

Whittier Hills Collection
Oral History

CHARLES A. HANSON

Transcript of Interview August 4, 1998

Interviewed by Carole Hull

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CH	This is an interview with Mr. Charles A. Hanson (CAH) being interviewed by Carole Hull (CH) and Sis Zimmer (SZ). The date is August 4, 1998. We are in the upstairs staff room of the Whittier Public Library.
006 CH	Mr. Hanson, thank you for coming today and consenting to be interviewed about the Whittier Hillside Task Force. Can you begin by discussing your education and professional background?
CAH	<p>I think so. I have a Masters and Ph.D. from the University of California in Biology, specifically in Entomology and Plant Pathology; and, while taking these particular courses, I spent a lot of time out in the country, farming areas primarily, and also studied a lot of related areas, biological areas. I've been a hiker since I was about 8 years old over in the Hollywood hills.</p> <p>When we came to Whittier, one of the things that attracted us, it was a good community but it also had hills. And probably that type of a background is most leading to further activity, working in hillside land acquisition at various levels. Does that answer—pretty much what you had in mind?</p>
CH	Yes, it does. I'm inferring from your response that you were involved in activities concerning the hillside before the Task Force was formed?
CAH	<p>Oh, long before the Task Force, close to 10 years. We started Friends of the Whittier Hills actually in 1982. Prior to that there was an informal type of group that went under the slogan "Save Our Hills". That's when Hillside Ordinance was developed by the City of Whittier in 1978 or '79, as a result of the City Council's indication that they wanted to top the ridgelines for housing development and put the dirt from those toppings, leveling all the hillside ridgelines, down into the valleys around it. Just put houses in.</p> <p>So, a lot of the citizens in town, environmentally-oriented people, felt that that was not a good idea. Two of the council members at that time, Bob Henderson and Jerry MacDonald, got an ad hoc group together under the, ah, no special name, but it was primarily just to fight this effort on the part of the City Council at that time. And what they were doing was setting up an advisory referendum that would give the council a feeling of the people as to whether the ridgeline should be topped, or shouldn't.</p> <p>So when the election was held, and there was lot of money spent on the election to defeat this proposal, and money came from as far away as Texas from developer organizations, and they put out a four-page yellow sheet, is what it was, giving all the reasons that the self-centered people in Whittier were trying to prevent progress, development, and minimize the chance of people living in the hills. My wife and I, and a number of others, went door</p>

to door with informational sheets, hung door knob things on the doorknobs, trying to point out this should be a defeat; people should get out and vote, this is a critical thing. It didn't tie the town's council down, in one sense, in that they were free to do whatever they wanted, but they had to wait one year before taking action on this particular proposal. And the people against the ridgeline destruction beat the City Council by 60% to 40%.

I keep saying "the council" because there were 3 members on the council who were determined that was going to happen. So, at the end of that one-year advisory period, totally ignoring the wishes of the majority of voters, the council proposed the same thing again--the same council membership. And this resulted in the, what was called the Hillside Initiative.

Essentially what that was, an ordinance was to be voted in by the people of the city, if they wanted to, that said that the City Council could not top the ridgelines without a positive vote from a majority of people. So that went on the ballot and again the propaganda that came out that was against that proposal was incredible. My wife was called, and several other ladies were called, streetwalkers. They were called, ah solicitors, a variety of names, again with most of the money coming from out of state or San Francisco.

The election was held and there was a lot of feeling--this was in 1978 or 1979--I believe, and the ordinance was adopted by a percentage of 75% to 25%. So, each time, at first it was 60 to 40, the next time 75 to 25. The result is now what is called the Hillside Ordinance, which is part of the city books, that this cannot be changed without a positive vote from a majority of the people voting. So it hasn't been challenged since then.

There have been other polls conducted by the newspaper and other organizations, and, "Are you for the preservation of the hills? Are you indifferent to it? Do you think anything should be done?", In every case, 60%--as high as 78%--of the people have voted to preserve the hills in the condition they are now in, you know, undeveloped.

So, it has been a very positive thing all the way through there. Then, out of all this activity came the idea of starting a, we had a nucleus group, starting the Friends of the Whittier Hills. So that was started in 1982, I believe. And my wife became the first president and has put out the newsletter ever since; and for anybody that puts out newsletters this is a very thankless task. But that's how it all started. And then, in 19...

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CH	Oh, go ahead.
CAH	No, go – I can keep talking with this, is a ...
CH	Well, I just, that's fine. I shouldn't interrupt, but I wanted to ask you how you came to join the task force.
CAH	<p>Oh, I'm not sure whether I applied for it, or whether I was simply appointed just because of my past activities within the city for hillside preservation. I think that's how I got on it, along with 12 other people.</p> <p>And our assignment by the council, as you probably heard from other people, was to simply come up. We were starting to acquire hillside land. Through Proposition A, the funding became available; and then once it was acquired, then what do you do with it? You just can't let it sit there. You've got to try to preserve it, manage it, or whatever. So the Hillside Task Force was set up for that purpose, when in 1993, I believe. And ah...</p>
CH	Assume that we don't know anything. This will be read many years from now as well as right now.
CAH	It was appointed by, the members were appointed by the council, partially people who had been interested and were interested in hillside preservation and partially, I guess, by people who felt they'd like a voice--13 members total.
CH	What was the mission of the Task Force?
CAH	The mission was to advise the council as to how to manage the hills--as a wilderness, as a recreational area--to set up policies, management plans or strategies, as to how they should be managed, because once the city started acquiring this land, it was a big, big, addition to the city. It was almost, ah, increased the city territory by 10%. Just geographically. And that's a big piece of land. Something had to be drawn up to let the city know what the feeling of the Task Force was as to the best way to handle it, to management, by that do you allow motorized vehicles, overnight camping, or just simply hiking, respiration (laughter) recreation...
CH	Good to allow respiration.
CAH	<p>You got to respire all the time. And that was the primary task, so we met monthly for about 2 years, simply to kick around all the ideas we could come up with as to how this could be best handled.</p> <p>And then, once the program was established and accepted by the council, then, it became policy for management and preservation. And, part of what some of us did, some people hiked all over, ah, we had several field trips going out, with a majority of the Task Force members went out into various areas and just looked at it on site.</p>

