

# Preserving the Hillsides: A Chronology

## 1900 - 1950

The Johnson family owns Johnson's Pasture (180 acres) for multiple generations and uses it for picnicking and hiking. They and friends plant trees, shrubs, and wild flowers.

The hillsides served other purposes as well--agriculture, irrigation and recreation. Gale Ranch was used to raise goats for mohair. College students hiked the foothills from the late 1800s on.

## 1925

The Padua Hills neighborhood is initiated on a ridge near the northeastern edge of Claremont.

## 1930

Padua Hills Theater is built.

## 1956

Claremont's first general plan is adopted. (Most north Claremont land is still in LA County.)

## 1960-1965

Claraboya, Claraboya II (Johnson's Pasture), Webb School and other hillside lands are annexed to the City of Claremont from LA County, more than doubling the city's size (from 3.65 to 7.14 square miles).

## 1963

The Claraboya development along Mountain Avenue is initiated.

## 1975

Claremont receives 40 acres from developer of Claraboya for an increase in the project density. The 40 acres become Sycamore Canyon Park.

## 1975 - 1981

American Savings and Loan, the new owner of Johnson's Pasture, plans to develop it. Existing zoning allows 356 housing units. The local League of Women Voters publishes "Claremont Hillside Planning" and works with the City to establish regulations restricting development in the hillsides. A novel feature of the regulations is TDR--transfer of development credits, which clusters development and keeps most of the hillsides open space. As a result of these efforts, in 1981 the City adopts the Hillsides General Plan and Zoning ordinance.

## 1980

The H.H.Garner family donates to Pomona College 1440 acres of foothill land between Johnson's Pasture and Padua Hills.

## 1989-1997

The City annexes the eastern foothills and negotiates with Pomona College to buy the Garner property, creating the original Claremont Hills Wilderness Park. In exchange, Pomona College gains the right to develop the cluster along Mt. Baldy Road east of Padua Hills.

## 1996

The Claremont Hills Wilderness Park (the initial 1220 acres) officially opens under City ownership.

## **1997**

The park is dedicated as a City Nature Park.

## **1999**

A developer plans to buy Johnson's Pasture and build 125 homes on it. Citizens begin meeting in opposition.

## **2000**

Several opponents of the development create Claremont Wildlands Conservancy (CWC) and incorporate it as a nonprofit organization with the goal of preserving Claremont's hillsides, and Johnson's Pasture in particular. CWC contacts the Trust for Public Land for guidance and assistance in acquiring hillside lands.

## **2001**

CWC writes a Conceptual Area Protection Plan to qualify for State of California funding for hillside land purchases. CWC works with the Trust for Public Land, which successfully negotiates an option to buy Johnson's Pasture from the owners. The option later expires when sufficient funds cannot be raised before the deadline.

## **2003-2004**

The City wins a State grant to purchase the Rancho de Los Amigos parcel, adding it to the Wilderness Park.

CWC and the League of Women Voters present a well-attended community meeting on "Preserving Claremont's Hillsides," with speakers from the City and the Trust for Public Lands.

In October wildfire sweeps through the park and destroys 50 homes in Claremont's foothills.

## **2005**

With the support of CWC and its Conceptual Area Protection Plan, the City wins State grants to purchase the Claremont McKenna College property (129 acres in 2003) and Wang property (104 acres in 2004), adding them to the Wilderness Park. To celebrate these acquisitions, CWC hosts a community-wide celebration in the foothills. The Wang property was an addition to the Sycamore Canyon Park. The General Plan shows the Sycamore Canyon Park and the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park as separate parks, but both areas together are frequently referred to as the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park.

With urging from CWC and other citizens, the City Council adopts a resolution to support the acquisition of Johnson's Pasture. The City then commissions an appraisal, which values the land at \$12 million.

## **2006**

CWC members take the lead in organizing two campaigns to save Johnson's Pasture. When the effort to pass a parcel tax fails in the spring, a new and more inclusive committee is formed (with CWC members again in lead roles) to campaign for a general obligation bond through Measure S. It passes on Nov. 7 with 72% in favor.

Supervisor Mike Antonovich awards the city a \$500,000 allocation of Proposition A Excess Funds for use towards the purchase of Johnson's Pasture.

## **2007**

As the Trust for Public Lands negotiator continues to work with the owners and the City to complete the sale, he encounters conflicts with one of the Johnson's Pasture owners over details of the purchase price and terms of sale. In the process of settling the differences, the City loses \$1 million in State funds that had been pledged

to the purchase; Council members vote to contribute that amount from the City's budget. By August, the conflicts have been resolved. In 2008 the City officially incorporates Johnson's Pasture into the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park.

