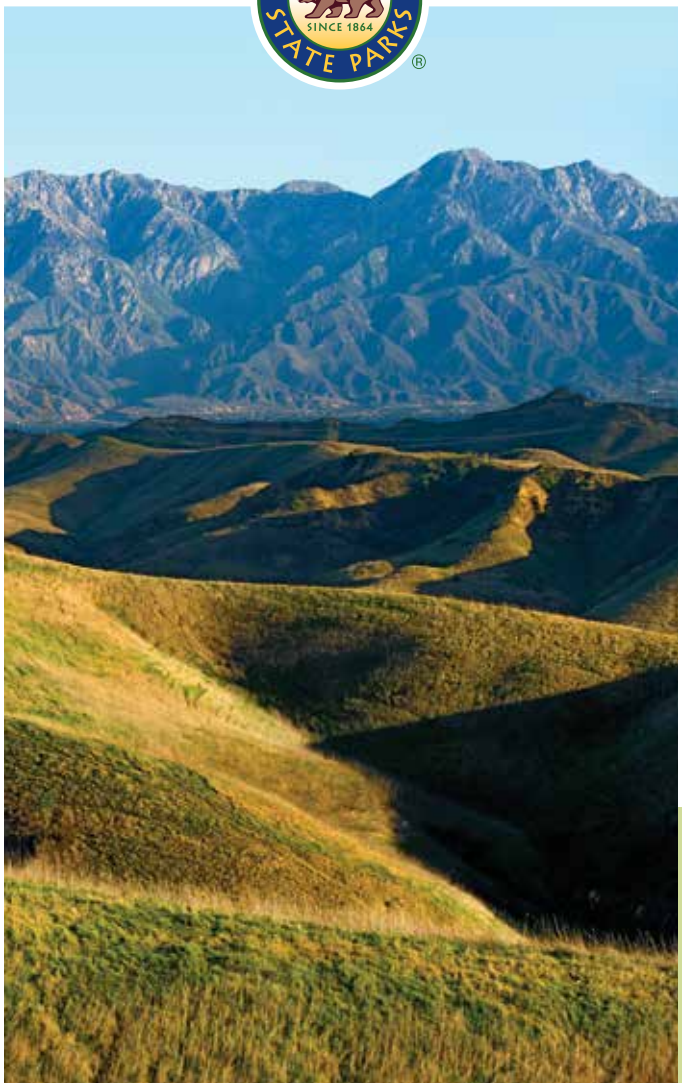
Chino Hills

State Park



Our Mission

The mission of California State Parks is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.

California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the park at **(951) 780-6222.** If you need this publication in an alternate format, contact **interp@parks.ca.gov**.

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Chino Hills State Park is an island of tranquility in a sea of urbanization.

Chino Hills State Park, a premier natural open-space area in the hills around the Santa Ana Canyon near Riverside, is a critical link in the Puente-Chino Hills biological corridor. This "bio-link" stretches nearly 31 miles from the Santa Ana Mountains to the Whittier Hills. The park has more than 14,000 acres of rolling, grassy hills and valleys, dotted with stands of oaks and sycamores.

The park is also a place where people can escape everyday pressures to find peace and solitude in a natural setting. Visitors can camp for a few days or enjoy walking, horseback riding, or bicycling over trails that meander along ridge tops and through valleys, woodlands, sage scrub, and grasslands. More than 90 miles of trails offer excellent opportunities for viewing wildlife and native plants. The park features a visitor center, a campground, picnic areas, and equestrian facilities.

PARK HISTORY

Over the centuries, many people have made use of the open spaces and plentiful water, plant, and animal resources of the Chino Hills. Before European contact, the Tongva (Gabrielino) Indians, who lived along the Santa Ana River basin, set up temporary camps here for gathering food.

Windmill at Telegraph Canyon

After the Spanish founded Mission San Gabriel in 1771, the Chino Hills were used extensively for grazing by mission cattle. During the Mexican Republic era, the hills were used as spillover pasture from such surrounding Mexican ranchos as Santa Ana del Chino and La Sierra Yorba. After Mexico ceded California to the United States in 1848, the land continued to be used for cattle.

Private land acquisition here began in the 1870s and continued into the 1890s. Some late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century oil exploration and mining activity also took place in areas now within the park. In 1948 the 1,720-acre Rolling M Ranch was established, and the land was leased to nearby landowners for cattle grazing. A ranch house, historic barn, and several windmills and watering troughs serve as reminders of the cattle-ranching days.

