

**Whittier Hills Collection**

**Oral History**

**David Cowardin**

**Hillside Preservation Task Force**

Transcript of Interview July 22, 1998

Interviewed by Carole Hull

**CAROLE HULL:** This is an interview with David Cowardin. It's July 22, 1998. This is Carol Hull. We're in the Whittier Public Library.

**CH:** Mr. Cowardin, please discuss what prompted you to join the Task Force.

**DAVID COWARDIN:** Well, I had been active with the Friends of the Whittier Hills and the City over a number of years, starting about 1978, and the Task Force came along because they were going to conclude the process that had originally begun way back. It was a logical way to continue my interest and finish this up, and I was invited.

**CH:** Discuss the mission of the Whittier Hills Preservation Task Force and your evaluation of how well that mission has been accomplished.

**DC:** Well, I think you can say it's been accomplished very well. The mission, as I see it, was a continuation. It was clear that the City Council was interested in preserving the wild land area of the Whittier Hills, so the mission was to try to figure out how to assign uses to the hillside land, to designate these uses in the hills; those uses would have been wild land uses. It was different pieces of information, biological land use types of information about the hills, and it was then necessary to classify the land as to its use from wild land to recreation. The City had no idea what it was going to do with this; it had some very broad policies that people had developed over the years, and the City was not in the business of managing wild land areas. So it got together a group of people who were a cross section of the Whittier area; the Task Force was a great idea. It so happened that some of the people there had planning and biological backgrounds, so they were able to come up with a concept of the guidelines and policies and the plan that now exists that the City approved. And I guess the purpose was to gather together this talent in the City; the City believed that there was talent available. After all, we'd all pretty much been involved in hillside groups of one kind or another, Conservancy or Friends of the Whittier Hills, for a number of years. All of us were known entities; they knew what we could do and what our interests were. And so it was an easy thing to put us on a Task Force and tell us to produce something, which was what happened. And then the evolution into the Committee is just that those people who participated most went on to become the Committee members.

**CH:** Tell me more about your background – your educational and professional background – and how you came to be so very involved in these environmental issues that led to your membership on the Task Force.

**DC:** I'm a planner by occupation for the County of Los Angeles.

**CH:** An urban planner?

**DC:** Yes. We're regional planners. Basically, that is. And being a child of the 60s and 70s, I was interested in conservation issues, and so my original idea here was that this was a large section of land that for one economic reason or another, or good timing, had not been developed. It seemed to me that there was a lot of wild life going on up there. It was pretty much recovering wilderness. It had been heavily grazed and then heavily pumped, as it was developed with oil wells in time. Pretty much the benign stewardship of principally Rose Hills and Chevron had left it in a situation where it was recovering; there was a lot of wild life going up there, and the people of Whittier seemed to really enjoy the background of the hills. In fact, if you look at the City logo here, you look back and there you see in the background that there are hills there. So obviously the people in the City did revere the hills. As it turned out, as we got deeper and deeper into this, with more activity going on, we got a City Council which is sympathetic to this sort of thing, and it went from there to the point now where we have about 1,500 acres or thereabouts, and we're probably going to have a really nice place. I was once told by the Director of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, with whom I talked in the early 80s about strategies to do this, to create a park, that you can usually tell really closely (and this makes logical sense from a political standpoint), that the politicians reflect the interest of the City, of the people in the City. There is a direct correlation. On the other hand, my experience had been that people in the City were not this way, that they had real concerns about hillside development; they turned up in 1978 to protest deletions to the General Plan at the time, appendices that were being deleted because people wanted to build Hadley, developers wanted Hadley, Chevron notably. I told myself, no, that's not the way people are around here; they really believe that this is something that should happen. So he's saying, "No, that's not true. It's a reflection, the politicians are a reflection of the people." A short time later the composition of the Council started to change, and finally I was really thrilled. Sorry I can't give you the dates, but during the 80s, first Bob Henderson got elected; Helen Rahder. And that was pretty thrilling. That was in April, right? At that

point I thought “I’ve got to give this up. I can’t handle this any more.” I’d been stumping around...

