

# Outdoors

in Orange County

Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks Summer 2022

Melanie Schlotterbeck



A view of the Laguna Coast Wilderness Park and an infill development in Brea.

## Finding the Balance: Housing & Natural Land

By: Melanie Schlotterbeck, FHBP Consultant

Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks (FHBP) has been participating in the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy (called Connect SoCal) for three cycles (once every four years). We've built, and are continuing to expand interest, from community-based organizations and non-profits about the strategies SCAG and its member agencies (transportation commissions, cities, and counties) will use to meet housing, transportation, and economic targets while also reducing greenhouse gas and vehicle miles traveled—both of which are codified in state laws.

FHBP and nearly 50 other conservation and community groups supported Connect SoCal in 2018 because of its innovative sustainability strategies, which included land preservation. One of the key components of Connect SoCal was the creation of a regional tool called the SoCal Greenprint.

The SoCal Greenprint converts more than 100 publicly available data sources into useful, interactive maps of the region's natural and built environment through a web-based tool. Over the past two years, the project has continuously received input from more than 60 agencies and organizations across the six SCAG counties, along with developers and builders. The tool was supposed to launch in Fall 2021, but was put on pause to address concerns from the building industry and a business alliance. A working group was established by SCAG to ensure the alignment of the Greenprint to specific SCAG policies.

Still, the opposition demanded the effort be halted because they believe development will be stopped if the public has access to this tool. But a greenprint is nothing new. We at FHBP developed our Green Vision Map (also a greenprint) 20 years ago—development hasn't stopped here. SCAG's Greenprint has even greater benefits, because it will allow decision makers and planners to make more informed decisions to balance development with environmental and open space protection.

The SoCal Greenprint supports better planning by displaying different data layers simultaneously in an easy-to-use map format. For example, a landowner who wants to consider the future of their property would be able to access crucial information like zoning and land use designations, proximity to water features, important plants and animals, and nearby parks or trails. The map also includes baseline information like the location of fault lines, floodplains, agricultural resources, areas prone to wildfire, potential sea level rise, water district jurisdictions, and air basin geographies. This meaningful information could help a landowner decide whether to sell to conservation or propose development on their property. The Greenprint does not limit landowner property rights.

There is a misconception that building an adequate supply of housing and being good stewards of the environment are *conflicting* priorities. With FHBP leading, groups from across the region continue to urge SCAG's decision makers to keep the SoCal Greenprint project on track, meet the requirements established in Connect SoCal, and ensure that this tool is finished as promised.

Access to information and transparency in the process enables decision makers, developers, and landowners to construct the healthy and sustainable communities with housing and parkland that residents need. It's our hope that SCAG leadership gives the stakeholders building our future the tools they need to help Southern California meet its housing and environmental needs, and give residents the healthy, vibrant future they deserve.



Melanie Schlotterbeck

# Wildlife Corridors



By: Damon Nagami, Natural Resources Defense Council

Rapid urbanization has broken up large swaths of habitat in Southern California, as it has in many other areas of the country. Wildlife corridor and crossing projects help facilitate the movement of animals across fragmented landscapes to reach food, water, and potential mates, and to adapt to a changing climate. Connectivity is crucial to the state's efforts to fight the biodiversity and climate crises, and its pledge to protect 30% of the state's lands and waters by 2030 (30x30). Below are a few exciting connectivity projects in Southern California that will help ensure the sustained survival and well-being of our local wildlife.

- This past Earth Day, Californians celebrated the ground-breaking of the Wallis Annenberg Wildlife Crossing, the world's largest wildlife bridge over the 101 Freeway in western Los Angeles County. The crossing will be surrounded by an acre of native vegetation and include a wall to help mitigate sound and light impacts from the freeway.
- The Irvine-Laguna Wildlife Corridor project is a six-mile habitat link in Central Orange County that will ensure wildlife, such as bobcat and mule deer, can roam safely between the county's coastal wildlands and the foothills of the Santa Ana Mountains.
- The Temecula Wildlife Creek Underpass will allow wildlife to safely cross below the I-15 Freeway to reach protected habitat on the other side. This project is the result of conservation groups reaching an agreement with the City of Temecula and a private developer to preserve a 55-acre parcel that will allow mountain lions to move safely between the Santa Ana Mountains and the larger Palomar Range.

