

Outdoors

in Orange County

Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks Spring 2020

City of Anaheim

The Canyon 1 fire burns Chino Hills State Park south of the 91 Freeway.

Fire Study Highlights High Risk Areas

By: Melanie Schlotterbeck, FHBP Consultant

In August of 2015, Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks (FHBP) completed a 100-year study of wildland fires that burned in and around the Santa Ana Mountains and the Laguna Coast. Recently, FHBP expanded the research to include fires between 2014 through 2019. Both research projects were undertaken to understand the fire causes, locations, and how these fires were impacting the natural lands and nearby residences.

Initially, the report spanned 1914 through 2014 with enough data to display 160 fires in the Santa Ana Mountains and 22 in the Laguna Coast. These recent six additional years added 58 more wildland fires in the mountains and 25 more along the coast. It appears that most of the new fires were small in size, extinguished quickly, and occurred on “normal” temperature and wind days. A few fires in the update did not meet this norm and ravaged both the wildlands and homes in the region, most notably the Canyon 1 and Canyon 2 fires (both in 2017) near the northern edge of the Santa Ana Mountains and the Holy Fire (in 2018) near Rancho Santa Margarita.

Our research indicates there are more fires burning in both areas—especially the Santa Ana Mountains—than would be seen during a natural fire regime. In the natural fire regime, fires generally occur every 30-150 years. For the Santa Ana Mountains, there has been one lightning strike (a natural ignition) and 217 human-caused fires in 105 years. Consequently, humans have increased the number of fires occurring to essentially more than two fires a year. No lightning strikes occurred in the Laguna Coast, so all fires were human-caused.

Only looking at the new data (2014-2019), the worst fire in the Santa Ana Mountains was the Holy Fire in 2018, which burned more than 22,000 acres. Since the last iteration of the study, Laguna Coast's worst fire burned 175 acres. The majority of new fires in both areas were ignited along roadways, specifically the 241 Toll Road and the 133 (Laguna Canyon Road).

The risk of more frequent burns is that the vegetation “type converts” into a non-native grassland, which by its very nature is more flammable, easier to ignite, and spreads fire faster. The goal should continue to be reducing ignitions to keep people, property, and parks intact for future generations.

It still appears actual access routes (roads and highways) into the wildlands increases the fire ignitions. Many more fires start along roadways than in the wildlands proper. Tracking is better now—as seen in the Laguna Beach example where the local fire department had information available to share (unlike last time).

The study also provides a status update to the 2015 recommendations and provides a few new recommendations. Many thanks to those that contributed to this effort and to our funders. We hope that in identifying locations where fires start, our local communities and fire agencies will be better equipped to prevent fires or fight them, identify locations for FireWatch volunteers, harden roadway edges, etc. As the summer months approach, please keep in mind ways you can protect your home by adding additional hardening features: ember proof vents, boxed eaves, clean gutters, etc. Be fire wise.



Water Quality Report



Rick Wilson

By: Melanie Schlotterbeck, FHBP Consultant

In February 2020, Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks completed a study digitally documenting which local streams were polluted and then which regional, state, and federal parklands had impaired water bodies run through them.

By way of background, the State Water Resources Control Board is tasked with ensuring the water bodies of California are appropriately governed by the state and federal Clean Water Act. The State tests the water quality of every water body every two years, specifically trying to identify if certain pollutants exist and at what levels. A determination is then made to add the water body to the “303(d) list” if the data demonstrate the pollutants are at levels higher than is considered safe. Consequently, if a water body is added to the 303(d) list, it is impaired.

Impairments can come in a variety of forms, but always has “too much” of something, whether it be: bacteria, selenium, sediment, total suspended solids, cadmium, dioxin, lead, etc. And, sometimes the water bodies have multiple impairments. The State Water Resources Control Board publishes a map and digital data of impaired water bodies. During this review, we narrowed down the list of waters to only those in and around Orange County.

There were 70 water bodies on the 303(d) list in and around Orange County. These included segments of rivers, streams, wetlands, and beaches. Thirty-nine pollutants were included in the study because they were found in these waters. The most common impairments included: indicator bacteria, toxicity, benthic community effects, selenium, phosphorus, malathion, and nitrogen. These pollutants cause harm to humans, wildlife, and the environment—everything ranging from hair loss to neurological disorders, cancer to algal blooms that kill off plants and animals. There are 24 protected parklands in Orange County that have 303(d) listed (polluted) waters within them.

