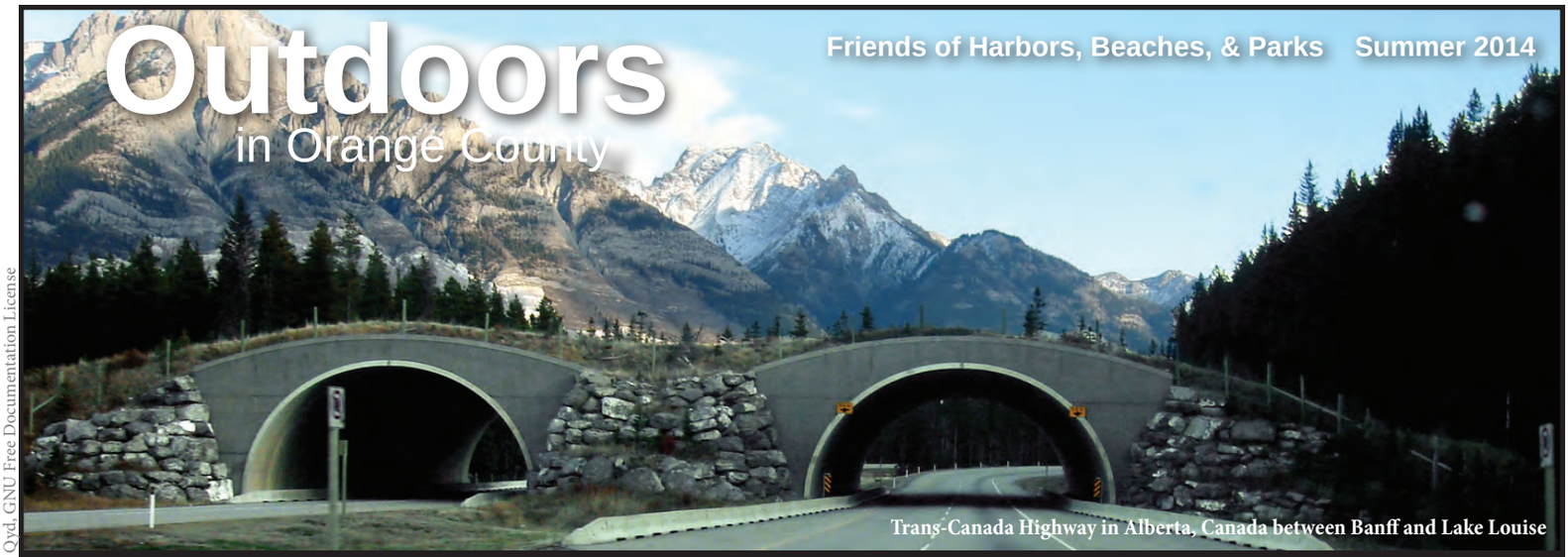
Outdoors in Orange County
Friends of Harbors, Beaches, & Parks Summer 2014



Trans-Canada Highway in Alberta, Canada between Banff and Lake Louise

(Re)Connecting Our Habitat Lands

By: Claire Schlotterbeck, FHBP

"Let's start indoors. Let's start by imagining a fine Persian carpet and a hunting knife. The carpet is twelve feet by eighteen, say. That gives us 216 square feet of continuous woven material ... we set about cutting the carpet into thirty-six equal pieces, each one a rectangle, two feet by three. Never mind the hard wood floor. The severing fibers release small tweaky noises, like the muted yelps of outraged Persian weavers. Never mind the weavers. When we are finished cutting, we measure the individual pieces, total them up—and find that, lo there's still nearly 216 square feet of recognizably carpetlike stuff. But what does it amount to? Have we got thirty-six nice Persian throw rugs? No. All we're left with is three dozen ragged fragments, each one worthless and commencing to fall apart.

Now take the same logic outdoors… It casts light on why the red fox is missing from Bryce Canyon National Park… An ecosystem is a tapestry of species and relationships. Chop away a section, isolate that section, and there arises the problem of unravelling."

Could anybody say it any better than David Quammen in the first paragraph of his book Song of the Dodo?

Wildlife need room to roam so they don't have to date (or mate with) their cousins. There are well founded laws against that in the human species. For example, in Amish populations where the options for partners are limited, cousins marry and reproduce. Genetic mutations are prevalent in this community. Inbreeding does not bode well for small populations.