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	<p>And then some of us went to meetings outside the area, up in, at the Conejo Conservation District was one, and then Capistrano has another type, so we went to all of these outlying areas to get an idea of what they were doing with their land--what they were recommending, and brought back this information to the Task Force.</p> <p>And that was, in turn, discussed; and what we felt was worth adapting to the Whittier Hills, we put into the policies, or proposed policies, at that time. And then we modified those and we added other things that came to mind--being we're located in such a metropolitan area. And out of that really came 4 or 5 drafts of management strategies, management policies, and the net result was finally tightened up, presented to the council at least twice, if my memory serves right. And, in the process, it was an exchange of information because the council, keep in mind, was going to be responsible for implementing the policy once accepted, what to do with the hills.</p>
CH	<p>Can you expand on the process? You've touched on that--that some of you went off to meetings, others on field trips to explore the area. How did you, there were 13 members, how did you organize yourselves? How did you assign tasks and responsibilities? What were the various disciplines that people brought to the Task Force?</p>
CAH	<p>It was very informally done. In a meeting we would discuss, "Gee, we should go up and look at this." How many have seen it, how many haven't, and then try to set up a mutually agreeable date for people to go, for example, up to the Chevron property and walk through it and look at it.</p> <p>Ah, as far as going to meetings outside of the area, that was done by those interested individuals. It wasn't done on a formal basis. We felt each of us were following our own particular goals. And, then we would report on what we had seen or heard once we got back to a meeting. But, it was actually a very informally run group.</p> <p>The qualifications of the people, ah, in the Task Force varied tremendously. We had one person, Ray Williams, who was Chair, who has been a biology teacher up at Rio Hondo for years and has, they have their own private canyon up there, in the landfill territory. Have you talked to Ray yet?</p>
CH	<p>Not yet.</p>
CAH	<p>And then David, at that time, Fretz was teaching at Rio and has since gone on to Irvine and teaches. We had a very big cross section--some people were simply interested in hillside preservation. One person was an accountant, who was interested. One was an aeronautical engineer. Another</p>

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	<p>one is a physicist who's hiked in the hills, so it was a tremendously varied background of people who got interested. The main thing is that they were interested, and they wanted to see that we could get the best programs possible for hillside preservation.</p> <p>I think Dave Fretz talked to the Angeles National Forest people and got their input from the experience up in the Angeles National Forest. Others talked to Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, which is a state agency, with their biologists, just looked and talked. It was all very informal and all of these things came back and were talked about in our meetings.</p> <p>So, out of that we picked what we felt were the key points for this type of hillside area, to keep it as a wilderness preserve for all the future generations to come, hopefully. Did that answer your question?</p>
CH	Yes. Was there consensus among the Task Force members about the goals of the preservation?
CAH	<p>Pretty much. Once we had gotten it worked out I would say, the Task Force generally, ah, overwhelming majority was always in agreement. There were one or two people who may have disagreed on small points, but, basically, there was no, ah, major points of controversy.</p> <p>And, we also were able, on a couple of occasions, to work out flights in the Fire Department's helicopter, and we'd meet over at ah, Presbyterian. We took along some state legislators. Grace Napolitano went once or twice. Hilda Solis went, Esteban Torres went. Of course, he was a congressman. But all of them got a fly-over to see what the land looked like from the air and it was about as complete an input as we could get, from all of the various factors involved. The biggest question, I think, once acquisition had been pretty well established, was, and still is, fire prevention, fire control. So...</p>
CH	Will you elaborate on that?
CAH	We had members of the Fire Department, the County Fire Department, the Sheriff's Department, and Police Department come and talk with us about fire control in the main, in that one case. And what they were saying essentially was there's always been fires. It's kind of cyclical, about every 8 to 10 years, and it's actually easier to fight a fire when there are no homes around. Because, if you watch fire in other areas, Oakland or Laguna Hills, you'll see that half the firemen are protecting homes. If they don't have homes to protect, then their main effort goes to controlling the fire. That's something most of us weren't aware of, and, ah, we were able largely to convince some people who were concerned about, "Gee, we could build

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	<p>houses up there and they'd have lawns and water and they'd all be taken care of, these things, we wouldn't have the biggest, bigger chance of fire", And that turns out not to be true, based on facts. And then...</p>
CH	<p>There's a greater chance of fire where there are homes?</p>
CAH	<p>No, there's a greater chance of a fire, once started--and it's almost inevitable it's going to start--whether it's arson, whether it's sunlight shining through the bottom of a jar, glass jar, or whatever. But it's much easier, as I stated, to control it, once it starts, if there are no homes that you are working on protecting.</p> <p>So we worked on all of those things and worked with the Fire Department; and then we also worked with the Sheriffs', initially the property was owned, as it became owned by the city. It wasn't in the city limits, so the City Police Department didn't have any standing authority there, it had to be done by the Sheriffs Department. So we had both city police and [county] sheriffs come in and talk to us and explain how they would work and cooperate on some of these things. It's a lot more complicated than it seems just on the surface, and once the property was acquired then by the city, annexed, became city property, then, you know, the Sheriff's Dept. was no longer directly involved. They could always be called in by the city police force if some supplemental help was needed.</p> <p>The thing has progressed, and is still progressing, now to the point where, even though the land has been acquired, some of it 4 or 5 years ago, it hasn't been opened up to the public. Hopefully, as you heard from David Fretz, it'll be opened up, at least the Chevron property, next spring. In the meantime, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, which is a state agency, has an arm called Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, which is also a state authority, and the city, using money from Prop A, has contracted with the MRCA for park patrol, or preserve patrol. And these people, there's 3 of them, are state rangers; and one of the them lives on site over on Chevron, just north end of Catalina. And they're uniformed, they have all the radios, side arms. They can issue citations. They can confiscate vehicles if they run into problems with people repeatedly taking motorized vehicles or 4-wheel drives up there. There used to be quite a lot of that, especially over on the east side of Colima. So they're responsible for maintenance, preservation. They repair fences. They try to keep people from partying up there--there's a lot of that goes on in some areas. So the actual management now, with guidance from the city and based on the management policies, is being carried out by a state agency. So the city directly doesn't have that much involvement anymore.</p>