These notable Southern California projects not only show how connectivity between habitats is vital to healthy ecosystems and biodiversity, but also fully align with the California Natural Resources Agency's recently released Pathways Report, which outlines how the state plans to achieve 30x30. By supporting wildlife corridor and crossing projects like these and many others, California has a golden opportunity to help halt and reverse the current alarming rate of biodiversity loss while protecting and reconnecting our wild spaces.

# UCI Open Space or Housing?



By: Julie Coffey, FHBP Board member

A small fraction of habitat remains undeveloped in coastal Orange County, with more projected to be lost to sea level rise or changes in habitat suitability in coming decades. Development of natural land impacts everyone in the surrounding area—from increasing stormwater runoff and altering vistas to exacerbating the causes and effects of climate change. As it has done in building out the rest of campus, University of California, Irvine (UCI) appears to value low-cost development over the benefits provided by natural lands, seeing them as paths of least resistance rather than as habitat, climate change adaptation areas, and places with enormous restoration and recreational potential.

UCI claims to be a leader in sustainability with a mission that includes public service to the surrounding community. Scientists at UCI pioneer research on climate change, human disturbances to natural systems, and processes for increasing biodiversity of degraded ecosystems. Yet, so far, the planning department and administration have not altered long standing plans to develop the few last remaining natural lands on its campus.

Campus development is dictated by a long-range development plan, the most current of which was written in 2007. In the 15 years since it was written, we have an increased understanding of the impacts of climate change on humans and ecosystems, the urgency of biodiversity loss, and the need to protect intact natural systems. Given that, UCI should re-evaluate its long-range development plan to prioritize protection of natural lands.

If the University wants to be a leader in sustainable development, it should first seek alternatives to developing natural areas. This is not an impossible task, but it requires UCI administrators to cease seeing natural lands as empty lots or unimproved weedy wastelands. In place of developing these remaining areas, UCI should explore re-development of parking lots and work with the City of Irvine to creatively evaluate enrollment, transit, and educational formats to determine whether there is an urgent need for student housing and, if so, what enrollment numbers make sense for both the University and the surrounding community. It is essential as we move into the future that we consider the true costs of losing natural ecosystems to our society and weigh that against the benefit of the proposed developed use.



# Homegrown National Park



Melanie Schlotterbeck

By: Melanie Schlotterbeck, FHBP Consultant

In a recent Sea and Sage Audubon webinar I learned: every 30 seconds a football field worth of natural land is converted to urban uses across America. And, that there is an estimated 40 million acres of lawn across the US. Without natural lands and the animals and insects within them, our planet and the creatures that inhabit it—including us humans—will struggle to survive. With these types of worrisome statistics, the work of conservation-focused non-profits like FHBP becomes ever more important. But, here is where you have a role. Your own personal actions can immediately help create useful habitat for wildlife and insects.

A national effort is underway to create as much natural habitat as possible. Professor, author, and conservation activist Doug Tallamy has coined the phrase “Homegrown National Park,” to call residents to act locally—and by locally, that literally means in your own front yard and/or backyard.

Early conservation goals were to protect the places where people were not located, instead of where they are located. Tallamy estimates that if each American landowner converted half of their yard to a natural landscape, which promotes biodiversity, then we will collectively protect 20 million acres of land. While it may take a fresh outlook to replace your grass, roses, bush honeysuckle, ivy, and bougainvillea, consider the benefits.

Your action will provide hope not just for the future—but for right now too. You will become an inspiration to others for doing this. There is no dependence on local, state, or federal government—it *is all you*. Backyards across America become part of the conservation solution instead of the problem. The native plants you install will become part of a greater biodiversity corridor allowing many types of fauna to move through your property.

If everyone begins the conversion process, our planet will be better for it. Selecting the right types of “contributor” plants that aid insects, pollinators, and butterflies is very important. Check out the Homegrown National Park website ([HomegrownNationalPark.org](http://HomegrownNationalPark.org)) to see how you can help. Need more help on selecting native plants for your geography? Audubon has that covered in a new online tool: [Audubon.org/native-plants/](http://Audubon.org/native-plants/). Another website for selecting native plants is CalScape ([CalScape.org](http://CalScape.org)). Your local work can contribute to the greater good. Let's each do our part.