Wildlife also need private places to breed and safe nurseries to raise their young. If they can't find these, wildlife will eventually die out in those habitat fragments—fragments we've created as we have spread across the planet creating barriers to movement and migration.

If a fragmented piece of land is not large enough to sustain the suite of species that belong there, they begin to die out. Scientists have been especially insistent that an ecosystem needs to be big enough to accommodate the largest predator. In our area that is the mountain lion. Without the cougar to manage the ecosystem there is an explosion of mid-level predators like raccoons, skunks, bobcats, and coyotes. These mid-level predators are much better raiders of bird nests. Over time the bird population changes and they no longer distribute plant seeds. The whole ecosystem simplifies in a process called trophic cascade. Our lands, rich in biodiversity, deserve better.

One remedy to the problem of these small fragments is to try to connect the fragments through wildlife corridors. These linkages can be short connections like Coal Canyon. This corridor connects protected land south of the 91 freeway to Chino Hills State Park on the north side via a freeway underpass. The underpass served as an escape route as well as a route to repopulate the State Park after the devastating 2008 Freeway Complex Fire.

Melanie Schlotterbeck

Harbor Blvd. tunnel shown center.

Sometimes connections need to be re-created like what occurred with the installation of a new tunnel under Harbor Blvd. in La Habra. Conservation biologists thought it would take 6-8 months for wildlife to find and use the new arched culvert, instead it only took weeks.

Laguna Greenbelt is working to ensure a longer connection through Irvine's Great Park to link the coastal wilderness parks to the Cleveland National Forest. Each corridor has its own set of challenges. Here it is a long, dark, and sometimes wet tunnel that only certain species will use.

The banner photo above is a well-known wildlife overpass created for Banff National Park. No overpasses for wildlife exist in Orange County. This newsletter is dedicated to a variety of corridors found in and around Orange County, but it all starts with better land use planning with an eye toward conservation.

Coast to Cleveland Corridor

Heritage Fields

By: Melanie Schlotterbeck, FHBP & Elisabeth Brown, LGB

It wasn't until the 1990s, when conservation biology really took root, that folks understood the importance of connecting parks to each other. Isolated parks, without those connections, have numerous ecological problems that impact wildlife and native plant communities. Closer to home the importance of connecting landscapes is playing out in Central Orange County.

Since the 1960s individuals and organizations have worked toward the preservation of many important lands along the Laguna Coast. There are several anchor properties among the nearly 22,000 acres of conserved land, including Crystal Cove State Park, Laguna Coast Wilderness Park, Aliso & Wood Canyons Wilderness Park, Shady & Bommer Canyons, and more. North of all the urbanized lands in Irvine and Lake Forest are the undeveloped natural lands of the Irvine foothills; and beyond those hills are the rugged Santa Ana Mountains and the protected Cleveland National Forest. There are numerous other smaller parcels in the urbanized area, some protected as parkland, some not.

It's here in the heart of Orange County between the Laguna Coast parks and Santa Ana Mountains where efforts are underway to create a permanent wildlife corridor called the Coast to Cleveland Connection. Wildlife must move through a highly specific corridor to reach the Coast or Cleveland. This particular corridor was set up to protect four specific species: Least Bell's vireo, California gnatcatcher, coyote, and bobcat.

In 2014, the Irvine City Council unanimously supported the proposal from homebuilder FivePoint Communities to spend $174 million to develop 661 acres of the 1,347-acre Great Park, so as to move closer to realizing the long-standing promise for an Orange County "Central Park." Simultaneously, a consensus plan for the planned wildlife corridor emerged from negotiations between Laguna Greenbelt, Inc., (LGB) representing a coalition of environmental groups and FivePoint communities. The plan centers on three segments that require sophisticated engineering, careful biological planning, and extensive earth moving. With the development plans and corridor plan approved, efforts now are focused on science-driven corridor monitoring; long term management and funding; and ensuring commitments to protect the wildlife corridor are followed.

The Pacific Flyway

Ryan Hagerty

By: Vic Leipzig, Sea and Sage Audubon

Roughly half of all bird species are migratory, meaning that they travel significant distances over the course of the year, usually from a summering area to a wintering area, and then back. Many migratory birds fly along much the same route year after year, generation after generation. Typically each species has its own particular route, but the routes of many species are rather similar, forming great north-south corridors referred to as flyways. Along the west coast of North America, many species use what's called the Pacific Flyway. Orange County lies along this important bird corridor.