**CH:** Give what up?

**DC:** The campaign to preserve the hills. In April I was really upset and disturbed about it; I’d put in a lot of effort and decided that I was going to give it up if things didn’t turn around. So these two folks get elected, and then four years later two more got elected; and then a third, making the fifth person, was appointed. And all of these people were personal friends. And they all felt the same way. So we were kind of off and running at that point. Bob Henderson really picked up the pace and really worked hard to set up the joint powers agreements and things like that and get the San District mitigation money; so we were in business. And Prop A passed about the same time; and also at the same time the economy was still pretty sluggish, so Chevron wanted to get out of town. Their decision was to sell the land. That’s how that all came about in sort of a thumbnail.

**CH:** So the Hillside Task Force was formed under the new City Council.

**DC:** At that point, yes. Absolutely. But by that time, actually, I think we had lost a couple of the conservation minded people, and we had to serve a brand new City Council. And it turned out that they were very sympathetic as well. So the composition of the Council has been – you know, maybe on other issues they more fully represent the town – but as far as the hills are concerned, everybody seems to have a joint feeling about them. This vindicates what my friend said originally, that the politicians reflect the sentiment of the public. In Whittier I think it’s true. Friends of the Whittier Hills was organized, I think, in 1981. I was involved in that and then became president a while back; at that point I developed a concept of the park, and then we started advocating that.

**CH:** A park in this same area that’s now the Hillside Preservation...?

**DC:** Yes, right.

**CH:** So at that time you had a different expectation for could be done.

**DC:** No, it was a wilderness, a wild land park. Basically the same thing you have now. I’m not a biologist, so I didn’t have the sectors that Dave and

Ray have been very instrumental in indicating on maps the way it stands right now in the plan or guidelines. I hadn't that far, really; all I did was set up a set of policies that were quite different than what the land use policies for this area were. I worked very hard to figure out if there was a way to create a transportation corridor across Hadley; and I came to a conclusion, looking critically at the constraints of the property, earthquake faults and landslides and all this kind of stuff, and the slope, that there was really no way to put in Hadley and still preserve the area. The cost of Hadley would drive development, and the cost of Hadley in terms of the grading that would be required, would wipe out a lot of the area that we have now that is natural.

**CH:** So it sounds as though you brought to bear your training in planning to undertake this study about the Hadley corridor.

**DC:** A lot of people go into planning in large agencies with the idea that they will have an impact from inside the organization. Planning, as it is practiced in California, has been traditionally pretty much a development-oriented process; we've paved the way for development. That's pretty much our function. And a political function the department served, but in the 60s and 70s there was a radical movement toward conservation planning. Basically that is the constraints of the land, livability, quality of life features like the hillsides, and things like that have a place like that in planning. And so a lot of the analyses that have been done, land use analyses related to slope and disturbance factors, and other values you might find in hillsides (or any other area actually) and then relating that to a suitable level of development. So they call them suitability/capability studies or that sort of thing. Basically you take constraints of the land that you all agree on, and you kind of take them away from the gross amount of land you have, and you have left some net value, which is the area that you develop. The rest of it, you manage. I had no clue what the money was going to be like. I think my job at that point was to sell a concept, and that's what I did.

**CH:** The concept of not...

**DC:** The wild land.

**CH:** Oh, the wild land; not of not developing Hadley.

**DC:** Glenn Robinson and the rest of the people from Friends of the Whittier Hills helped me; we would go to meetings and advance our theory. We published a little book that had these policies and some maps. But I created basically the outline of the park as it is right now. That was fun. It was a way to combine my professional job with my community and my citizenship feeling at the time.

**CH:** Exactly. Which brings to mind: It's been a long time ago now since the early 80s, when the Task Force was formed. If you can look back to that time, what were your expectations then and how have they changed and evolved over the years? The expectations for the Task Force.