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	<p>But, it's always on call, in case something comes up where the rangers need help right away, or whatever. To me, it's a very excellent way of getting started.</p> <p>Now, once the program and these lands are cleared for the public to come in, then there will be a whole series of other things that will be planned for, you probably heard from David, like nature centers. That's been a discussion. Picnic areas. Trying to point to people who are hiking up there without any experience. And our biggest concern has been, a lot of people want to go hiking, they have never been in the hills, don't have a clue to what poison oak looks like, what rattlesnakes look like, or any of these things that, you know, are potential hazards. And teenagers especially want to get off trails, they want to take shortcuts. This is part of the problems that are all being addressed and who has priority-- people on bicycles, people on horses, people on foot. These are all part of the management considerations that we got into.</p>
CH	<p>You mentioned the complexity of this whole project. Once you got into it, and of course, when you joined the Task Force, you shifted gears from the public interest organization, to an adjunct of the city government. Can you describe for me your expectations for the Task Force and how these evolved, if they did, as you did the work?</p>
CAH	<p>Pretty much. I went in as an individual who happened to be a member of a preservationist organization, Friends of the Whittier Hills. So as an individual, I acted as an individual based on my own background, interests, feelings, experience. There was no conflict at all because what our group, Friends of the Hills, was doing was simply concerned with preservation and we hadn't gone past that point. So there was very little transition required in my case to get into management policies and strategies. In fact, that was just a logical extension of what Friends of the Hills had been doing. The Task Force was taking on that.</p> <p>We had, as Friends of the Hills, done something slightly different. We had made arrangements with the School Districts to take children—and there were some fourth graders on--on hikes during school week as a field trip. And, I think, in 94-95 we took about 3,000 local school children up into the hills.</p>
CH	<p>How many at a time?</p>
CAH	<p>90</p>
CH	<p>That's a lot of children at once!</p>
CAH	<p>We went into this with great intentions but not a clue, really, as to how to do it. We talked to the teachers who go on field trips all the time. They have</p>

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	<p>rules and regulations for kids on field trips. We told them to carry those out --one parent for every ten kids. Then we were able to get, during the week, people like myself or the head of the Audubon Society, Felix Owens, or another naturalist, Gene Foley, who is an animal tracker--flat expert. A whole cross section of people on different days that wanted to do this.</p> <p>We put one of those in each group of thirty children. We'd start in the morning about 9 o'clock, come back about 12. The buses would bring them up and then come back at 12 and take them home. And we were able to show them, you know, what's up there. And it's amazing the interest--these kids who have never been up in the hills. And on Hellman, right up at the end of Greenleaf, which is the only part the city had, you get half way up and you can, on a clear day, see all over. And they would be astonished. They'd be pointing out Whittier High School, the Hilton Hotel and everything they could see--just totally amazing. Lot of the parents had never seen it.</p> <p>So, and we also told them, you know, going in--these are the things you run into: poison oak, rattlesnakes, explained what to do or not to do. And we got some of the parents coming along. And we felt that education, starting as early as you can start, locally, is one of the most critical things to do for people who are, at a later date, going to be able to go up there on their own. And there are a lot of wonderful things to see--birds, plants, animals--it's just tremendous resource.</p>
CH	That's my next question, as a matter of fact. What have you learned about the Whittier Hills since you've been involved in their preservation?
CAH	We learned first that they're great hills, a great area to preserve, and nothing comes closer to mind, we have pictures taken from 20,000 feet and from 438 miles that show...
CH	Satellite?
CAH	<p>Yeah, that these hills are a little island peninsula, and that's the only thing in eastern Los Angeles County that's not built up. And, when you go up there, you don't have to go very far in any one of the valleys, and you cannot hear freeways, you cannot hear sounds of civilization--until an airplane flies over. That you can hear! And the gratification, I think, comes from knowing this is going to be here for as long as any one of us can foresee.</p> <p>The areas that have been heavily grazed by cattle over 50 years or so, are going to be revegetated, either naturally or with help from various groups, and eventually the area up here, which was once formerly all oak trees, that's hard to believe, but it was primarily...</p>

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CH	I'm sorry, but you're gesturing "up here" but can you describe what you mean.
CAH	<p>Up here is the hills to, (laughter) sitting in the room at the library, but the hills were formerly, oh 70 or 80 years ago when the Tongva, or San Gabrielino Indians were living here, were all primarily oak trees, some sycamores, some cottonwood and a variety of other trees. There's water sources available, a lot of native plants in what now appear to be mostly grassy, weedy areas. But they've been so heavily grazed by cattle that all the native plants have pretty well disappeared.</p> <p>So, hopefully, in time, with natural revegetation, plus assisted by people actually planting trees and seeds, this will revert back in maybe 15 or 20 years to what it used to be. I can't imagine a better area for people to go into and say, "Hey, this is fantastic."</p>
CH	Two things--what about the water sources, what are they? And then also you mentioned the habitation by the Native Americans. Can you expand on that for us?
CAH	The water sources: there are a number of areas in the hills, ah, where there are springs or seeps. The water is coming up from wherever underneath. The hills in their natural condition are a tremendous watershed, especially in years like this last year, where the water percolates down into the ground through—the geology is kind of mixed right here because the Whittier Fault goes through. But, there's a lot of underground water sources, so there are constant seepages in some areas. And then, on the Chevron property in Arroyo Pescadero and Arroyo San Miguel, there are a water called "blue line streams", which there is water in parts of them almost all year long. The same is true in Sycamore Canyon.
CH	Is that what a "blue line stream" means, that it has water most of the year?
CAH	<p>Right. They're not big rushing streams or creeks, except in the wintertime; but there's water there during most of the summer. So, this is one source of water for animals. Ah, vegetation, native vegetation, supplies moisture just by the fact that its roots are down in areas where there are water sources, and the roots of some of these plants will go down 50 and 60 feet. And they'll bring water up. The leaves are constantly transpiring as they take in oxygen and they give off carbon dioxide and water vapor.</p> <p>So animals who browse all the time get a lot of their moisture simply out of the water that's in the vegetation. This isn't true of the exotic weeds, like castor bean, Indian tobacco and mustard and a lot of the grasses, which were all introduced over the years through a variety of means. But the native vegetation will supply a tremendous habitat for a major cross section of</p>

