



Puente Hills Landfill
Native Habitat Preservation Authority

For Immediate Release

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Construction Has Begun **for** **Wildlife Underpass at Harbor Boulevard**

After over 5 years of planning, construction of a wildlife underpass at Harbor Boulevard in the Puente Hills has begun this week. The County of Los Angeles will be administering the construction contract.

In a joint effort, the Puente Hills Landfill Native Habitat Preservation Authority (Habitat Authority), the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works and California State Parks were successful in obtaining \$1.2 million in federal TEA funding.

Countless numbers of native wildlife have been killed at this habitat chokepoint and the safety of drivers has been put at risk as wildlife try to cross this road. Biological and planning studies undertaken by the University of San Diego and Cal Poly Pomona indicate that the underpass at this specific location would greatly improve the situation and assure the continued vitality of wildlife populations allowing them to continue to move through this area and mix genetically.

Harbor Boulevard is a major thoroughfare that connects Orange and Los Angeles Counties. Planning for the project began in 2001. At that point, the Average Daily Traffic (ADT) for Harbor Boulevard was 28,585 vehicles which has most likely only increased since. Motorists use Harbor Boulevard in their commute to job sources in Los Angeles County, and Orange County. It directly connects to the 60/Pomona Freeway and the 90/Imperial Highway in which hundreds of thousands of commuters use daily. With continued development in the Los Angeles Basin and subsequent increased traffic over time this Harbor Boulevard crossing point if unimproved would become more risky for wildlife and motorists.

Regionally, this underpass is vital to the Puente-Chino Hills Wildlife Corridor open space area which extends some 31 miles from the Whittier Narrows area in the west to connect with the Cleveland National Forest at Coal Canyon eastward into Orange County.

A Joint Powers Agency created pursuant to California Government Code §6500 *et seq.*
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Extensive efforts have been made to buy and preserve this Corridor. To date, over \$174 million has been spent to purchase over 19,000 acres of public land, and additional lands are being purchased by various agencies working in cooperation to save this remaining open space area in the Los Angeles Basin. Overall, this underpass is the linkage point for 4,600 acres of publicly protected habitat to the west and about 14,000 acres of publicly protected habitat in the east. It would strengthen the biodiversity of all lands to the west and add to the richness of the east.

Wildlife movement is important to ensure a healthy functioning ecosystem for the long term. Movement allows for species to find food, water, shelter, and mates, and to mark and defend territories. Also, movement ensures genetic diversity within species populations that is critical for their survival. If habitats become fragmented, the decline of genetic diversity occurs. This leads to species populations running the risk of genetic decay, which can lead to extirpation from an area resulting in severe cascading effects throughout the ecosystem.

Open space is more than an amenity; it is an essential component of community life, producing measurable health, social, and economic benefits. Public investment in parks and open space has shown to invigorate community revitalization, increase property values, reduce health care costs, improve productivity, and stimulate tourism. This project will contribute to these ends by helping maintain a healthy regional ecosystem and enhancing the nearby rural community environment. This in turn will improve the quality of life in the surrounding communities, making them more appealing places to live and work.

The Habitat Authority, is a joint powers authority with a mission *dedicated to the acquisition, restoration and management of open space in the Puente Hills for preservation of the land in perpetuity, with the primary purpose to protect the biological diversity. Additionally, the agency will endeavor to provide opportunities for outdoor education and low-impact recreation.* Its Board of Directors includes representatives from the City of Whittier, Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County, Los Angeles County and the Hacienda Heights Improvement Association.

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