**DC:** I had no expectations. My expectations were zero. I thought that anything I could do would be a win.

**CH:** You just had hopes, not expectations.

**DC:** No expectations at all. There was no chance that this was going to happen. But I had a lot invested emotionally. I had a lot of time; I made maps, I built a model, I did all kinds of interesting things. I wrote. And I was also president of the Friends of the Whittier Hills, so that was a responsibility. Lots of meetings. So after that election, maybe it was '84, finally things started to happen; and even though it was a 3-2 situation on the Council, things began to happen. There was a light at the end of the tunnel. My way is, and I've sure you've heard this...we used to call them the "good old boy network"...

**CH:** Oh, yes.

**DC:** At that time it seemed to be a very strong political force; people would come up through the ranks, the Boys and Girls Club and various things like that, and then all of a sudden they would become rewarded by being a City Councilman. And that was my impression of what was going on here. My view was that these people had no dreams; I'm sure they do. All the people I'm talking about are fine, fine people who have put in their time with the City absolutely, the Claxtons; those folks are wonderful people. But they didn't have any clue about this; there was no clue. This was outside of any concept they might have. But it was within mine; this was an ideal of mine. That it was necessary to have natural areas in an urban area. And there are other groups around, and I can't think of the name of it; there was a group

that was active up in the San Rafael area in Pasadena, something like Committee for a Small Wilderness or something like that. This was a very active group that was promoting this sort of thing. And we had this sort of situation here; the only thing is that we had a wonderful custodial arrangement. We had Chevron, who was doing nothing up there, and Rose Hills, which was basically doing nothing. This wonderful, and the economy was down at the time, so it was a total happenstance of conditions.

**CH:** A confluence...

**DC:** Yes, it was amazing. Which makes your project really great because this is going to be down somewhere, and people can use it. It's a model, a real model of how to do community activism.

**CH:** I hope we can hear more about that. Let me just interject and introduce Gloria Friehl, who is the archivist. Describe what you've learned about the Whittier Hills once you became involved in the Task Force.

**DC:** Actually, my information goes way back to 1978. I became involved at that point and I learned; I had known more about the suitability/capability analysis, so there was a lot of geological and biological land use information about the hills that I was able to glean from all that. And I lived up behind Whittier College, so I was able to look at them every day and enjoy the scenery. Previous to that, I lived up on Skyline Drive in Hacienda Heights, which looks right down into Turnbull Canyon. My family and I were interested in it. So I think I brought information to the Task Force. I brought information on Dave Fretz and Ray and Cheryl Swift brought the concept of how this thing was going to go together. That was our input. After all, we are professionals in the field, so we did our planning thing and gave the City a gift of a concept and more detailed information. Dave and Ray, as the biologists, really put together the flesh on the bones. We all suggested and agreed upon a skeleton about how this would go together, and it is basically a land use plan. We defined certain areas; there were parameters going in. The gnat catcher habitat was probably the most critical driving force because there was a line drawn by the Fish and Wildlife Service about where these birds were supposed to be, where their habitat was.

**CH:** Are they threatened?

**DC:** I believe they are rare and endangered by the habitat. One of the fortunate things about this is the happenstance of economics that has kept this area undeveloped; not unused, but undeveloped. This had to do with Chevron's ownership of other properties and the future development of these properties. All of these areas (Montebello oil field up by Costco) were Chevron property, and they were intending to do more development up there.

**CH:** Development of oil, more oil drilling?

**DC:** No; land use development. Also the Los Coyotes area in the Brea-Fullerton area; they wanted to do south La Habra, it's the stuff south of Imperial. Up on the hill, you can actually see it now – they are grading that up there for a residential development. And all three of these areas were gnat catcher habitat, I believe. So the price for them being able to develop these two areas, these two extremes, was the hills up in here. And I think that figured very much into the price of the land finally.