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	<p>animals, where eucalyptus trees--which we call the Chevron trees, they were mostly planted by Chevron--will grow under real difficult conditions, but they don't provide much habitat for either animals or birds. It's just not suited for that.</p> <p>And they're [eucalyptus trees] tremendous fire hazards because of the high oil content in the trees. So those are going to be, over time, taken out; and we found that people who have them right along their property line don't want them removed. They are very scenic, but, at the same time, they present a fire hazard. It's been interesting to me to see that a lot of these people have shake roofs on their houses; and nothing is a bigger fire hazard than a shake roof, especially with eucalyptus trees around.</p> <p>So, all of these things the Task Force has been working to impr--, to ah, get started, going, and they have been coming up with recommendations from time to time, present them to the council, and the council has accepted them. So, its coming along real well, and they are the actual on-site group. Two of those Task Force members--not Task Force, Open Space Advisory Committee, I should say--are members of Friends of the Hills.</p>
CH	I wanted to ask you to discuss the interactions of the Task Force, if there were any, with the local conservation groups and the general public, and other outside groups?
CAH	<p>Both the Task Force and the Open Space Advisory Committee, being council-appointed groups, of course, were always open to the public, meetings. And people came and were free to contribute and still are, pretty much, ah, whatever comments they want, ask whatever questions there were, so that kind of a relationship is still there. I personally, and some of the others, are well acquainted with all the things that are going on, and making an effort to try and keep up; and so we have a constant informal input on all of these items. And we know the council people, we can go talk to them. So we have a very, I'd say, open working relationship, with working on the programs.</p> <p>Now the programs of the Open Space Advisory Committee, based on the Task Force, of management policies, strategies, are open to anyone. And that's what's being used as a foundation to implement everything that's going on. The question then is, "What's the best way to do it? How much can be, money can be spent? Where can we get the funding?" So these things are ongoing and they're--I would say the, ah, the relationship is about as close between any of the local environmentally oriented groups and any of the city groups, you know, as possibly can be. And we have just recently,</p>

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	for funding, the proposal now is to, in the Open Space Advisory Committee, the groups are so interrelated, the Task Force, the Open Space Advisory Committee, are so interrelated that one of them stopped simply because the council said, “Okay, the Task Force has done its job. Now let’s go on from there.” We’ve got the policies. The library, I understand, has 4 copies of these. Have you seen them?
CH	Of what, the final report?
CAH	Yeah.
CH	Yeah, we do have copies of the final report.
CAH	Yes, you’ve got 4 of them. These are what they look like, Sis, in case you haven’t seen them. They’ve got maps and various things in them.
SZ	That was my question: What are the boundaries?
CAH	<p>The boundaries are the, pretty well defined on any maps of the city. Anything north of the existing city maps, in the hillside areas, are part of the Wilderness Preserve. It’s difficult in one way to answer your question, specifically because the relationships are so, ah, open. You know, and people talk about various things all the time, just informally.</p> <p>And the one thing that’s working now, and came out of a Task Force recommendation: parking is a problem. There are 18 gates going into the Wilderness Preserve and a lot of the neighborhoods felt, and they said this in the Task Force, “Where are you going to put parking and entrances into this?” Because people who live there didn’t want to have, they immediately envision a regional park with residents from Downey, and Southgate, and Long Beach, or any place coming up here because there is nothing like this anywhere. So all the neighbors in various areas were concerned with all the influx of people from outside.</p> <p>The end result really was that 3 areas were chosen by the Task Force as main entrance areas. One of them is Hellman Park, off Orange and Greenleaf; and one of them was over on Workman Mill Road where Sycamore Canyon comes in; and the other is just off Colima, on the west side. Now they are going to build a parking area on the east side of Colima, which will take in areas within the city boundaries over there. But all the other gates, 13 or 14, are not going to be open for public access. But it’s amazing how many of the local neighbors who live right there will either roll under the existing gates or go around them or whatever they do, well, a couple of property owners even have their own gates out of the side of their property.</p> <p>But all the gates have to stay there as emergency access in case there are</p>

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	fires. Fire or emergency vehicles have to be able to get in, so they'll stay in place. But they won't be open to the public.
SZ	Did you have to work with other cities that are on the opposite boundary? Who is north of it?
CAH	<p>Hacienda Heights, which is not incorporated. They have an improvement association, Hacienda Heights Improvement Association, which is made up of local residents; and in acquisition of Whittier land, we didn't have to consider them at all. We were totally concerned with our own immediately adjacent properties.</p> <p>The HHIA was concerned with the Puente Hills Landfill. And then Bob Henderson, who has been probably the leading council member, a very much of a spark plug in the whole thing, ah, formed a habitat, Puente Hills Habitat Preservation Authority, which includes the L.A. County City Park Dept., and the L.A. County Sanitation District. And together they levied what's called a "tipping fee" on each person dumping any refuse in the Puente Hills Landfill. And there are 16 cities that take refuse up there and dump it, 13,000 tons a day, and for every ton, \$1 is put into this fund for land acquisition. So they're buying land that we couldn't, as a city, afford from Prop. A--we had used up our Prop. A funding--but, other funding now is coming from the landfill.</p>
SZ	Does the City of Whittier get the whole \$13,000 a day, or does, is this split up with other...
CAH	<p>No, that gets into this other Preservation Authority, but it can only be used for landfill, I mean land, acquisition, wilderness preserve land in the Whittier/Puente Hills. So, it can't go to any other part of L.A. County the way it is presently established.</p> <p>And, it has been used to acquire land already; and if the, ah... Turnbull Canyon is the last major acquisition area, about, 1,400 acres, and is really needed to complete the Whittier Hills Wilderness Preserve. That's a major connecting site and the discussions are going along with that, so once the price is agreed upon mutually, then the funding will all come out of this landfill tipping fee. And over the lifetime of that tipping fee, it's projected it will amount to about \$70 million.</p> <p>See initially--I should have said this in the very beginning--the idea of preserving the hillside was a great idea for many of us, but it was all privately owned. And one of the major arguments was, well, the city can't take by eminent domain or condemnation, private land. It's just, you don't do that. So that made it very difficult. It wasn't until County Proposition A</p>