For some species, such as the endangered California Least Tern (pictured above), Orange County is an area where they come each summer to lay eggs and raise their young. In fall, they fly and leave our area completely. These terns are intriguing in that scientists still don't know for certain just where they spend the winter months. Some scientists think these birds spend the entire winter out over the open waters of the tropical Pacific.

For many other species, Orange County is the wintering, not summering, ground. These birds spend the winter here in nice warm Orange County, then fly north in the spring to areas often farther north than the Arctic Circle. Many waterfowl and shorebirds use this pattern.

Right now, it's summer and Least Terns are nesting at Bolsa Chica, Huntington State Beach and a few other locations in Orange County. Waterfowl (ducks and geese) and shorebirds (sandpipers and plovers) are relatively scarce around here. Their numbers locally won't begin to increase again until mid-to-late autumn.

The Pacific Flyway extends from the arctic to the tropics. All parts of it provide critical habitat support for migrants at one season or another, or, as with Orange County, both summer and winter. And all parts are essential for the successful functioning of the flyway. Damage to tropical areas due to forest clear-cutting threatens the survival of species that nest in the U.S. over summer. Damage to arctic tundra due to oil exploration at the far north of Alaska threatens species that come to Orange County in the winter. And the precious remaining habitat areas of Orange County provide support for both summering and wintering birds. The people of Orange County owe it to ourselves to protect "our" birds. In doing so, we protect birds that are the heritage of people and ecosystems far beyond our county lines.

Coal Canyon Bio-Corridor

Ron Krueper

By: Claire Schlotterbeck, Hills For Everyone

Efforts to establish Chino Hills State Park began in 1977 under the leadership of Hills For Everyone. Similarly efforts to protect land in the Whittier Hills began in the early 1980s with Friends of Whittier Hills. As the understanding of conservation biology emerged, the two ends of the Puente-Chino Hills realized their individual efforts were at risk. They came together to form the Wildlife Corridor Conservation Authority (WCCA), the first Joint Powers Authority created to protect a wildlife corridor. WCCA's assessment of the linkages revealed a critical connection needed to be made immediately to connect the entire hillside system to the Santa Ana Mountains.

By 1997, the options were down to one—Coal Canyon along the 91 freeway. The property on both sides of the freeway was at risk. An outlet mall was proposed on the commercial land in the City of Yorba Linda on the north. On the south, the land was already approved for over 1,500 houses in the City of Anaheim.

Scientists were called in to assess the situation. Letters were sent by agencies to document the importance. Park supporters were activated.

Chino Hills State Park sits in Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties. With the creation of WCCA, Los Angeles County legislators became involved in the effort. After convincing decision makers of the importance of this connection, cooperation across county and political lines resulted in a stream of funding allocated for the purchase of the entitled southern parcel, Hon.

Enough money was allocated in two years that the new landowner took notice. He brought in a team of consultants to figure out if it really was significant or if it was much ado about nothing. The consultants did their homework and concluded that it was indeed important. The landowner was convinced of the State's commitment in acquiring his land and negotiations began in earnest. Once the south was secured, the north soon followed.

Steve St. Clair is the developer who chose to do the right thing—to save Coal Canyon and not develop it.

A global precedent was set when Coal Canyon was protected along the 91 freeway. It was the first time an ecological planning error was corrected. It was the first time State Parks ever bought land simply for its connectivity value.

Riparian Corridors

Debra Clarke

By: Melanie Schlotterbeck, FHBP

Water is an essential component for life. Without water we'd live in a very different environment. Humans began re-shaping our waterways centuries ago. With the installation of dams, course corrections, and more recently channelization—our waterways have new functions. Today, water engineers want to get as much water out of the urban environment (our streets and roads) as fast as possible.

When left in their natural state, rivers change the landscape through erosion and sediment deposition. They are essential for bringing nutrients needed for life and for growth. Water loving vegetation grows along the streams, providing refuge, food, and nesting sites for a variety of species. A lot of our major land features have been shaped by the riparian corridors. For example, the Santa Ana River cuts through the Santa Ana Canyon bisecting the Santa Ana Mountains from the Puente-Chino Hills. Water always finds a way. As the old saying goes water follows the "path of least resistance."