# New Housing Trust



Luke van Zyl

By: Nancy Scarborough, Still Protecting Our Newport

Still Protecting Our Newport (SPON) is collaborating with Eagle Four Partners and Lyon Living to create a non-profit Housing Trust that will focus on affordable housing in Newport Beach.

The state mandated that Newport Beach plan for 4,845 housing units over the next eight years in the upcoming Regional Housing Needs Assessment cycle. The result could be many more than the base 4,845 units. It is challenging to make projects pencil out when they consist of 100% affordable units without complicated financing and subsidies.

Eagle Four, Lyon Living, and SPON realized that pressure to plan for so many additional housing units was going to impact the city's infrastructure and residents' quality of life. Several meetings and hours of discussion revealed a common concern from the parties. Both Eagle Four and Lyon Living are local developers with deep roots in Newport Beach. SPON's mission, since its inception in 1974, has been to protect and preserve the residential and environmental qualities of Newport Beach. The parties' shared objectives made it clear that cooperative action was essential. The impact of tens of thousands of new apartments was not going to be acceptable.

A formation committee will be setting goals and priorities over the next six months, but is focused on 100% affordable housing for the workforce, seniors, and veterans, while also maintaining the City's existing affordable housing, including accessory dwelling units. “Affordability” means the cost to own or rent is no more than 30% of an individual's income. Typically, levels of affordability are determined by the city or region's area median income, which for Newport Beach is \$67,000/year. Thus affordable units would be \$1,675/month.

Capital would be pursued through county, state, and federal grants and other programs; city affordable housing in-lieu fees charged to developers; and through private donations. The new organization, which will form a 501(c)3, hopes to be functional by early 2023.

Creating a Housing Trust is one of the more recently adopted tools and offers a way to find common ground among many stakeholders. FHBP supports these efforts to find a way to balance the need for affordable housing while continuing to protect the environment.





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](http://www.FHBP.org).

Articles: 1 & 5 Melanie Schlotterbeck, 2 Terry M. Welsh, MD, 3 Michael Wellborn, 4 Dr. Patricia Martz, & 6 Dr. Winston Vickers

## Project Updates

### 1 Coast Fire Impacts

On May 11th, Laguna Niguel, Laguna Beach, and Aliso and Wood Canyons Regional Park experienced a 200-acre wildfire. About 35 acres of the Orange County Transportation Authority's Pacific Horizon Preserve also burned. In Laguna Niguel, 20 homes were destroyed and 11 damaged. Homes burn hotter and have more fuel (sofas, furniture, curtains, etc.) than habitat does, making it easier to ignite neighboring homes. Early reports indicate

the fire started from a downed power pole near the South Orange County Water Authority plant. CalFire's historic fire data indicates this area had not burned since record keeping started in 1914. Thus, it was relatively pristine habitat. With the drought, wildfire risks are considerably higher.



### 2 Banning Ranch Acquisition

The Banning Ranch Conservancy (BRC) is extremely happy to announce that all the funding for the purchase of 384 acres of the Banning Ranch property has been secured and we hope escrow closes this summer. Banning Ranch will then be public property owned and managed by the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority. FHBP has been a steadfast supporter of saving Banning Ranch since BRC started its preservation efforts 23 years ago, and we are deeply grateful for the

partnership. Banning Ranch was included in the initial and subsequent versions of the FHBP Green Vision Map—this made a big difference. This underscores the importance of having a countywide organization such as FHBP in place to assist with the more local and project-specific environmental groups like BRC.



### 3 Poseidon Project Denial

On May 12th, the California Coastal Commission held its long-awaited public hearing on the proposed Huntington Beach Brookfield-Poseidon desalination project. The Commission's staff report presented a thorough review of the project's numerous conflicts with the Coastal Act. Three key conflict areas (among many) persisted in FHBP's view: 1) the lack of need for the water due to the capacity of the north County groundwater basin; 2) impacts to

coastal resources from intake and discharge pipelines; and 3) fiscal impacts to disadvantaged communities from the anticipated high price of the treated water at three times the current rates for imported water. After some 10 hours of testimony, the Commission unanimously voted to deny the permit.