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	was passed in '92, and again in '94, that funding became available to the city of Whittier. We had \$17.3 million in 1992 for land acquisition, so nothing had to be condemned or taken by eminent domain. It was all willing buyer/willing seller, that kind of a thing. And that put a whole new feeling on land acquisition, on the part of people who were really against preserving the land; and the only argument they came up with, "You're condemning private land." That was their final argument. Well, if we found somebody who wanted to sell it and we had the money to buy it, I say we, meaning the city, then that eliminated the argument. So...
CH	I was going to say, there were obviously a lot of agencies and forces at work, too, in this process of preserving the hills, and what exactly, what was the role of the Task Force itself in preserving the hills?
CAH	The actual role, I think, of the Task Force, land had already been acquired, the Chevron property primarily, and what do you do with it? So the role of the Task Force was to come up with these policies, strategies, to recommend to the city what should be done with it. And that was the actual purpose of it. What should be done now, 5 years down the road, or in the future--a lot of it was very long term.
CH	Maybe you can expand now on these policies, the impact these policies and guidelines that you developed will have on the flora and fauna in the hills.
CAH	The effect of flora would be to eliminate over time as many of the non-native plants as possible. There's been so much disturbance of land over the 100 years that the oil companies have been pumping up there that some species, plant species, come in on disturbed land almost entirely. They won't come in in established growing areas.
CH	I'm sorry, can you define native and non-native for me?
CAH	Natives are plants that have been growing here, in the area, for centuries. Maybe shorter, but they are native to this area, or areas immediately adjacent to it. And they've just developed and matured over hundreds of years. The non-native plants are plants that came in, a lot of them, say, from the Mediterranean area. Mustard is, came in from outside. It makes the hill look gorgeous, but it's a non-native. Castor bean came in from another, other countries. And they're all prolific seed producers, to the point where they outproduce seed of the native plants. And they can, on that basis, get started earlier in the springtime, and get bigger before the native plants coming from seed get high enough to get any sunlight. So the natives then are shaded out. Does that satisfy what you're talking about, natives and non-natives? It's a long concept to work out.
CH	Yes, that's fine.
CAH	But, essentially, these were plants, non-natives, that were not here 50 or 100 years ago. And they had to come in...if the ranchers brought in alfalfa hay

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	<p>or whatever, fed it to their animals in times when there wasn't enough native grass, the ranchers would plant non-native grasses that would grow faster, produce a lot of forage for grazing animals. And, if they brought in baled hay, for example, it could contain seed and plants from anywhere. And if those seed happen to find a happy growing place, they'd grow! And a lot of seed will pass through birds and animals without being harmed. So essentially, when it comes out, ah, they used to sell these pelletized seed, so that seed has its own fertilizer source and everything. It's all ready to go. So, that's one of the ways it's spread. Birds can eat the seeds someplace else and then come in.</p> <p>So many of the plants we see around us all the time are non-natives. We have the hopes that the animals in the area do not develop as well, or their populations won't increase as well among non-native plants. They'll adapt. But when you have native plants, particularly oak trees, you get a tremendously different number and different species of birds particularly. Rabbits, squirrels, a lot of the small animals will live better under native trees because the type of leaf material that comes down is more suited, and it forms a real good mulch on the ground and they can live better there. Reproduce better. And when, they are the bottoms of the food chain: rabbits, mice, rats, squirrels, so then, the larger animals, the more predatory animals, having a bigger food base, they'll start to increase. So we're going to get more foxes, more coyotes, unfortunately. I said unfortunately because coyotes are very adaptable. They'll come right down into the city areas-- probably get down into the, as far as your street; and they eat dogs and cats, so there's a lot of trade off on some of these things.</p>
CH	Are the coyotes considered a native or non-native animal?
CAH	Coyotes are natives.
CH	OK, and can you talk--what other, well expand on, on the animals, the changes in the numbers and kind of animals that we'll have as the native plants gain a foothold.
CAH	<p>We probably won't have changes in kind, types of animals, because most of them are already here. But we will have changes in numbers. What happens in nature is that when one species increases, if it happens to be a squirrel and it's a host species fed on by foxes, for example, and when they have a good year, that means the foxes grow and develop and are more fertile, so they have more litters.</p> <p>And there's always this thing going on all the time, a constant shifting of an ecological balance among animals and among plants. And what happens is that you will get a buildup, almost explosive sometimes, and then the</p>

predators: foxes, badgers, bobcats, which we have in the hills, coyotes, will follow that explosion with their own kind of mini-explosion. But it will lag behind the other one, the host species. By that I mean, the squirrel explosion comes first and it isn't some months or a year or two before the other populations start really increasing in number. And that's a very common ecological situation.

So we're getting lots and lots of the smaller animals this year because of the rain making so much vegetation available. So their food source has increased. And now we have the smaller animals increasing, so we're going to get the resultant increases of animals that feed on the small animals, the vegetarian animals.

And this just goes on all the time and, incidentally, coyotes don't just eat animals. They'll eat plant seeds and berries and all kinds of things. So they're very omnivorous feeders, and most of the larger animals are.

