- from parcel size to species, partners to population. These numbers play into the game we call land conservation.

To help you better understand some of the tools conservation organizations have used for preserving some of our natural heritage lands this article will highlight through case studies some of the typical and unique methods to protect land.

### FEE TITLE ACQUISITION



Hidden Ranch - 814 acres - FMV \$4,815,000

In 2004, the Trust for Public Land (TPL) negotiated a conservation transaction to purchase fee title of the 814-acre Hidden Ranch property. Nestled in the canyons of the Cleveland National Forest, the property was acquired due to its significant natural resource values. Working with TPL staff, the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) allocated \$15 million for land acquisition in Orange County, specifically focused on coastal sage scrub habitat. TPL worked with the landowner to have the property appraised and determined its fair market value (FMV) to be \$4.8 million. TPL purchased it using the WCB grant and eventually this property was transferred to The Wildlands Conservancy for permanent protection with deed restrictions.

### DEVELOPER MITIGATION



Shapell C - 1,262 acres - FMV \$3,100,000

In 2006, the 1,262-acre Shapell C site in eastern Yorba Linda was donated to the California Department of State Parks with a \$500,000 endowment. This property was added to Chino Hills State Park. The landowner, Shapell, was required to donate this property as mitigation for building on California gnatcatcher habitat in the nearby hills. This particular ridgeline property was the subject of Hills For Everyone's first lawsuit in a battle to protect the Park's ridgeline. The suit was lost on a technicality in 1981 and yet in the long term, the war was won and the ridgeline was protected 25 years later. The lesson is that in fighting for this ridgeline, the message about the site's importance to the Park was delivered and it was ultimately protected.

### LANDOWNER DONATION



Wardlow/Mello - 20 acres - FMV \$40,000

In 2006, a landowner generously donated his land to the Trust for Public Land. The property, in the Oak Flat area of the Cleveland National Forest, consists of 20 acres and its estimated fair market value was around \$40,000 due to its remote location. Landowners are able to receive significant tax benefits for several years when donating property to non-profit organizations like TPL. Eventually this property will likely be transferred to the Cleveland National Forest.



### IN THIS ISSUE...

WAYS TO SAVE  
NATURAL LANDS

FAIRVIEW PARK  
RESTORATION

GREEN VISION MAP  
& GROUP UPDATES

### UPDATE ON MEASURE M

The Orange County Transportation Authority's Renewed Measure M includes habitat mitigation funding. An Environmental Oversight Committee (EOC) has been meeting all year to work through the process of habitat acquisition, restoration and management. This process includes creating a Master Agreement for a Natural Communities Conservation Plan and Habitat Conservation Plan (NCCP/HCP) for Orange County which the Authority and Resource Agencies will sign. Soon a habitat impacts analysis will guide the EOC in its consideration of potential mitigation sites.

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**CONSERVATION & LAND USE AGREEMENTS**



**Tejon Ranch - 240,000 acres - FMV unknown**

In 2008, the Planning and Conservation League, Audubon California, Sierra Club, Endangered Habitats League and the Natural Resources Defense Council signed a Conservation and Land Use Agreement with the Tejon Ranch Company. The Ranch is the largest contiguous privately owned property in the state. The Agreement protected 90% (or 240,000 acres) of the Tejon Ranch. California comes together at Tejon Ranch, as the Ranch lies at the confluence of four major ecological regions. It sits at the southernmost end of the Central Valley, provides a buffer from the Los Angeles Basin, and connects the southern Sierra on the east to the Coast Range on the west. The agreement, created the Tejon Ranch Conservancy, which is funded by transfer fees.

**PROPERTY TRANSFERS**



**Los Cerritos Wetlands - 100 acres - FMV unknown  
Sunset Ridge - 12 acres - FMV \$1,300,000**

In 2008, a land swap was proposed to preserve 175 acres of Los Cerritos Wetlands in Long Beach. Fifty-two acres of City-owned property could be traded for acreage in the heart of the Los Cerritos Wetlands. The City would then sell the marsh to the Los Cerritos Wetlands Authority for about \$25 million and use the proceeds to acquire 20 acres along the L.A. River for recreational open space. In 2006, after abandonment of the Pacific Coast Freeway in the 1970s, 15 acres of right-of-way owned by Caltrans was rezoned for a condominium development. Residents fought hard to retain this coastal site as open space. State legislation finally allowed transfer of the site from Caltrans to State Parks and subsequently back to the City of Newport Beach for park use. The cost to Newport Beach was \$1.3 million, the amount originally paid by Caltrans for the right-of-way.

