

Cost of the Great Outdoors

16 October 2015

Dear Editor:

Hillside parks and open space serve much the same purpose as beaches in Southern California. While not everyone is fortunate to live close to one or the other, they are resources that should be available to all. Californians have long insisted that beaches be public and that access be guaranteed. We should demand similar treatment for publicly owned open spaces in our foothills.

Research for the Master Plan of our Claremont Hills Wilderness Park affirmed two key points. First, both Claremont residents and neighbors from the region enjoy the park. Second, while usage has increased, it has not significantly damaged the flora and fauna. Increased access has not compromised the goal of preservation.

My concern is that access will instead be limited by the proposed increase of parking fees detailed in the draft. It is unlikely that raising daily fees from \$3 to \$5, annual permits from \$100 to \$140, and fees on weekend mornings to \$10 will generate more revenue for the park, as promised. Rather, it will discourage those of modest means from visiting the park altogether.

The draft plan claims that these fees are in line with other area parks, but that is not the case. In Orange County, an annual parking pass for all County Regional and Wilderness Parks is \$55, and one for all County Parks and Beaches is \$80. Daily parking in wilderness parks is \$3.

A more sensible approach would be to leave daily parking fees unchanged and consider lowering annual fees to boost sales among regular users.

Tom Ilgen
Claremont Wildlands Conservancy Board Member