And then we have an occasional mountain lion up here, because we have lots of deer. Several mountain lions have been seen over the last 10 years in this area; and they have--they're nocturnal mostly, so you don't see them during the daytime--it's rare that you see 'em. But you'll find the tracks of 'em in various areas, especially over by the Puente Hills landfill. So we have a very, very cross section of animals typical of a wilderness area.

We don't have bears, and we don't anticipate any bears' coming in; but, we do have--our biggest predator is a mountain lion. A mountain lion, to give you a feeling for it, normally a female mountain lion will have a territory roughly of 100 square miles or something. And they'll be scattered all down through the open wilderness areas, and in the Angeles National Forest. And they, the males, have a territory of about 600/700 square miles; and in that territory will be 4 or 5 females. So the males just make their visits every fall, or whenever the season is.

So we have a real cross section; and one of the things we do in taking our trips--and this is recommended in the policies of the Task Force and the programs—is, we tell people what to see, what to expect, how to react. If they see a large predator like a mountain lion coming along, just stand still, don't run, you know--face it. Because if you are going the other direction, then you're prey, and that's just an instinctual behavior.

So we try to do all that, and we point out to people on our trips that we have

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	<p>5 different kinds of sage plants, which incidentally smell like sage, can be used in the kitchen if you want; and we point out all of these native plants and animals. And this is implementing part of the Task Force recommendations from an educational standpoint.</p>
CH	<p>I wanted to ask you what are the particular programs that the Task Force has put in place that will impact on the native plants and in turn on the animals? Can you describe...?</p>
CAH	<p>Yeah, the basic things that they've recommended and are now starting to work on is replanting native plants. And I don't remember the exact figures, but I think last fall and early this spring they've replanted about 200 trees of maybe 5 species. But they got them and planted them too late, so we're, the survival rate is uncertain due to water. This year they're planning on starting in November, about the time the rains normally start.</p> <p>But that program has started, and then another program is being carried out by La Serna High School. A group over there was in the Whittier [Daily] News this morning. They are building a greenhouse to start growing native plants for use to, in repopulating, redeveloping native areas in the hills that have been overgrazed and where at present, there's just grasses.</p> <p>So those programs are just getting started; and over a period of 50 years--it's not going, it's going to take a long time, because you have problems with survival. Deer, for example, love to eat seedling trees, like oak trees. And they'll come along and browse 'em right down to the ground. So in some areas they have to put wire screens around 'em to allow them to get to a big enough height.</p> <p>But it's a long-range program--and that's recommended by the Task Force--for reforesting, redeveloping plants in these hillside areas. Hopefully, at some time, if you know the Santa Ynez Valley, when you go up there, there are just oak trees everywhere. I use oaks, there's also black walnuts and poplar and sycamore. And they are almost solid; and that's a magnificent native area, up around Solvang. And hopefully, in time, we'll get this area back to that. But it's going to take time, and I'm sure David [Fretz] probably said the same thing.</p> <p>But the program is in place, you know, the outlines are all in here. I'm not leaving this for you, I'm taking this one back with me. The program is in place, and there are a lot of groups volunteering now to do various things. We have Boy Scout groups that are interested, Eagle Scouts, on the Eagle trail who want projects to work on--trail maintenance, planting, whatever.</p>

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	<p>There's a whole variety of things, so the possibilities actually are just starting to open up. And as the word gets out, through talking to groups or showing them--we've talked to service clubs--more people will volunteer. I'm skipping around because the things are so interrelated, it's hard just to stick to the Task Force.</p>
CH	<p>Well, actually there was an area I was hoping you could backtrack to. You mentioned grazing. What the impact of grazing had on the hills and also you mentioned in passing that Indians, that Native Americans lived in the hills. Obviously both those things had great impact. Can you expand on those two areas?</p>
CAH	<p>Grazing does two things. First, it, over years, almost totally eliminates native vegetation, except maybe cactus; and I'm not too sure that they don't eliminate that. But more, perhaps more critically, just the weight of one of those big animals on the ground compacts the ground; so it's not as, not as easy for seeds of natives to get into the ground and grow; but the introduced species can do it very easily. They're more adaptable to this type of thing. So we've got the effect of compacting the soil; and that'll loosen up in time, when its not grazed, and then the effect of grazing down the native plants.</p> <p>Now getting back to the archeological thing, I'm not as familiar with that as some of the other people might be. We have one lady in town, Jen McKenna, who's a specialist. She's an archeologist and she would.... I don't know if Jen was on the committee, I don't remember. But she would be someone to talk to about the native peoples who were present here. She is right locally. She has an office on Greenleaf.</p>
CH	<p>Who did the cattle ranching, and during what period was that, and where was that, on Chevron land before oil was developed?</p>
CAH	<p>I don't know that it was on Chevron land because they've been operating there since, when, 1893, over 100 years. But the area north of Chevron, mostly all on Rose Hills land, I think, whoever owned that probably leased out grazing rights. I know there were three separate herds of about 50 cattle that I used to see. And there was also up at the end of Worsham Canyon, a barn and a corral and some buildings that are still there, and a big pond; but the cattle were all owned by somebody, as far as I'm aware, from outside the area. And they were mostly Herefords, just grazing there, free land. This went on for a long time. When it started, I'm not sure.</p>
SZ	<p>Well, the Spanish land grants would have started the cattle.</p>
CAH	<p>Way back, yes.</p>
SZ	<p>The Spanish who lived here, they existed on the meat?</p>
CAH	<p>Yes</p>