**LANDFILL MITIGATION**



**Turnbull Canyon - 951 acres - FMV \$14,000,000**

In 2002, after a nine year battle the property known as Turnbull Canyon was purchased in perpetuity. The land, owned at the time by the Rose Hills Foundation and its counterpart the Los Angeles Archdiocese, had a proposed cemetery on the Canyon's steep and well vegetated slopes. The Puente Hills Landfill Native Habitat Preservation Authority stepped in and was able to purchase it because of a landfill mitigation fee. This fee, a \$1 surcharge for every one ton of trash dumped at the Puente Hills Landfill, is a unique funding source. Eventually, and as per the usual, several funding sources from project partners (US Fish and Wildlife Service and Department of Fish and Game) were needed to complete the conservation transaction. Now landfill mitigation fee programs are being established in Orange County because of this excellent example.

**PARK BOND FUNDING**



**Bolsa Chica - 103 acres - FMV \$65,000,000**

In 2005, the State of California made a significant purchase along Orange County's coast -- the purchase included the coveted lower bench of the Bolsa Chica Mesa. The mesa is known for its many sensitive bird species and environmentally sensitive habitat areas. Historically, the Bolsa Chica was a former outlet of the Santa Ana River and contains important Native American sites. California Coastal Communities, the developer, worked with conservation groups like the Bolsa Chica Land Trust for 10 years to preserve this property. The State paid for the land using funds from Proposition 50, a 2002 initiative that provides \$3.4 billion for environmental projects. In 2006, voters approved Proposition 84 for \$5.3 billion as a Water and Park bond that can fund other conservation transactions in the State.

**Fairview Park Wetlands and Riparian Habitat Project**

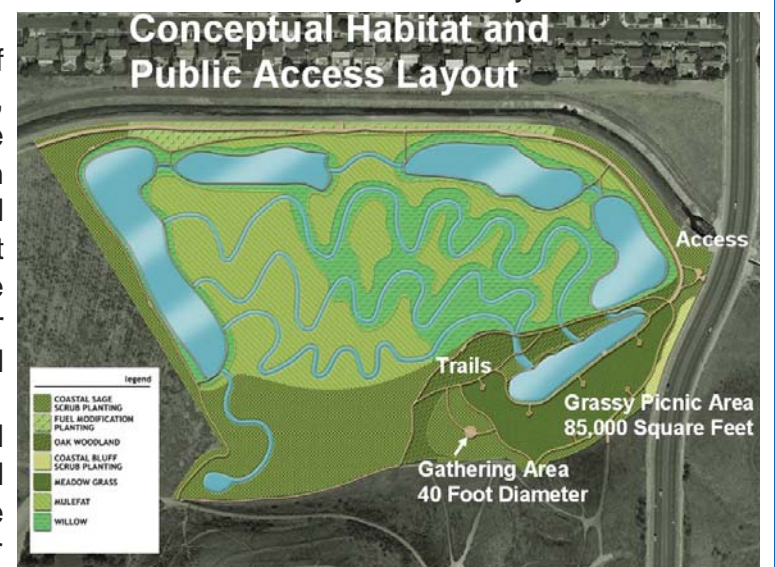
By: Robert Staples, City of Costa Mesa

The City of Costa Mesa has partnered with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (the Corps) and Orange County to help fund restoration of 35 acres of constructed wetlands and riparian habitat located in Fairview Park. The City's partnership with the Corps and the County will fund and construct a portion of the first phase of a three phase restoration project in the northern lowlands of the Park.

The first phase includes removal of invasive plant material, grubbing, grading, and installation of 17 acres of native riparian plants. The Corps will begin construction in November 2008 and be responsible for the first year plant establishment period. After one year the project will be turned over to the City for maintenance. The first phase is expected to be completed in the spring of 2009.

The second and third phases will include the wetlands installation, picnic and observation areas, and defined trails. The City is currently seeking grant funding for

these two phases. The completed project will provide the community with a unique opportunity of: improved passive recreation on various trails in the lower Park; viewing of wildlife and habitat in its natural state; and distinctive "water treatment" wetlands whereby water will be diverted from adjacent storm channels to be filtered and cleansed naturally.



**Birds of a feather...**

Be a part of Friends of Harbors, Beaches & Parks.

Help our practical, realistic projects make Orange County a better home for all of us.

Your help, large or small, is deeply appreciated.



**Yes!** I want to help Friends of Harbors, Beaches & Parks.

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Fairview Park - City of Costa Mesa

## McKibben Talks Climate Change in OC

More than 200 people attended the 11th Annual "Caring for Creation" Conference in October to hear environmental author and activist Bill McKibben discuss the need for society to understand the number "350." McKibben said the most recent scientific consensus warns that human society must reduce the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere to 350 parts per million (ppm) within the next few years to avoid the worst consequences of global climate change. Atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> is currently at 387 ppm. His organization can be found at [www.350.org](http://www.350.org). Held at St. Mark Presbyterian Church, the conference is sponsored by the Orange County Interfaith Coalition for the Environment.