In 1977 the California Legislature passed a resolution directing California State Parks to conduct a study on acquiring Chino Hills land for park purposes. A local citizens group, Hills for Everyone, worked closely with California State Parks and the legislature to create the park with an initial acquisition of 2,237 acres. The California State Park and Recreation Commission officially declared the area a unit of the State Park System in 1984. Since then, numerous land acquisitions from various private landowners have expanded the park to its present acreage.

WILDLIFE

Because of its great variety of habitats and microclimates, Chino Hills State Park is an ideal location for observing many wildlife species native to Southern California.

Bobcat

Coastal cactus wren

More than 200 species of birds and mammals, numerous reptiles and amphibians, and thousands of types of insects and other invertebrates live in the park. Some of these animals—including the least Bell's vireo, the California gnatcatcher, and the coastal cactus wren—are considered rare, threatened, or endangered. The diversity of native plants and animals found in this region is ranked one of the highest in the United States.

GEOLOGY

Ranging from 400 to 1,781 feet in elevation, the park straddles the north end of the Santa Ana Mountains and the southeast portion of the Puente-Chino Hills, which together form the northern end of the Peninsular Ranges in Southern California. This formation interrupts the generally flat Los Angeles Basin with a variety of rolling hills, mountains, and canyons on its south and east sides. The hills are a result of uplift and folding along the Whittier and Chino faults.

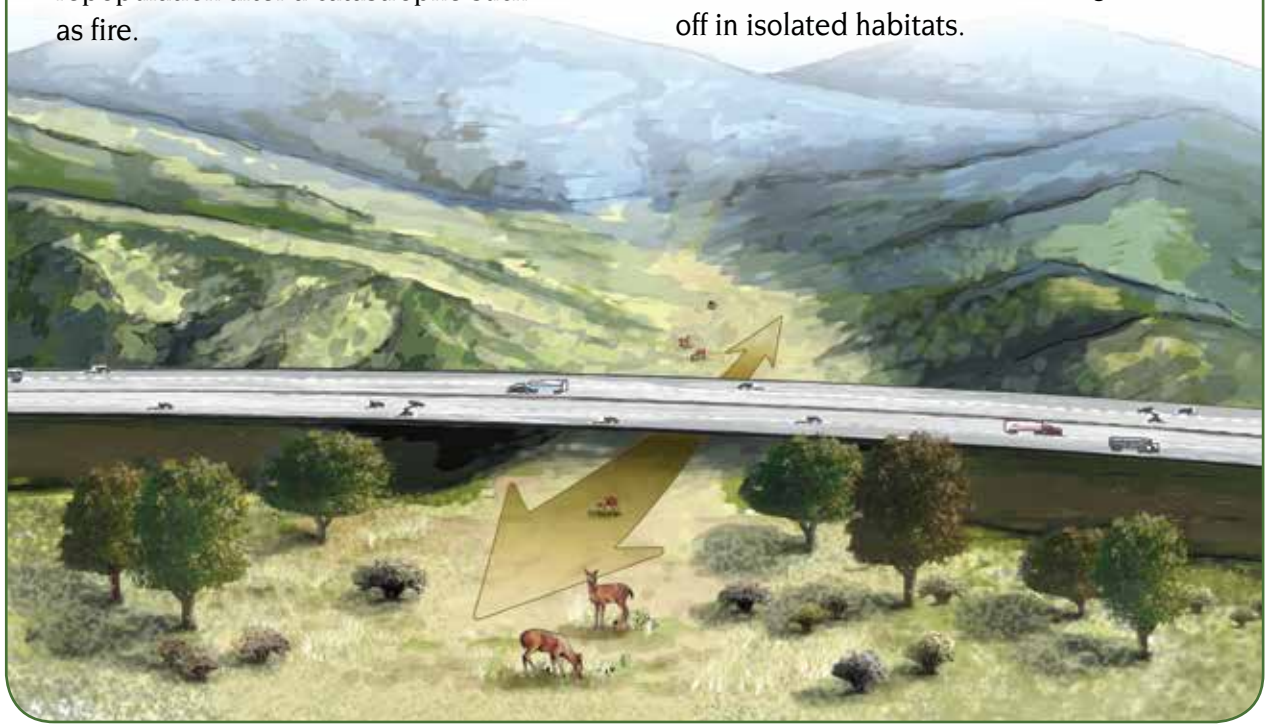
The Puente-Chino Hills are made up of sedimentary rocks of the Puente Formation, deposited from five to fifteen million years ago. Associated with this formation are petroleum resources that have been explored and exploited in the Los Angeles region since the late 1800s. Fine clay soils are found in these formations and in alluvial deposits that wash down from the hills and mountains during winter rains.