Since our parks provide the refuge, nurseries, hunting grounds, foraging areas, and wildlife corridors that these species need to survive; ensuring the rivers, streams, wetlands, and beaches—that both wildlife and people rely on—are protected is important. When water bodies are polluted, it can cause significant impacts to parks, decrease the safety of the water body for contact and consumption, and harm wildlife and plant species. The study is on our website: www.FHBP.org.

Pandemics & Habitat Loss



Melanie Schlotterbeck

By: Claire Schlotterbeck, FHBP Consultant

When I was a counselor in college at summer camp for at-risk youth we taught the kids who were new to the forest to “hug a tree” if they ever got lost. We told them, “We will come looking for you and you will be easier to find if you stay put.” We are all finding our way right now not only staying put, but also wondering for what our new world will become.

As people who care about this planet, hugging a tree carries its own special meaning. We find solace in nature—we know how important that tree is in giving oxygen, shelter, and shade to the other life forms that depend on it. We also know that our planet cannot continue to sustain us if we continue to abuse it.

COVID-19, from many accounts, is a result of habitat loss and increased access/interactions to wildlife. As forests are cut and myriad species are confined to smaller and smaller fragments, they run into other species not meant to be their neighbors. And then humans come along entwining ourselves in a dangerous linkage when we gather those animals up for food. Our mission at FHBP boils down to saving habitat and its importance has never been clearer. The more habitat we save, the less confined species are and the fewer interactions there will be. This helps all of us.

Millions of stories are being written—some are too terrible to imagine. But, maybe we can imagine a better time where the gifts of the natural world are honored and we can recommit ourselves to saving the habitats close to home—doing our part to save land just as we are doing our part to save lives by hugging a tree. Thank you for supporting our conservation work, it is clearer than ever that we must continue our efforts.

*“The light begins to twinkle from the rocks
The long day wanes,
The slow moon climbs;
The deep moans round with many voices,
Come my friends,
‘Tis not too late to seek a newer world.”*
Tennyson

CEQA Study Results Reveal Trouble Meeting Requirements

By: Melanie Schlotterbeck, FHBP Consultant

In December 2019, Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks (FHBP) completed a study on the effectiveness of biological mitigation measures required under environmental laws. Twelve projects, including residential, mixed use, and infrastructure projects throughout Orange County, were evaluated for their success in restoring the natural landscape and promoting ecological function for threatened and endangered species impacted by those projects.

Southern California comprises a biologically rich landscape with a diversity of plants and animals, many of which occur nowhere else in the world. Our native species are increasingly imperiled, not only through removal of natural communities for development, but also through fragmentation and degradation of the remaining habitat areas. Environmental and water laws exist to protect these species and our water quality for future generations.

The study included five tasks: to understand whether mitigation measures were tracked, implemented, successful, and monitored; and what may be needed to improve outcomes for species on the brink of extinction. Although our research identified some successful and viable restoration projects, we also found examples of cities, the County of Orange, developers,

restoration specialists, and permitting agencies failing to achieve the required levels of mitigation for significant impacts to rare and endangered species. On a scale of one (worst) to five (best), the average score for restoration projects was a 3.2.

By evaluating long-term outcomes, we have identified fundamental issues that may not become evident until years after agencies have signed off on the apparent success of a given mitigation effort. Ultimately, we hope to assist these agencies in their ongoing efforts to ensure the adequacy of habitat restoration plans, as well as the implementation, monitoring, and documentation of the ensuing restoration efforts.

We developed 15 recommendations intended to guide how decisions are made for biological mitigation. Most critical is more adequately staffing and funding our natural resource agencies. Many thanks to the funder for this project, the Henry W. and Ellen R. Warne Family Endowment Fund of the Orange County Community Foundation.

Visit our website to view the study, descriptions of each project, its mitigation measures, and recommendations. Download the report at www.FHBP.org (Resources > Studies & Reports > CEQA Mitigation Study).