### 4 Putuidem Village Threat

The 65.5-acre Northwest Open Space in San Juan Capistrano, which includes the archaeological remains of Putuidem (the founding village of the Acjachemen) and the newly opened 1.5-acre Putuidem Village Park are threatened by development. Despite the efforts of the Acjachemen, California Cultural Resource Preservation Alliance, and the conservation community like FHBP, the City Council requested proposals to lease the open space to developers. The Council

narrowed proposals to three concepts: equestrian, ranching, and entertainment facilities. These include stables, a rodeo, barns, restaurants, amphitheatres, agricultural features, and parking lots. The developments will impact the sacred archaeological deposits, and create noise and visual impacts to the 1.5-acre park.



### 5 Infill-Focused Grant Funding Support

FHBP is a part of a regional coalition requesting a more robust allocation to support a statewide infill infrastructure grant (IIG) program. The Southern California Association of Governments made commitments in its regional planning documents to multiple strategies that improve infill development, especially those locations near high quality transit areas. Funding exists for this grant program now, but it isn't nearly enough to help infill developers meet the state's housing needs. The request also includes training

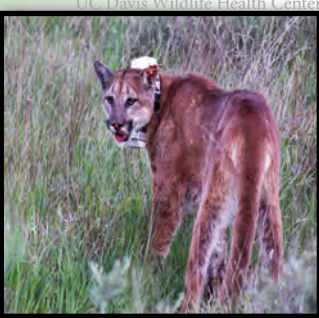
and technical assistance to applicants. Funding can go to rehab parks and open space, utility improvements (like water or sewer), roads, parking structures, transit linkages, and traffic mitigation measures. Building homes with more density in urban areas helps reduce traffic congestion and climate impacts.



### 6 Laguna Coast Cougar

Many of you have heard about M317, a young male mountain lion who was captured in Irvine on March 22nd, collared by the University of California, Davis team, and released in the Santa Ana Mountains, only to reappear in the Laguna Coast. In over a month's time, this male cougar moved from San Juan Capistrano northwest, all the way to Newport Beach. He was recaptured there and relocated back to the Santa Ana Mountains where he is still circulating—trying to find a permanent territory. He faces considerable

road hazards—crossing the 91 Freeway twice, the I-5 Freeway once, and the toll roads 18 times, in addition to many local, busy streets. One factor likely impacting his roaming is that he has to face competition from larger resident males with existing territories in the Santa Ana Mountains. Let's hope he persists!





**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](http://www.FHBP.org)



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## Being a Good Trail User



Melanie Schlotterbeck

By: Claire Schlotterbeck, FHBP Consultant

We don't think about it much when we visit our parks, but most parks that protect natural lands have residents too—wildlife. Abiding by trail rules protects wildlife as well as other visitors. From rabbits to bobcats to coyotes, they each eke out a living in our parks. We pack sandwiches, granola bars, or Gatorade, but wildlife struggle daily to find enough calories just to survive. If we go off-trail, wildlife need to maneuver to avoid us. This means we have added to their calorie challenge! If we bring dogs to areas where dogs are not allowed, wildlife perceive these new smells as a new predator to avoid—and more calories are expended. So, following trail rules is important for wildlife and the very lands we are there to enjoy.

And, of course, following rules is important for our fellow park users, so that everyone enjoys a safe experience. The triangle of users is well known—hikers yield to horseback riders; cyclists yield to both hikers and horseback riders. For hikers and cyclists, it is essential to be cautious around horseback riders. Horses are large animals that have the potential to spook easily. This poses a safety hazard not only to the rider and the horse, but also to nearby hikers or cyclists. Find out from the rider exactly what you should do to pass them safely. Remember every horse is different.

"Leave no trace" is a standard slogan borne out of need to remind people to be stewards of the land they love to recreate in. Take your own trash out. Leave nothing behind. Your mom doesn't pick up after you on a hike, but the wildlife can and will and they may ingest it, get their head caught, or die from plastics. Again, they are residents, you are a guest.

It is also important that if you are camping in California, be sure to follow wildfire rules. There is a dwindling supply of federal firefighters, more fires that span the West taking more teams to fight fires at the same time, and higher risk with the drought exacerbating wildfires year round. We encourage you to reach out to Park Managers to ask the question of wood burning and even propane based campfire methods. Be sure to also get your California Fire Permit annually found at:

[www.ReadyForWildfire.org/Permits/Campfire-Permit/](http://www.ReadyForWildfire.org/Permits/Campfire-Permit/)



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