

**\*\* PRESS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE \*\***



Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks  
Melanie Schlotterbeck  
714-779-7561  
[GreenVision@FHBP.org](mailto:GreenVision@FHBP.org)  
[www.FHBP.org](http://www.FHBP.org)

## **FIRE STUDY SHOWS MOUNTAINS AND COASTAL AREAS BURNING TOO FREQUENTLY FOR HABITATS TO RECOVER**

**Newport Beach, CA, Thursday, August 27, 2015** – The regional non-profit Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks (FHBP) completed a study of the Santa Ana Mountains and Laguna Coast fire regimes. Research shows humans have increased the fire frequency from one fire every 50 years to one fire every seven months. The only natural fire occurred in 2009 and was caused by lightning strike, while all the others corresponded to humans (arson, car fires, fire arms, fireworks, etc.). The Study called “Understanding the Santa Ana Mountains and Laguna Coast Fire Regime” is available for download on the FHBP website: [www.FHBP.org](http://www.FHBP.org).

Fire studies conducted in 2009 and 2012 by the Irvine Ranch Conservancy and Hills For Everyone respectively provided in-depth information about the Irvine Ranch lands and Chino Hills State Park, but these studies left two significant fire impacted areas out; the Santa Ana Mountains and Laguna Coast. Two large local fires, one in 2007 and the other in 2008, prompted increased concern for and attention to large wildland fires in Orange County. Concern stemmed not only from the increase in houses located in wildland areas, which are more prone to burn due to location, but also the impact of frequent fires on the habitat lands. Two case studies were included in this FHBP Study: the 2007 Santiago Fire and the 1993 Laguna Fire.

“Roads seem to align where the fires start,” states Melanie Schlotterbeck, consultant to the non-profit FHBP. “In the Santa Ana Mountains fires tend to start along the 241 Toll Road, Santiago Canyon Road and Ortega Highway. Similarly, in the Laguna Coast, several fires started along Laguna Canyon Road.” It is important for agencies, residents, and cities to understand how, why, and when fires are starting so that more can be done to protect people, property, and parkland.

The report documents the fire perimeters, points of origin, causes, and weather conditions for each fire that burned in, adjacent to, or near the two study areas between 1914 and 2014—when the data was available. While there are some identifiable causes to the fire ignitions, many fires do not have a known cause. The data is available for download, on the FHBP website, for use in Google Earth.

FHBP’s goal with this study is to reduce the ignitions and frequency of fires burning in both areas, but especially in the Santa Ana Mountains. “Plants need time to regenerate, regrow, and recover from a burn—when they don’t have enough time in between fires to do that, non-native plants take over. Non-natives grow faster, dry earlier, and spread fire faster perpetuating the fire cycle,” states Schlotterbeck. Recommendations are available at the end of the study to take a pro-active prevention approach.

Friends of Harbors, Beaches, and Parks is a non-profit organization working to protect the natural lands and waterways of Orange County.

###