Water is also life giving. Some riparian corridors in Orange County offer flora and fauna an opportunity to reproduce—bringing the next generation into the world. For an endangered species, this means the continuation of your species. One important example is the Steelhead Trout. This fish was thought to be extirpated (gone) south of Malibu, but it was actually found in 1999 in the San Mateo Creek, pictured above.

This 22 mile long Creek, near San Clemente, was actually healthy enough to allow Steelhead Trout to spawn in its waters. Trout swim upstream in the creek they were born in to lay their eggs. If, as a trout, you swim upstream to reach your spawning grounds but hit a dam, what's a fish to do? In some rivers, like the Carmel River in Monterey County, agencies have installed fish ladders allowing the fish to "climb" up and over the dam using increasingly elevated pools of water to reach their spawning grounds. There are plans to provide fish a ladder in several Orange County creeks.

Our riparian corridors are often viewed as obstacles for our urban infrastructure. We collect water with dams, funnel water with culverts, cross channels with roads, and introduce non-native plants that can outcompete native plants. Our fish and amphibian populations have a difficult time surviving due to predator-prey relationships already. Instead of viewing our rivers as obstacles… let's celebrate our rivers and creeks—they are important assets and provide life sustaining habitat.

ORANGE COUNTY Green Vision

Friends of Harbors, Beaches, and Parks

DRAFT

A Green Vision for Orange County...

This parcel-level map is the result of an ongoing collaborative project between Friends of Harbors, Beaches, and Parks and local conservation and community organizations. It is a work in progress and intended for use as a general planning tool only.

Acquisition Opportunities

- Active Conservation Project
- Potential Conservation Land

Other Land Designations

- Public Conservation Land
- Private Conservation Land
- Public Not Protected
- Easement / H.O.A. Land
- Golf Course / Cemetery
- Landfill
- Military Land
- Utility Land

Other Map Layers

- Nature / Education Center
- Stream Corridor
- Sacred Site
- County Boundary
- Watershed Boundary
- Highway

Detailed descriptions of the categories used in this map can be obtained from the Friends of Harbors, Beaches, and Parks website at: www.FHBP.org.

Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic
Datum: North American 1983
Last Update: June 2014

Project Updates

Ridge Project, Huntington Beach (Map #1)


Bolsa Chica Land Trust

As it became clear that the 5-acre Ridge project would be denied by the California Coastal Commission, the developer abruptly withdrew the application. The proposal would have changed the decades old land use designation from open space/parks to residential low density. Up to 22 single family residential units would have been constructed had it received approval. This site is a known archeological gem. Extensive artifacts have been found on the property dating back 2,000-9,000 years, proving the site was inhabited by Native Americans. Numerous organizations and individuals have been fighting this project because of its impact and proximity to Bolsa Chica. Acquisition dollars are being sought to preserve the Ridge and neighboring Goodell property (pictured above). Learn more at: *www.BolsaChicaLandTrust.org*.

Coyote Hills, Fullerton (Map #2)


Karen Lang

The effort to save West Coyote Hills takes another big stride forward with Chevron, the landowner agreeing to work toward an acquisition agreement. The Trust for Public Land (TPL) has also joined the conservation project to work with Chevron toward that goal. This is a historic turn of events where all major stakeholders including the City of Fullerton are collaborating on saving West Coyote Hills from development. TPL is working on behalf of the community to iron out the price and other terms for the land purchase. The coming months will be a critical time for achieving an acquisition agreement and a plan to complete its execution. North Orange County could use additional parkland as noted in the 2005 OC Parks Strategic Plan. The acquisition of Coyote Hills would help achieve this. Learn more: *www.CoyoteHills.org*.

Madrona, Brea (Map #3)


Melanie Schlotterbeck

The 15 year long effort to defeat the 162-unit Madrona housing project deep in Brea's Carbon Canyon enters a new stage. In a 4-1 vote the Brea City Council approved the project, choosing to ignore the public safety dangers and destruction of resources the residents documented. The ridge top site has burned four times in 30 years meaning it is more likely to burn again. To flatten the ridgeline (which can be seen from all over Orange County), they must bulldoze 1,400 oak and walnut trees. In the most insulting absurdity, the Council made a finding that "oak and walnut woodlands are not habitat." They needed to make this finding in order to get around requirements in their own development code. Fundraising has begun for a legal challenge, donations are appreciated. Learn more: *www.HillsForEveryone.org*.