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SZ	They brought in cattle by huge numbers.
CAH	I think Sis is probably right. It started way back then, but in the local hills, I'm not sure. And then remember the Pellesier's family had dairy operations right out Workman Mill Road for some years. I'm not sure of that. I've never asked them, but it's a good question. But they obviously have been there for years.
CH	Can you discuss now the recommendations of the Task Force for managing the hillside lands, and your opinions of them, and what changes you might make if it were strictly up to you?
CAH	Let me answer the last part of that. I don't think I'd make any changes at present, because, I believe the Task Force spent a lot of time and effort--2 year--looking into all the factors that they felt would have a bearing on management and should be recommended to the City Council. The input from a variety of people covered just about everything we could think of to do two things: to try and balance recreational use and preservation of areas. So there were different areas designated, particularly in the Chevron property, over by Colima. That would be buffers between the people, the residential areas that butt up right to that land. Then there are other areas set for people to come in and hike, specifically, easily, without getting into what we felt were still the pristine, still well-preserved environmental areas, original environment. We're trying to minimize the impact of what's there, the native plants.
CAH	Can you describe how you're going to try to keep people out of the pristine areas, or...?
CH	<p>Hopefully, its going to be done by making the trails such that, it's easier to stay on a trail than to go off into some of these other areas. It's a difficult question to answer and there's no easy solution. All the people we've talked to say that you can get most people to follow signs, providing some other people don't come in and tear the signs down. So you have all of these factors. Some go into the hills, kids, teenagers, and their idea is to do whatever a sign says not to do--to tear up the sign if they don't like it. You know, and otherwise, that's just the way they are at that age. Then others pay a lot of attention to it; and if we say "Heavy Poison Oak," and they know what poison oak is, that'll help keep them on these established trails. And the trails are very definitely going to be signed, so you can stay on them, and be aware, and they'll be kept clear and walkable and useable.</p> <p>Another group that comes in, that, ah, are the mountain bikers; and they have their own agenda. Usually, that's to go as fast as possible, especially down hills, and if there are jumps, things they can go up in the air and do all of these. They're going to be much more difficult to control, so we're trying</p>

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	<p>to put in--the Task Force is recommending (it's in here, in these policy manuals), trails constructed in such a way that it'll minimize mountain biking. All we can do is try to minimize it, there's no way to prevent it.</p>
CAH	<p>I was going to ask, why not prohibit mountain biking?</p>
CH	<p>Well, because it's a recreational use, and a lot of people who bike in the mountains are very legitimate--they obey the rules. They're just biking just like other people jog and walk. Trying to draw lines between what is a good recreational use and what is not is like drawing the lines anywhere--you know--on the freeways, or whatever. You hope to keep the erratic users under a little bit of control, but we can't do anymore than put up signs and hope they won't do it.</p> <p>The same is true of people who want to camp overnight. We have areas right here at the end of Greenleaf and Hellman Park, big pepper trees, and we were up there a couple of months ago after the last part of the Hellman estate was acquired, and we must have taken out 3 or 4 big trash bags full of beer bottles, and all kinds of things. They were smoking, drinking and whatever up there. So those people are here.</p> <p>We hope the rangers will be able to cover enough of these areas so that if neighbors see something going on, they can phone up the rangers and get them to come in. And usually when that's happened, the rangers have been able to respond fairly well, fairly rapidly. They can call on Whittier City Police now that the land is annexed. There's always going to be this borderline area that you try to control in as many ways as possible. My personal recommendation, in some areas, was simply to plant more poison oak.</p>
CH	<p>Is that going to be done?</p>
CAH	<p>No. We're not going to do that deliberately. That does--poison oak reproduces itself very well. Deer can eat it without any problems, but people react with a very strong allergic reaction many times. So we're not planting, or the plans didn't call for any of that, but just planting some of the native-type trees: sycamores, poplar, cottonwood, rather, and oaks, laurel, sumac and of the others that used to be there, or on hillsides where they would ideally suited for, and hope, over time, that that helps to minimize, bring the hills back and minimize some of the problems. These are long term goals.</p> <p>So there's really no easy answer to what you're asking, as to how to prevent this except, I'm sure, that the goals will be modified as things go along. I think the method of achieving some of them will be modified. But it's a</p>

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	<p>dynamic thing, because nature itself is generally dynamic. So, 50 or 100, whatever number of years, it hits a balance; and everything is in pretty much of a balance, which moves up and down a little bit, but doesn't change that much. So that's the only way I can think of to answer that question.</p> <p>And the results, you go up, things are also seasonal. Birds come through, different birds at different seasons, insects, particularly butterflies, come in at different seasons. So you can see, it's a constantly changing thing as far as the animal life is concerned. The plant life, the flora, stays pretty much the same, with the exception that in the springtime you get more blooming and you get more seeds reproduced of the annual type plants because of the rain and water accumulation. We've got a fuchsia flowered gooseberry up there that's just absolutely gorgeous in the springtime.</p>
SZ	The planting of cactus up there, is that a native cactus?
CAH	Yes, some areas, Sis, where the slope facing, south facing slope will support some types of plants better than a north facing slope, there's a lot of cactus wrens up there and so those huge big patches of cactus. So the plants are being selected based on what their environmental niche is, what they're best suited for, and planted in those areas.
SZ	Is there a time line for making the trails and the nature center and other things to make it accessible to the public?
CAH	<p>The first thing has been trails, because in the Chevron property on the west side of Colima, there's been a lot of asphalt that they have been, sometimes, it's 8 to 12 inches thick that they used for just their trucks and equipment going up. Well, those are being torn out. The asphalt is being removed in the areas that are going to be trails. Interestingly, a lot of the asphalt old roads, the plants are coming in and growing right through it. Those are not going to be trail areas. So the trails were selected in various areas so that people could get kind of a maximum view of all the things that are there. It's going to take several years. It hasn't been opened, hopefully it'll, the Chevron property will be open this spring. The asphalt will have been removed, the trails and so forth are pretty much in place; and, believe me, it's a lot easier to walk on a trail than it is to try and go through the brush.</p> <p>Then the nature center has only been in the discussion stage. It hasn't gotten further than that's an idea that would allow people like the Whittier Narrows Nature Center, they could come in and look at the plant specimens, or model stuffed animals, whatever. Incidentally, they don't plan on killing anything to put in a nature center. It's going to come just from other ways that animals pass into the next plane of existence.</p>
CH	Is this something that the Open Space Advisory Committee is working on,