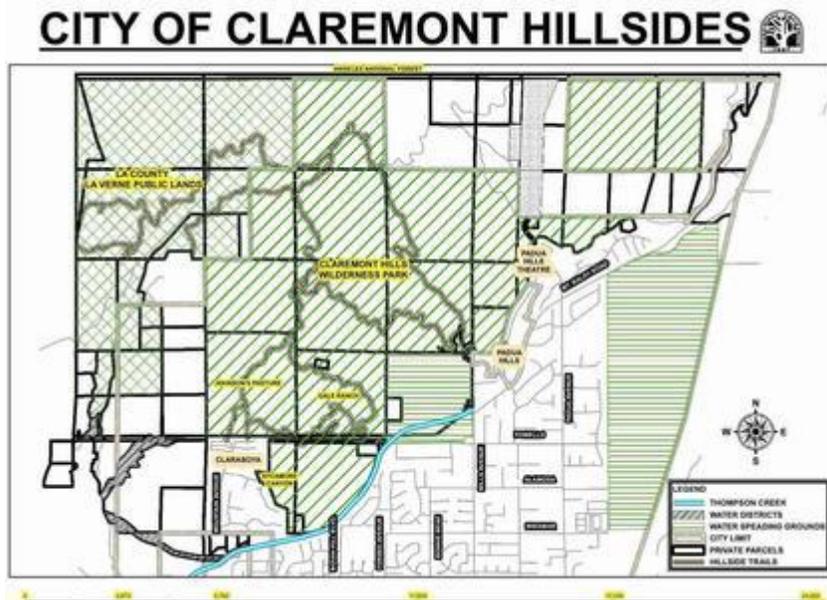
LaVerne, the city west of Claremont, and LA County, with help from the Trust for Public Land, win State funds to preserve 143 acres adjacent to Claremont's Wilderness Park, 22 acres along the southwest edge of Claremont's hillsides, and 40 additional acres in nearby Marshall Canyon Park. These acquisitions support CWC's long-term goal of creating a continuous wilderness corridor from Claremont westward to Monrovia.

### 2009-2010

CWC and Trust for Public Lands, with the support of the City, continue to work on acquiring three additional parcels in the southeastern section of Claremont's Wilderness Park (the Girl Scout property and the DeVito and Cuevas parcels). Funds are available at the State level from three propositions voters have passed since 2002 committed to preserving California's open space and watershed. The Gale Ranch property, owned currently by the Cuevas family, is the top priority because of its large size (151 acres) and strategic location between Johnson's Pasture and the Wilderness Park entrance.

### 2011

After two years of effort by Trust for Public Land, with support from the City and CWC, two State agencies--the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy and the Wildlife Conservation Board--agree to split the \$4.8 million cost of Gale Ranch and contribute it to the Wilderness Park. The City officially accepts the land and agrees to maintain it as part of the park in perpetuity.



[Click here to download a full-sized map.](#) (JPEG Image, 1937KB)

### 2011-2013

Sycamore Canyon undergoes restoration after being badly damaged by the 2003 wildfire. The City partners with the LA Conservation Corps and the LA Fire Department to create a sustainable ecosystem and build a rigorous 0.8-mile hiking trail from Thompson Creek to Johnson's Pasture.

### 2012

A rough City survey counts more than 6000 visitors per week in the Wilderness Park in 2011, or about 320,000 for the year. With the tremendous popularity of the park, the City Council grapples with issues of conservation,

safety and accessibility. Open hours for each month are established with fines for violators. The Council votes to expand the parking area at the main Mills Avenue entrance and to charge parking fees. Funds raised are to be used exclusively for the park and parking lots.

Large-scale developers show interest in the Evans parcel (75 acres), which goes on the market in the fall. The Trust for Public Land, the City and CWC begin the process of seeking to acquire it.

The Evans parcel, vulnerable because of its accessibility for development, is on the market. Competing with developers, The Trust for Public Lands, the City and CWC begin the process of seeking to acquire it.

## **2013**

The City opens the expanded parking lot at the Mills Avenue entrance with the new parking fee policy and restricts parking on neighboring streets.

In March the City, with CWC support, celebrates the opening of Sycamore Canyon.

No progress is made on acquiring the two hillside properties for sale: Evans and DeVito.

In the fall, the City hires MIG consulting firm to guide the community through the development of a Master Plan for the Wilderness Park. Proposed completion date: December 2014.

## **Today**

Today the size of the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park is 2063.72 acres or approximately 3 1/4 square miles, a combination of Sycamore Canyon Park (144 acres) and the Wilderness Park (1919.72 acres). Elevations vary from 1800 to 3000 feet. The park boundaries extend from Marshall Canyon on the west to the San Bernardino county line on the east; from the Angeles National Forest on the north to Claremont residential areas on the south.