WHAT IS A BIOLOGICAL CORRIDOR?

Development has claimed large tracts of wildlife habitat. Biological corridors link the remaining habitats by acting as passageways between designated open spaces.

When small patches of wilderness are cut off from other open-space areas, many of the species present at the time of isolation will inevitably disappear. Biological corridors help to maintain healthy populations of plants and animals by allowing for genetic exchange, species migration, and repopulation after a catastrophe such as fire.

The Puente-Chino Hills bio-link offers people a refuge from urban life while connecting the park's plants and animals to other natural areas. Since Southern California is so heavily urbanized, it is impossible to preserve the huge tracts of land needed to ensure species diversity. However, by providing a major biological link between islands of open space, Chino Hills State Park effectively enlarges habitats. Water Canyon Natural Preserve, Coal Canyon, and the rest of the park are part of a biological corridor that allows wide-ranging species like bobcats or mountain lions to avoid becoming walled off in isolated habitats.



VEGETATION

Plant communities include various associations of riparian, grassland, sage scrub, woodland, and chaparral.

In the park's riparian zones, willow and sycamore trees stand above understories of wild rose, stinging nettle, and mule fat. Cattails grow along seasonal and year-round creeks. These areas provide habitat for a variety of wildlife, among them red-winged blackbirds and many nesting birds that come from Central and South America each spring to raise their young.

Southern California black walnut trees join coast live oaks above creeks on north-facing slopes. These walnut woodlands are another important and rare plant community preserved in the park. Only a few thousand acres of this California habitat

still exist, with just over 1,000 acres in preserves. Several hundred acres are protected at Chino Hills State Park.

The Tecate cypress is a rare species of conifer found only in a few places in the United States. Tecate cypress trees are found in Coal Canyon, near the larger ecological reserve managed by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Other plant communities found along the hills, slopes, and canyons include coastal sage scrub, mixed chaparral, alluvial sage scrub, and mule fat scrub. Wildlife species depend on these plants to survive.

Grassland species native to California, such as purple needle grass and giant rye, can be found among the park's annual non-native grasses. Part of the park's restoration program is returning native grassland to its natural dominant state.

Discovery Center

RECREATION AND INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS

More than 90 miles of multi-use trails wind through the park. The park is open seven days a week for day use; campsites can be reserved by calling (800) 444-7275. School programs, Junior Ranger programs, and educational talks are offered year round.

Cattail

The Discovery Center, located at 4500 Carbon Canyon Road in the city of Brea, offers hands-on exhibits about the wildlife, plant life, and other natural resources of the park. Staff and volunteers also conduct nature hikes, talks, programs, and events at the Discovery Center. A meeting room is available to rent for events and meetings. Visit **www.parks.ca.gov/ChinoHillsSP** for Discovery Center hours, an event calendar, and meeting-room rental information.

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

The Native Plant Trail, the Discovery Center and interpretive trail, and the Rolling M Ranch day-use area are accessible. The campground has accessible campsites and restrooms with showers. Two Bane Canyon vista points have shade ramadas and picnic tables. For ongoing accessibility updates, please visit **http://access.parks.ca.gov**.

PLEASE REMEMBER

Speed limit—15 mph for all vehicles and bicycles.

Motor vehicles—Off-road or backcountry driving is not allowed.

Smoking is prohibited outside of the campgound and throughout the entire park during fire season.

Campfires are not permitted due to fire danger. Charcoal grills are not allowed during fire season.

Trash—Pack it in; pack it out!