Rio Santiago (Sully Miller), Orange (Map #4)


Joel Robinson

There has been a long history to ensure that the Sully Miller site is kept as open space. Approximately 98 acres of the 110-acre former sand and gravel site has been designated "Permanent Open Space" by four different community plans—all plans were adopted by the City of Orange in 1970s. Only 12 acres are zoned for residential. The environmentally sensitive Santiago Creek flows through the heart of this property. Impacts from development cannot be properly mitigated as it's in a flood plain, next to a landfill that is prone to natural hazards: dam inundation, methane gas, and liquefaction. Orange residents have fended off two developments since 2003. In June 2014, the Orange City Council denied all entitlements for the 395-unit mixed-use Rio Santiago proposal. For more info: *www.OPACommunityAction.org*.

MacPherson, Silverado Canyon (Map #5)


Melanie Schlotterbeck

In December 2013, the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) purchased its sixth property for permanent conservation. As part of a comprehensive environmental program, the Authority is mitigating the impacts the expansion of 13 freeway projects will have on the environment by acquiring, restoring, and managing natural lands in perpetuity. A coalition of more than 30 conservation and community groups supported the Authority's extension of Measure M in 2006, which allowed for a $243.5M fund to be established for this mitigation program. The 204-acre MacPherson property secures a crucial linkage north-south between the Irvine Mesa and Baker Canyon. The property will now be added to the OCTA preserve system, which totals 1,150 acres to date. Learn more at: *www.FHBP.org*.

Saddle Crest, Trabuco Canyon (Map #6)


John Sefton

A coalition of environmental and public interest groups continue the critical fight to defend last year's Superior Court win against Saddle Crest, a 65-unit housing tract on 113 acres along rural Santiago Canyon Road, just north of Cook's Corner in Trabuco Canyon. Saddle Crest—situated between the Cleveland National Forest and Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park—would bulldoze pristine hillsides, wipe out oak forests, and destroy native chaparral. Saddle Crest's approval included eviscerating amendments to the Foothill-Trabuco Specific Plan and the OC General Plan, with impacts far beyond the development's borders. Although the County did not appeal, the developer, Rutter Santiago, slogs on. The Court of Appeal has not yet set a hearing date. Learn more about this work: *www.SaddlebackCanyons.org*.

Friends of Harbors, Beaches, and Parks (FHBP) works to protect the natural lands, waterways, and beaches of Orange County. Learn more at: www.FHBP.org

Find us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/FriendsofHBP

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Safe Trails Coalition

By: Melanie Schlotterbeck

Tom Maloney

In our last newsletter, we announced the formation of the Safe Trails Coalition. As part of our outreach and education efforts, we want to be sure to provide recreational enthusiasts with accurate information about our parks and trail systems.

Just as there are rules for our streets and roads, there are also rules for our trails. Following proper trail etiquette will help ensure trail user's safety and protection of our natural resources. Here are five basic things you should know:

1. If the trail isn't marked with an official sign, it likely isn't an authorized trail. Only the park's trail map will confirm if the trail is authorized or not. Areas that do not have authorized use are restricted for a variety of reasons, so adherence to the park's trail map is critical.
2. It is helpful to know trail etiquette. Bikers yield to hikers and equestrians; and hikers yield to equestrians. These symbols, used on park signs, indicate the predominant user groups: = biker = hiker = equestrian
3. If you are passing another trail user, call out in advance which side you'll be passing on so the trail user knows you are there. For example: "On your left!" Slower trail users are encouraged to stay on the trail's right side.
4. Our parks typically have a speed limit of 15 miles per hour. Increased speeds over 15 mph pose a danger to yourself and others as you are less able to respond appropriately to changed circumstances, be it a fallen branch or a group on the trail. Speed limit signs are shown like this: = Speed limit is 15 miles per hour.
5. Here are some of the common symbols used on trail signs and park maps.

P = Parking	= Ranger Station
= Handicap Accessible	= Restrooms
= Scenic Vista	= View Point
= Camping	? = Information Kiosk
= Fishing Permitted	= Picnic Tables

Similarly, if the image has a slash through it, the activity is not allowed, such as:

= No Dogs	= No Smoking
= No ATVs	= No Campfires

In July, we will launch our new website: *www.SafeTrailsCoalition.org*. In the meantime, stay tuned for more Trail Tips in future editions of the newsletter.

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