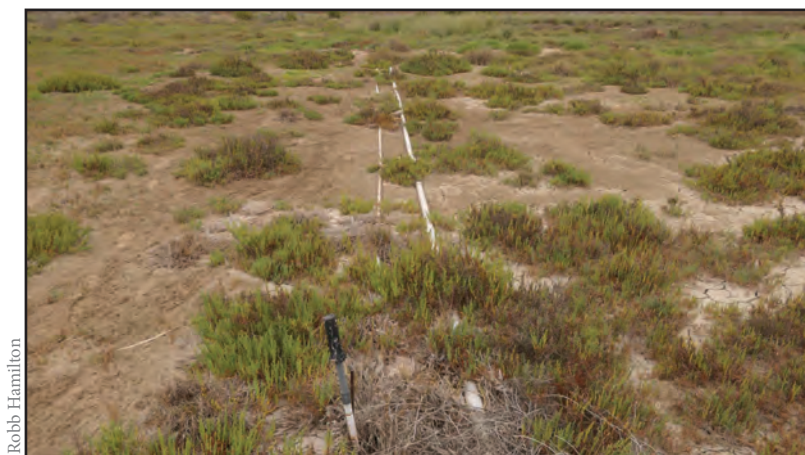
Melanie Schlotterbeck

Restoration specialist Margot Griswold and study biologist Robb Hamilton review one of the many sites used for the Transportation Corridor Agency restoration work. Those sites were consistently well restored and had California gnatcatchers present.



Robb Hamilton

Fullerton's Hawks Pointe restoration site had fountain grass planted along the roadway edges. Fountain grass is a non-native invasive plant and should not be present. This type of poor work, lowered the overall restoration score.



Robb Hamilton

Talbert Nature Preserve was a restoration site used for the San Diego Creek Flood Control Channel project. This site was abandoned after an unsuccessful attempt at restoration onsite. As was the case elsewhere, PVC pipe, fencing, and other items were never removed from the location.



Robb Hamilton

Tonner Hills Planned Community set aside this hillside and other areas as a place for the endangered species to "move into" as the development proceeded. Unfortunately there are more non-native plants growing than natives. This site burned in the Freeway Complex Fire of 2008.



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

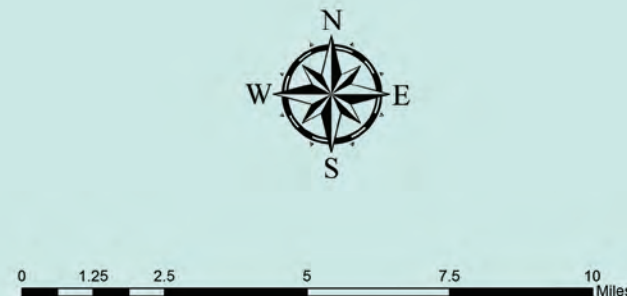
Other Land Designations

- 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

Data compiled from a variety of sources including First American Title and OCTA, with input from OC Parks; the California GAP Program at the University of California, Santa Barbara; the California Resources Agency - Lands Project (2003); the Cities of Brea, Irvine, and San Juan Capistrano; and the California Protected Areas Database. © FHBP 2000-2020. All Rights Reserved.



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.

Articles: 1, 2 & 4 Melanie Schlotterbeck; 3 & 5 Gloria Sefton; 6 Claire Schlotterbeck

Project Updates

Connect SoCal Plan (Six Counties)

FHBP pulled together a 48 member, cross-county coalition to engage with the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) during its release and comment period for the Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy. This Plan, called Connect SoCal ties together land use, transportation, and housing across six SoCal counties. As a result of our engagement over the last nine years, for the first time in its 50+ year history, SCAG added natural

land preservation as a priority. The plan supports city and county decisions to focus development on urban areas and near transit/transportation options. Nearly all of the suggested edits we supplied during public comments were adopted. In May, we testified and provided our support and the Plan was adopted.



Melanie Schlotterbeck

Eastbridge Acquisition (Map #1)

The local conservation group, Hills For Everyone, has partnered with the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority to acquire 320 acres in San Bernardino County owned by Shopoff Realty Investments. The hillside property, known as Eastbridge, is in Chino Hills and is bordered on three sides by Chino Hills State Park. The property has been on the acquisition list for four decades. The State Park was created along ridgeline boundaries to protect the viewshed and watershed. The

goal is to transfer this ridgeline property to State Parks. Final details are being wrapped up in escrow, but funding was approved in February by the Wildlife Conservation Board and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The next acquisition will likely be a neighboring 80 acres owned by the same entity. Then on to 1,200 ridgeline acres nearby!



Melanie Schlotterbeck

Tree Ordinance (Map #2)

Our county has the dubious distinction of being the only SoCal county without a tree preservation ordinance. That's why FHBP continues to spearhead the campaign for tree preservation in Orange County. We submitted a draft tree ordinance to the County staff and they worked the ordinance into the draft "Orange is the New Green" zoning code update focused on sustainability. Originally intended for parcels with 20,000 square feet and larger in all unincorporated

areas, the geographic scope has been narrowed to only the Silverado-Modjeska area. We continue to appeal to the Supervisors to not only approve it, but also to expand its coverage to the Foothill-Trabuco area and unincorporated lands above Brea. The item is expected to go before the Supervisors in July.