OCICE Conference

Visit: [www.OCICE.org](http://www.OCICE.org)

## Lands Acquired in Trabuco Canyon

After years of working towards a purchase agreement the Department of Fish and Game and Wildlife Conservation Board, with assistance from The Conservation Fund, completed the acquisition of 306 acres in Trabuco Canyon. The property, known as Saddle Crest/Saddle Creek has a long history... It was once approved for development by the County only to have the entitlement decision repealed via a lawsuit. Located near the corner of Santiago Canyon and Live Oak Canyon Roads, the property was targeted for acquisition in the Natural Community Conservation Plan as the only low elevation wildlife connection of the Central Reserve to the Cleveland National Forest. The 2007 Santiago Fire burned the majority of this land, but the land is protected and slowly recovering.



Saddle Creek

Visit: [www.dfg.ca.gov/news/news08/08084.html](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/news/news08/08084.html)

## A Styrofoam OC Could be in the Future

In 2007, the City of Laguna Beach passed a citywide ordinance banning styrofoam. Due to the very active and ever expanding youth programs of Earth Resource Foundation (ERF), the City of Newport Beach educated the public, elected officials and businesses about the consequences of styrofoam use. November 28, 2008 marks the date all restaurants in Newport Beach need to begin implementing a non-styrofoam food service program. This ordinance passed unanimously and was supported by the Newport Beach Restaurant Association! With another success under their belts the ERF Youth Programs have set the goal for 2009 -- to make all of Orange County styrofoam free!

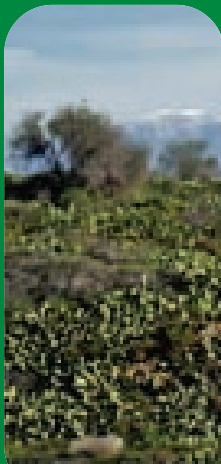


Youth Against Styrofoam

Visit: [www.EarthResource.org](http://www.EarthResource.org)

## Council to Decide Fate of Coyote Hills

Rising above inland valleys and the San Gabriel River plains, the West Coyote Hills are a thriving ecosystem that hosts a wide diversity (more than 130 species) of plants and animals. The landowner, Pacific Coast Homes (a subsidiary of Chevron) intends to construct 760 houses plus a commercial building on the 510 acres of undeveloped land. The Friends of Coyote Hills have long advocated for the preservation of all 510 acres as a park in park-poor northwest Orange County. Additions to the Environmental Impact Report have been made and a response submitted by attorneys at Shute, Mihaly & Weinberger LLP for Friends of Coyote Hills. The project will be reviewed by the Fullerton City Council in early 2009.