**CH:** So they made a trade off.

**DC:** It was a trade off, right. The mitigation for doing the development in these two areas was the Whittier Hills. Another plus for us, a wonderful happenstance. Bob Henderson can tell you a whole lot more about that. So there were some basic understandings that came into this, and then we applied our own planning... again, these are constraints. We worked with some constraints. The area is incredibly steep, and there was oil well production that had to be stopped and capped and all of that sort of stuff. There were a lot of constraints, and from that we were able to develop a sense of where a trail should go and we knew that because of the gnat catcher situation it was truly going to be a wild land; we would get the support of the federal government in that respect. It was sort of a simple situation because we had constraints that pretty much dictated that this area had to be wild and then, of course, our political aspect was that the people of the City of Whittier had to feel like they had something to use. So we had to balance the recreation aspects of this with the wild land aspects. So that was our job, really, was to do that.

**CH:** Did you, meaning the members of the Task Force, become directly involved in discussions with Chevron and with Fish and Wildlife and with other entities that were involved in this hillside area? 22:35

**DC:** No, because we were advising the City Council. And the City Council was making these arrangements. I think Bob was principally involved. And so we were advising him on one hand, providing him with information. We really didn't become involved with him at all.

**CH:** And then he would go...

**DC:** And then he did his business part. Very effective at it.

**CH:** Did you, as a member of the—or did the task force interact with any other groups, other than of course the City Council, by whom you were appointed?

**DC:** Well, of course, the City had a representative there. Hideo. Hideo Hamano was there. And...

**CH:** Is he from the planning...?

**DC:** Yeah, he's... No, he's the Parks Department. Yeah, Hideo is a great guy. Worked very hard with us. Surprisingly enough, it's really interesting, being a planner, I notice this: planning agencies somehow don't get involved in this sort of stuff. Sometimes conservative planning agencies aren't involved... this stuff is pretty cutting edge. It's a little unusual because it involves having some money, having some land in a natural area. It's not the natural state of events in an urban area. The state of events in an urban area if you have a vacant piece of property is to develop it, and that's what planning departments do best. So they really don't – planning departments don't get involved in this sort of stuff. Newer cities get into it more, I think, because the focus... it's hard to say, really, why it is. In this city, the planning department really wasn't involved in the process. But then again, the City Council, their role is not... that wasn't their role. Their role is to do the planning. And the City Council became directly involved in this business with us. That's the way it is now with the Open Space Advisory Committee. We're sort of, through Hideo, we're directly responsible for the Council, and relaying information to them. So it's sort of a unique... heh heh.

**CH:** The Open Space Advisory Committee... is this... you're directly connected to the hillside area or is this something else?

**DC:** That's the successor to the Taskforce. The Taskforce was disbanded and they decided they needed an advisory group to carry on, which is the Open Space Advisory Committee.

**CH:** And what will be the roles and functions of the Open Space Advisory Committee?

**DC:** Well, we created these documents. We created the guidelines, and the – what is this guy called here... this is the...

**CH:** You were talking about the Specific Management Plan for the Whittier Hills Wilderness Preserve, and the Management Policies and Guidelines for the Whittier Hills Wilderness Preserve.

**DC:** So once the City had money in place with Prop A, and mitigation funds from the Puente Hills Landfill, this was our contribution to guide the City on how to use the money. So the Parks Department is carrying that out at this point. And we meet on a regular basis, a monthly basis to agendaize, we function as a city committee, and we discuss aspects of implementing this plan. It's getting awkward.

**CH:** I was going to say, it's interesting, and I'm sure that's something you want to cover, but before we lose sight of the Taskforce, I'd like to get back to that too. Perhaps you can discuss the role that the Taskforce played in preserving the hills, for posterity.

**DC:** Well, I think that the Taskforce was formed because the City all of a sudden had an imminent acquisition of the Chevron property, and the City Council had no idea about what to do, and I think there was a resource – as an ongoing collection of individuals in the city who had backgrounds pushing the concept, and these people moved into the Taskforce to formalize the policies into some sort of an implementation plan. So I think the drafts of these plans were actually – the concept, the format, the structure of these plans were formulated by the Taskforce.

**CH:** So the Taskforce did play a key role in actually bringing about preservation?

**DC:** Yeah, and I think the City has activated a really good program, and that is to – when they have a problem like the landfill, and the Whittier Hills,

they create a Taskforce of people who seem to be interested in... I mean this is really unusual for a Planning Commission, because planning commissions just aren't equipped to do this, and Planning Departments aren't equipped... it's not that they're not equipped, they're equipped, they probably don't have the time to do this sort of work, so the City got a lot of work out of this.