Melanie Schlotterbeck

Vegetation Treatment Lawsuit (Map #3)

FHBP signed on as a co-petitioner in a lawsuit against the California Department of Forestry and Fire (CalFire) for its vegetation treatment plan. The plan proposes multiple ways to reduce vegetation in our natural areas—including removal of habitat on 20.3 million acres (or 250,000 acres per year). CalFire acknowledges its plan doesn't help fight fires that occur during Santa Ana wind conditions, which cause the most damage and burn the most acreage. Endangered Habitats League and California

Chaparral Institute are the lawsuit leads. The lawsuit focuses on the failure to comply with environmental laws, failure to adequately consider environmental impacts, failure to adopt reasonable mitigation measures, and more. The map indicates the areas targeted for vegetation removal.



Gloria Sefton

Red Rock Gardens Lawsuit (Map #4)

The Saddleback Canyons Conservancy, Rural Canyons Conservation Fund, and FHBP formed the "Save the Canyons Coalition" to fight the County's unlawful approval of the Red Rock Gardens proposal of a commercial event venue. The residential property sits on scenic, hilly—and notoriously dangerous—Santiago Canyon Road adjacent to Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park. In approving the commercial use of the residence, the Board of Supervisors ignored the project's inconsistencies with Orange

County's General Plan, the Silverado-Modjeska Specific Plan, and zoning, all of which prohibit commercial use there, and defied the community's objections to transforming the residence to a commercial event venue at a dangerous location traffic-wise. The court agreed with our position. The project is overturned.



Gloria Sefton

Petition to Save the Cougar (Map #5)

As the toll mounts, the death of each cougar in the Southern California mountains spells the impending extinction of this charismatic and critical species locally. That's why the Center for Biological Diversity and the Mountain Lion Foundation filed a petition with the State requesting this distinct sub-species be added to the California Endangered Species list. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife supported the petition findings and recommended the listing. On April 16, the Fish

and Game Commission unanimously chose to list the sub-species as candidates for state protections. More research will be conducted and a final recommendation presented to the Commission next year. Meanwhile, our local cougars will receive special protection as a candidate for endangered status.



HC Davis Wildlife Health Center

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



Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks
P.O. Box 9256
Newport Beach, CA 92658

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Trail Safety is Imperative

By: Michael Wellborn, FHBP Board President

The County of Orange, following the regulations of the state vehicle code, prohibits motorized bicycles on dirt trails in the wilderness parks. FHBP supports this policy despite increasing pressure to allow “e-bikes” (bicycles with electric motors). The key reason for this position revolves around our parks already being a big attraction for local hikers, bikers, and equestrians. With over three million Orange County residents living nearby, along with those from nearby counties venturing to our parks—trail use has greatly increased over the past decade. This is a positive benefit for our residents. Yet the popularity of the trails has also brought an increase in conflicts among trail users. Allowing e-bikes on unpaved trails would add to the already congested, multi-use trails.

Weekend trail uses are already over-capacity at many parks. When parking lots reach capacity, visitors park in local neighborhoods. Changing the prohibition on motorized bicycles would increase not only trail impacts, but the associated parking problems as well.

Creation and use of non-authorized trails is also rampant. Actions such as cutting new trails, after-hours night access, high speed descents, and even commercial video trail productions are occurring. Allowing e-bikes would invite an increase of these prohibited uses. Park rangers are being pulled in many directions and this would increase their workload by having to monitor the trails more frequently. Since electric bicycles offer higher speed travel and increased wilderness access, additional problems emerge. Often the excess speed and lack of rider's skill level collide, creating an increase in back country emergencies, and increased use of and damage to trails since e-bikes can travel so much further.

Additionally, many of these lands are enrolled in a program for mitigation that requires specific requirements be met and maintained forever. Adding new, impactful uses can undo the conservation parameters these lands were set aside to protect.

FHBP supports our County regional parks and open spaces. We encourage everyone to enjoy these amazing places, but they should be safe for all. That's why Audubon California, Laguna Canyon Foundation, Sea & Sage Audubon, Sierra

Club, and FHBP are founding members of the Safe Trails Coalition. Together we are working toward solutions.



Melanie Schlotterbeck

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