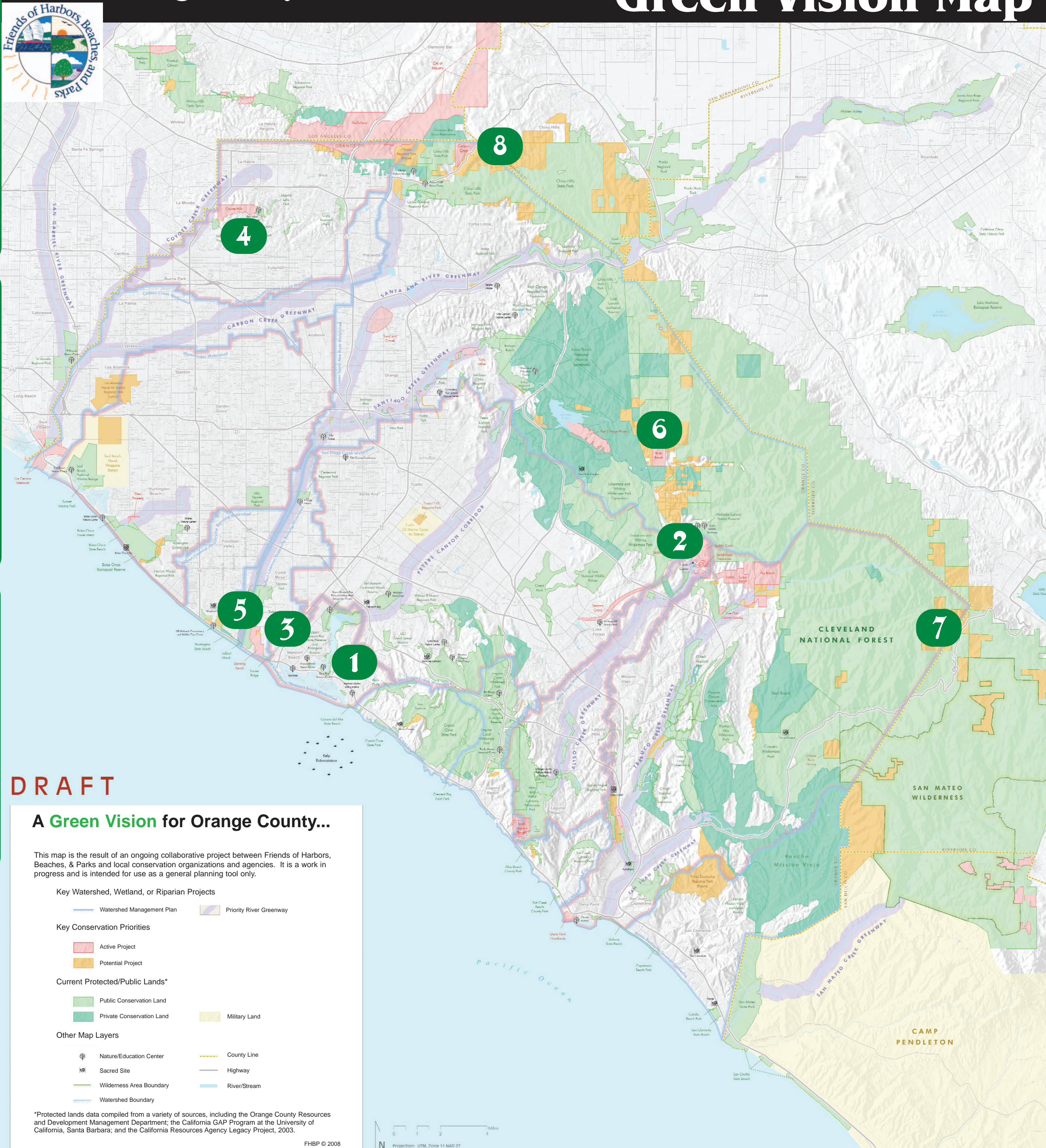


Coyote Hills

Visit: [www.CoyoteHills.org](http://www.CoyoteHills.org)

# Orange County

# Green Vision Map



## Banning Ranch Conservancy Formed

Banning Ranch, 412-acres located at the mouth of the Santa Ana River, has been declared critical habitat for the California gnatcatcher. Efforts to acquire and preserve the entire 412-acre property as open space are underway. The Banning Ranch Park and Preserve Task Force continues to work on organizing public officials and the local community. Earlier this year saw the formation of the Banning Ranch Conservancy, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Our first fundraiser was held at eVocal in Costa Mesa in August. Though the property is being appraised for open space acquisition, the landowners have applied to develop 1375 homes, a commercial center, and a coastal inn on the property.



Banning Ranch

Email: [info@SaveBanningRanch.org](mailto:info@SaveBanningRanch.org)

## Court Battle Ensues Over Ranch

The 320-acre Holtz Ranch, on the western edge of the Cleveland National Forest, includes a 158 year old Native American homestead. The OC Board of Supervisors approved a 12 equestrian mansion development on this site in 2007. This December, the Rural Canyons Conservation Fund and the Silverado Modjeska Park and Recreation District are going back to court in a second CEQA lawsuit over water quality compliance ordered in the first lawsuit and an endangered species issue not addressed in the EIR. This issue, the confirmation of the endangered arroyo toad (thought to be nearly extinct in area) and its habitat are in too close proximity to the proposed houses.



Holtz Ranch

Visit: [www.RuralCanyons.org](http://www.RuralCanyons.org)

## Houses Proposed in Santa Ana Mountains

A 165 home development, called the Preserve at San Juan, is planned and being processed for construction in the Santa Ana Mountains in the vicinity of El Cariso and just off the Ortega Highway. This land per the Orange County General Plan is classified as permanent open space. The Forest Service has been requested to swap its land near the Highway for a somewhat larger parcel further away from the Highway. This tract will be in an area which well could be in the path of a forest fire. In light of the recent Triangle Complex fire, and several environmental concerns, many feel the project should not be approved by the Forest Service nor by the OC Supervisors.



Santa Ana Mountains

## Ridgetop Property to be Built?

Canyon Crest is 367 acre hill top property owned by the Shopoff Investment Group that can be seen from all over central and north Orange County. Plans for 165 executive houses will necessitate bulldozing 1,899 oak and walnut trees. The steep landslide prone slopes require rearranging 10 million cubic yards of dirt to create housing pads. The land is surrounded by open space including Chino Hills State Park and Firestone Boy Scout Reservation and studies have shown mountains lions traverse the land on their way west. Unfortunately, the Canyon Crest property burned and thank goodness no homes were in the way! We await word on whether the Brea City Council will approve the project.



Canyon Crest

Visit: [www.StopCanyonCrest.org](http://www.StopCanyonCrest.org)