



NEWS FROM NATURE

NEWSLETTER OF CHINO HILLS STATE PARK INTERPRETIVE ASSOCIATION

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Melanie Schlotterbeck

FIRE TAKES ITS TOLL ON PARK & RESOURCES

Any one who loves wildlands or lives near them always feels anxiety on hot windy days. November 15th was that kind of day. Two heart-sinking plumes of smoke, near Corona and Brea, eventually brought calamity to our hills. One fire started, apparently from a car spark along the 91 freeway, at about 9:00 AM near the Green River exit in Corona (Riverside County). With strong erratic Santa Ana winds blowing, the flames quickly moved into Chino Hills State Park (San Bernardino County) and up the hills where so many homes have been built next to the Park - and where no buffer zone had been required by decision makers. According to news reports, there was some delay early on in fighting the fire when all attention was turned to saving a fire crew suddenly trapped in the flames near the freeway.

Another fire, caused by arcing from inadequately maintained electric lines serving oil pumps, started 8 miles west in Brea (Orange County) at 11:00 AM near the Olinda Landfill. Because of the erratic winds, these

two fires eventually merged into one big fire in Tonner Canyon (Los Angeles County).

Our hills and the State Park have never experienced this kind of man-made disaster before - 30,000 acres burned in one fell swoop. Hundreds of homes were lost. Chino Hills State Park took the brunt of the damage - 95% of it burned. Only the man-made structures were saved - the Ranger house, campfire area, campgrounds and historic barn. The fire burned so hot in some places that trees exploded and left a hole. Firefighters call it a moonscape. Natural fires usually start at ridge tops by lightning and burn more slowly downhill. Man-made fires usually start in a canyon where the roads are and rapidly race uphill.

Though most of us know fire is a natural part of our hillsides' life cycles, these frequent fires are not natural and they are changing the very nature of our State Park. This area has been burning nearly every five years rather than the 30 year cycle that history records.

Since fire is a natural part of the ecosystem - plants have adapted to survive. Some plants use the heat of fire to open or awaken their seeds and start a new plant. Fires that are too frequent don't allow young plants to mature enough to develop seeds. Other plants store energy in their roots and then resprout from stumps. Repeated fires can sap so much energy with the demands of frequent resprouting that plants run out of stored energy. As the bushes die off, non-native grasses take over.

These annual grasses not only can't provide the cover or the nutrition for wildlife, but they also die off faster in spring than native grasses and this extends the fire season. Non-native grasses also ignite easier and spread fire faster than the native chaparral, coastal sage scrub and woodlands we hoped we were protecting as parkland.

Because of the threat of intentional invasive species, the Interpretive Association will be distributing to Park neighbors and at Park kiosks information about what you can do to limit the spread of non-native species entering the Park boundaries.

THE FIRE AFTERMATH LINGERS IN THE PARK



Claire Schlotterbeck

After days of burning, the fire eventually charred 95% of the Park's 14,000 acres.



Claire Schlotterbeck

The once thriving restoration area in Carbon Canyon is now a charred landscape.



Melanie Schlotterbeck

Usually an upright water-laden plant, this prickly pear cactus is limp and withered.



Melanie Schlotterbeck

This sycamore tree was burned, but will likely survive.



Melanie Schlotterbeck

Some sycamore trees were too dangerous to leave in place and were cut down.



Melanie Schlotterbeck

Park infrastructure, like these wooden posts, require replacement.



Melanie Schlotterbeck

After decades of cattle grazing, the willows finally came back, but were badly burned.



Melanie Schlotterbeck

Park signage was also torched throughout the Park.



Claire Schlotterbeck

At Rim Crest the fire burned so hot, very little evidence of the vegetation was left.



Duane Thompson

After the fires, this truck was discovered in Sonome Creek.



Melanie Schlotterbeck

One of the first non-native plants to recolonize after the fire is artichoke thistle.



Melanie Schlotterbeck

Though evidence of the fire still exists, spring flowers are in bloom in the Park.

EARTH DAY – APRIL 25 AT CHINO HILLS STATE PARK



CALIFORNIA
STATE PARKS
FOUNDATION

Chino Hills State Park needs volunteers for restoration work after the fire.

The event begins at 8 AM and ends at 2 PM.

Learn more by calling 951-780-6222.

Even **NATURAL BEAUTY** needs
a **TOUCHUP** now and then.



Every day is Earth Day in California's State Parks. Join us, on **Saturday, April 25th** for the California State Parks Foundation's 12th Annual Earth Day Restoration and Cleanup. Volunteers are needed to plant trees, restore trails and spruce up campgrounds while helping to preserve our magnificent state parks.

To find a location near you,
visit www.calparks.org or call **1-888-98-PARKS**.

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THE PARK NEEDS YOUR HELP NOW!

By: Tom Greene

The recent wildfire that decimated Chino Hills State Park coupled with the state's budget crisis has created a sobering situation: the Park desperately needs additional help and support. If you were ever thinking of getting more involved and working directly to improve the Park, there is no better time than now.

You can become a member of the Park's Volunteer in Park's Program (VIP). The volunteer program is designed to link the interests of volunteers' with Park needs, and assign them to a particular volunteer unit. For example, if are into horseback riding or mountain biking, you could help patrol the Park as a member of the Mounted Assistance or Mountain Biking Units. Or, if you are interested in cleaning up the Park and rehabilitating areas with native plants, or leading hikes with students and the public, the Natural History Unit would be a perfect fit. To learn more about the VIP Program please contact Ranger Sherman Poole at spoole@parks.ca.gov.

Another way to volunteer your time is to become a Board member of the Chino Hills State Park Interpretive Association (CHSPIA). The Interpretive Association is a non-profit organization that advocates



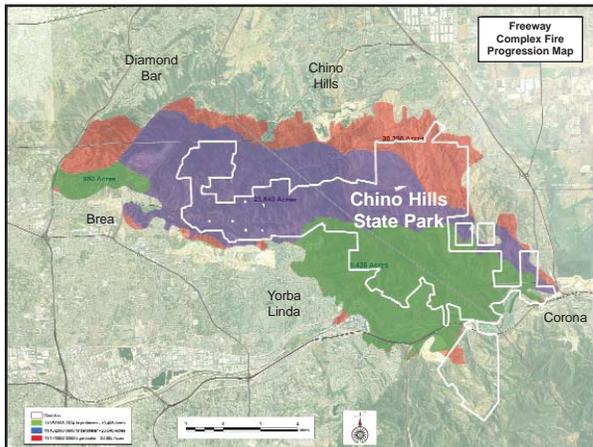
on behalf of the State Park by promoting and organizing community outreach events designed to support and raise money for the Park. If you love the Park and enjoy working with the Park's neighbors and community, you would be a great addition to the Board. Another option is to become a supporter of the Interpretive Association. We offer memberships for individuals beginning at \$15 per year and for families beginning at \$40 per year. Visit www.ChinoHillsStatePark.org to learn more about donating.

Finally, thank you for all your emails sent after the fire. We have a long road to recovery, but with your support the Park will recover from the devastating effects of the wildfire.

This newsletter was printed and mailed via two generous grants from the Norcross Foundation and the California State Parks Foundation.

Chino Hills State Park Interpretive Association
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The November 2008 Freeway Complex Fire destroyed 95% of Chino Hills State Park. The Park needs your help.



City of Brea

VISIT US ON THE WEB: WWW.CHINOHILLSSTATEPARK.ORG