**CH:** It does sound like a great deal of work.

**DC:** They got a lot of work out of it. Mainly Dave and Ray as far as the writing is concerned. They really did get a lot out of it. They got a plan that's, oh I don't know, \$500,000 worth of work, to put all this together. In that respect, the Taskforce, the modern Taskforce, that they have put together in the last few years, have been really successful for the City. They've got a quality job out of citizens of this community. And I'm happy to do it. I mean, it's a wonderful idea. And then they, you know, they needed ongoing oversight over what was going on, so essentially we, since we created these documents, we're pretty much the people who are experts on them, and can relate to what's going on as this program is being implemented – the right way, the wrong way, whatever – we can provide our guidance, and so it works out real well.

**CH:** That's a lot of professional expertise brought to bear. Was this all done on a volunteer basis?

**DC:** Oh sure. We're suckers for pain. Well I mean, it's a model. We're not isolated. This stuff goes on all over the place. And I think that we – you know, our experience is unique because of the economics... the timing is really unique. It's going on everywhere. Ray has been involved in the Backbay in Newport for a long, long time. And other people have been involved elsewhere. It's something that's sort of a people power thing, you know. It's kind of a 70s, 60s and 70s type thing. It's a great model for people to follow. That's why I was really interested when you asked me to come down, because if there's something here to be – there's an education here for people who are interested in community activism. We actually did this. This worked.

**CH:** You pulled it off. You mentioned the Gnatcatcher, and how preserving the habitat of the Gnatcatcher was key to the shape of the whole plan. What other impacts were there on the flora and fauna in the area? Or will there be, I should say, once this plan is actually implemented?

**DC:** Well, I think that – I viewed this, when I became really involved in this in the early 80s, I viewed it as a recovering wilderness. It had been heavily grazed. In fact when my wife and I first moved here in 78, there were cows still up in the hills, and we used to watch them with interest, wandering around. So most of this area is grazed land. That's why the grasses are all growing... the non-native grasses. But even within that environment, and I think within getting more biological information about this area, I think we've realized that it is recovering and it's recovering somewhat different than it was originally, and I mean I think we understand that we're not going to get a wilderness that was like it was 200 years ago.

**CH:** Why is that?

**DC:** Well, because things have adapted. There are blends of different plants up there, and so in a way, because it's isolated, it is unique. It's a blend that is unique to the Whittier Hills. But it's natural. It's the way it is. It's what has evolved up here as a result of all of the factors that have gone on, and there are populations of animals, and so on, living things up there that exist and are surviving fairly well in this sort of hybrid atmosphere. So it's an interesting biological experiment. As to how this adaptation process has gone on. That's the real interest to people. And they see that all over, because we have all of these islands of natural areas. And it's a really significant – if they can put together the whole string or backbone of the hills, all the way down from Chino Hills Park, and Cleveland National Forest, all the way over to San Gabriel, and the San Gabriel will link all the way up to the San Gabriel Mountains, there are big game that go through there. It's within the range of big game.

**CH:** Mountain lions, anything else.

**DC:** Yeah, I'm sure you've heard that. No one's actually sighted on. But there's a possibility that they do move up there. And bobcat, coyote. So it's alive. Diversity, understand the biological concept of diversity, we have pretty much sterile areas in Los Angeles, but not really. The animals are surviving and this is just one more part of that chain of survivability, is that you do actually provide a large enough sanctuary that a lot of animals do survive, and even though they migrate down into the urban areas, they – you know it's, you know everybody, heh heh, it's hard – the diversity issue, I think it's important for us here to have diversity, because we have so little of

it. And the hills provide a part of that diversity that's so like upland diversity. You've got this down area here, the urban area, and the songbirds and everybody else are down in here, but it's kind of, they have a little retreat back there. I don't know, this is probably not very biologically sound, but I get a sense that there's a movement back and forth and that that's important.