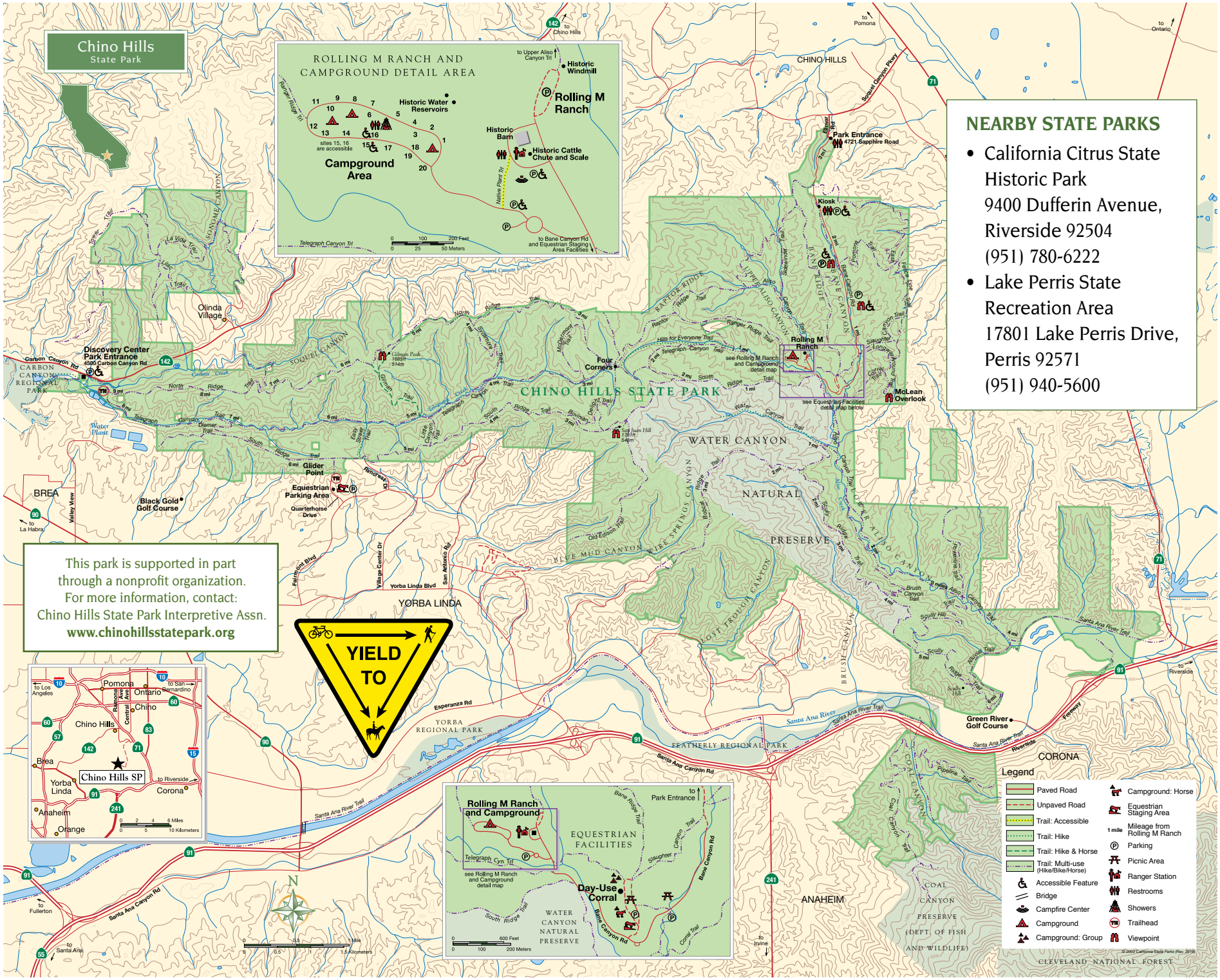
Weapons of any kind are prohibited.

Trails—For safety's sake, stay on designated trails and don't hike alone. Be aware of wildlife, especially rattlesnakes.

Collecting—All natural and cultural features are protected by law and may not be disturbed or collected.

Dogs are welcome on Bane Canyon Road, in the Rolling M Ranch, and the campgrounds. They must be on leash at all times and, except for service animals, are not allowed in the Discovery Center building, in the backcountry, or on trails. Pets must not be left alone at any time.

Park closure—The park will close following rain of more than one quarter inch and remain closed until road and trail surfaces are no longer saturated. High clay content in the soil causes "greased" conditions when wet. Trail use during this time causes severe erosion and rutting of trail and road surfaces. The park is also closed during times of extreme fire danger.



This park is supported in part through a nonprofit organization. For more information, contact: Chino Hills State Park Interpretive Assn. **www.chinohillsstatepark.org**

NEARBY STATE PARKS

- California Citrus State Historic Park
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