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	since I understand that the Hillside Task Force is considered over?
CAH	<p>It's done, yes, it was done in '96. The Open Space Advisory Committee, to date, has been primarily concerned with getting the asphalt removed, getting the trails set up. And they've made maps of selected trails that are in these guides that people can get at the library, I'm sure. There are trail maps there that show where they start. The trails will be marked with signs from the parking areas. There's going to be one on the west side of Colima, another one the east side of Colima is being planned for, I think contracted for right now. And so there will also be flyers available, trails will be marked.</p> <p>That's about all that can be done at this stage; and then as time goes on, and these big major jobs are out of the way, I think, I would imagine, the Open Space Committee then would be working on some of the details--where to put a nature center, or 2 nature centers, and what type of information would you want to have available to people that take a leaflet out, if--and that's a problem, too. Because kids going through, every one of them takes one and then they put it in their pocket and never read it, so nobody's figured out how to handle something like this yet, to my knowledge. But they are going to try, over time, to make it as easy as possible for people to walk there and to see what's there. Some of us, I'm one of them certainly, spent a lifetime doing a lot of these things, so for us, there's still a lot to learn.</p>
SZ	Is it still open to the schools if they wish to take a class?
CAH	<p>The only thing we've had open, we didn't go this last year because of the rain, our only area was Hellman Park and there's a switchback in there, which is clay soil, and when it's wet it's so slippery we didn't want to take a chance on going through there. And the trail would get "rained out" almost every other week. So, hopefully, that is being worked on now by volunteer groups from L.A. County.</p> <p>We can take people there, but even better, if we can get the Chevron property--and we've got to get a better name than Chevron, and we're all aware of that, but nobody's come up with a name that fits, so "Chevron," by default--if that opens, we would prefer to go over there first, it's new, it's a lot easier walking. Hellman requires a person to be in reasonable shape. One of our naturalists lost 15 pounds in 2 weeks just going up there with--we would take 3 trips a week usually, sometimes 4, and kids who are in the fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh grades, they're in good shape, and they go up there like rockets, and then some of the rest of us, like myself, it's a distinct effort to go up some of those hills. In fact, we had teachers and parents, one teacher said I'm never coming back. But it's the only things we've had available.</p>

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	<p>Sycamore Canyon is another easy one. That trail has been cut. There's a road that goes past the Cal-Neva Spa area, you go up the canyon to Dark Canyon and it was about 4 or 5 feet wide, wide enough for a pickup truck. But there's been so much rain, so much plant growth, the Ranger's been going in there every 2 or 3 weeks, with power equipment, trying to keep it clear. And the last time 6 or 7 of us went through, we couldn't walk, that road had been totally overgrown especially with a plant thistle, it's called milk thistle, and that grows, this last year, 8 or 10 feet high and it's very spiny. And you don't walk through in normal clothes, in fact, I'm not sure you'd walk through it in anything. But the ranger is just so tied up trying to keep that clear that it's going to depend to a large extent how much that's used and how clear we can keep that.</p> <p>So now the discussion has been on the old trail that's on the north-facing slope, which is south of the streambed. It doesn't have this same type of growth on the far south-facing slope, so we're thinking, they're thinking of putting a trail up there. It's on hillside below Circle Drive and Grande Vista and getting that opened up but that hasn't come about yet. There's been so much to handle in such a short period of time, and they're trying to do it on a priority basis and the first thing was getting rid of the asphalt in Chevron property, and getting that ready for people to go in, and then, once that's done, then they can get their attention going (to) some of these other areas.</p>
CH	But the first priority is establishing trails?
CAH	Exactly.
CH	And then the next priority is what, planting?
CAH	Probably establishing trails is going to be a continuous process for the next several years. And planning and replanting is going to be going on concurrently with that. In the fall of the year, primarily, when the moisture-you can count on rains to help plants get established, then once they're established, they can go on pretty much on their own.
CH	Is there anything else about the Task Force that you would like to discuss?
CAH	Not really. I think we've done it, we've covered most of it and these 2 booklets took 2 years and to try and cover...
CH	The policy guideline....
CAH	<p>Yes, to try and cover all of that, you know, in a short time, in a conversation, is very difficult, but talking generally, I think I've covered most of the points.</p> <p>We spent a lot of time going out in the fields, just looking, just talking and then we'd come back and meet for 2 or 3 hours and talk. By and large</p>

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	<p>everyone was just in agreement on just about everything, and we felt we did a pretty good job. And the [City] Council agreed with it so they accepted it. Very frankly, one of the things when we started Friends of the Hills and hillside preservation, and we drew up what was called the Hillside Park Plan, in 1988, one of our members, Dave Cowardin, is also on the Open Space Committee and was also on the Task Force, decided, “Okay, we’re going to save it, what are we going to do with it?” So, he’s a planner for L.A. County, so he came up with what’s called a Park Plan, all the things that could be done if the hills were preserved.</p> <p>But we did not have a clue as to how to get the land. And I would be remiss if I didn’t say, Senator Frank Hill, state senator at that time, got the legislature to pass a bill that would allow a bond issue to be floated if it were approved by a simple majority of the voters. So that meant 51 %, or whatever over 50%, could agree to that; and that made money available. Prior to that, any bond issues, we were working at the level of two-thirds, and that’s very, very difficult. We get 64% or 65% but we couldn’t get the 66%. So, Frank made this possible, and that’s where all of the funding started and the land acquisition that was able to start.</p> <p>But prior to that time, we didn’t have any idea, it was a great dream, a tremendous thing to try and achieve. But we didn’t know how to do it. So once that was done, and then the land started being acquired, the Task Force then had something to be concerned with, the city had something to be concerned with. So then they set up the Task Force of interested citizens to start working on—“We’re getting it now, what are we going to do with it?” And that’s basically how the thing has progressed, and to me it’s an incredible miracle that in an 8-year period of time this has been accomplished.</p>
CH	It’s a wonderful thing. Now I thank you, Dr. Hanson, on behalf of the Library; and I just want to confirm that you agree to make the tape, and the transcript when we get it typed up, available to the general public and to researchers.
CAH	Anybody who is interested, as far as I’m concerned.
CH	Thank you very much.
CAH	Thank you, it’s been my pleasure. Thanks for asking me.