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FROM GARBAGE DUMP TO COASTAL SAGE SCRUB WONDERLAND

It's been almost three decades since the Coyote Canyon Landfill near Newport Coast Drive in Newport Beach received its last load of garbage. Today, you wouldn't recognize it as a landfill, thanks to a remarkable transformation that began in the mid-1990s.



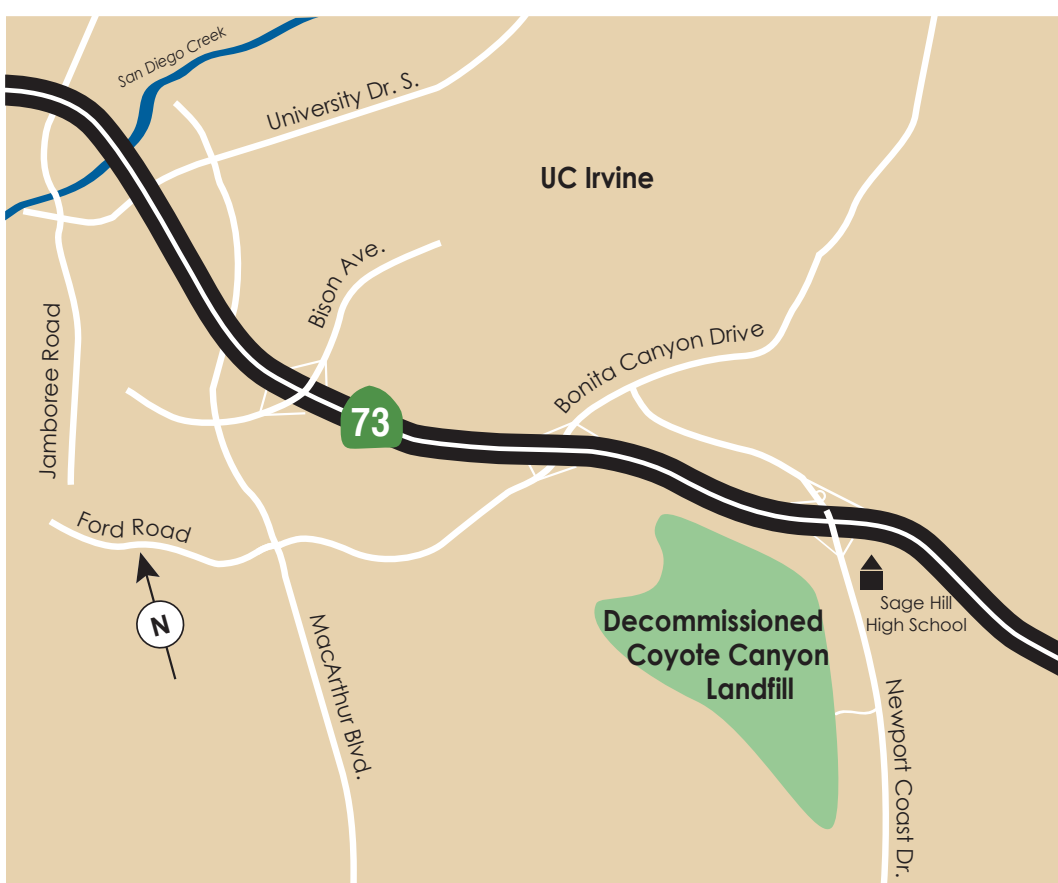
A portion of the closed site has been regenerated as coastal sage scrub habitat. Tons and tons of municipal solid waste – trash from homes, businesses and agriculture – lie beneath a thriving sustainable native habitat supporting wildlife, thanks to restoration work done by the Transportation Corridor Agencies (TCA).

The habitat is closed to the public and that remoteness attracts wildlife including the federally-listed coastal California gnatcatcher, a small blue-grey songbird. Gnatcatcher sightings – particularly nesting and breeding pairs of gnatcatchers – usually indicate that an ecosystem is healthy. The last survey recorded 15 pairs successfully breeding in the habitat, that produced more than 53 offspring.

A New Idea

Restoring the land as habitat was part of the original plan when the Coyote Canyon Landfill closed in 1990. Back then, the idea of creating habitat for a federally-listed bird species on a landfill was new and untested. TCA spearheaded the restoration as mitigation for construction of the 73 Toll Road.

The landfill's location meant that it could serve as a link for birds and animals traveling between the San Joaquin Hills and Upper Newport Bay. Wildlife corridors like this help birds and animals expand their breeding areas which, in turn, reduces the likelihood of inbreeding and genetic loss.



Signs of Success

The first California gnatcatcher pair arrived at the Coyote Canyon Landfill ahead of schedule – just two years after the habitat was planted. By 1999, the site's fifth year, 15 pairs of California gnatcatchers were successfully breeding in the habitat; 58 percent produced one brood successfully and 33 percent successfully produced two broods. These percentages were comparable to other populations in the region and the Coyote Canyon Landfill habitat was deemed acceptable as mitigation for the California gnatcatcher.

The coastal sage scrub habitat has met all federal permit requirements and the performance standards established by the Biological Opinion issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the 73 Toll Road.

Today, it continues to evolve as a natural, protected space that will be preserved for wildlife for generations to come.



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TheTollRoads.com

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