**CH:** Who or what organizations will be doing the scientific studies?

**DC:** No, I really don't. I know that Whittier College, Cheryl Swift is in the biology department up there, real interested in the hills. Of course, the Sierra Club is interested... I really don't know anybody else. But there's opportunities...

**CH:** There were no provisions made as part of this Taskforce job to conduct ongoing studies?

**DC:** No, we're not involved in that. But I'm sure it will be.

**CH:** You've touched on this a little bit but if you could amplify, talk about your opinion of the recommendations, the final recommendations that the Taskforce made for managing the hillsides.

**DC:** Well, I think key to this is the dedication of the City to this wilderness area, the wild area. I think there are many factors that make that the best way to go. Well first off, if we have a federal mandate, the Gnatcatcher Mandate is a federally imposed restraint on what goes on up there. And I think that also the City, and environmental... the quality of life aspect of the City, the City has sensed that people want to have this area in a natural appearance. I think they don't understand exactly what all that means. I think the City also – we have a concept that yes it's fine that this is going to be a wilderness and it has great wilderness value, but people in the city have to be involved in this process so it's – it has value in that respect too. And the way we do that, a person says to you well gee I paid good money for this, I want to be able to go up in my wilderness... well, the way to do that, I think, our philosophy and attitude is that we get well-regulated groups like the scouts and the other groups that are interested, and we take them up there, and we start to build a cadre of people who are real interested in this area, understand that there's a lot of interpretation that goes on by people who lead hikes. Chuck Hanson is a real active guide. The Audubon Society's real active. Friends of the

Whittier Hills. And so as long as this cadre of people is developing, then you really have your citizen participation. The citizens know what it's about. Friends of the Whittier Hills are close to the, the Uptown Festival, the Oak Tree Festival, they have a booth there and they talk about this all the time. People are always interested. Not that many people show up, generally, for hikes and things, but we're building a cadre of people who know about it, know what it's about, and are interested in it. I don't know, maybe I got off the track a little.

**CH:** Well, I wanted to ask you, what recommendations in the management guidelines would you change if it were just yours to write the way you want. What would you do differently from what's in the plan.

**DC:** Well I don't really think I would do anything differently. It's achieving everything that I ever wanted. I think the goals and the standards that are created are good and proper for this sort of a situation. I think they're – should I say, not strict, that's not the right word – they're appropriate to what's there, I guess that's where I was going in my discussion. It's a steep, dangerous place. At most there might've been four or five hundred homes created there had Chevron decided to develop. And the impacts of that on Whittier would've been pretty dramatic. On Mar Vista. So I think the management plan reflects this, and it's keeping people pretty much in the same areas, down close in here as far as the recreation potential is concerned, and recreation potentially is somewhat limited to hiking and that sort of thing. We still have to confront opening the park up to people and things like that. But I think it's a very conservative plan. I think it's the right plan. It provides probably a higher level of protection than Chevron and Rose Hills are able to provide. By virtue of our relationship with the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy folks, what are they, mountain restoration, whatever, MSRC, or whatever they are. You know their patrol is absolutely necessary for this thing to really succeed. I think that the policies that we've created and the standards we've created are appropriate to protect this area. You know, the reality of it is, once again, I think that there are jobs that we have to do, and one of them is to get people in the City of Whittier really interested in this place, understand it, and that provides a protection of its own. Because then you don't have people just wandering up and down for no reason and carrying on. And so the more people you get involved, I think that's part of the plan, too. I think that the policies of the plan are conservative, and that's necessary, considering where it is, what it is. Otherwise, if you had a more liberal program, you would start running into

some liability issues, there would be people backed up in there... it would be more troublesome.

**CH:** Liberal in what sense?

**DC:** Well, we have a pretty conservative trail system and policies. And pretty much down in the flat areas. And I think that's—this area's never been open to the public. I have friends who have lived in Whittier all their lives, and they travel all over that area, you know, very well. But for the general public, it's never been available, and I think a low level of use is really appropriate. It's fragile, it's dangerous, and... You know, maybe in the future, it might be possible to open it up a bit. But we just have to see. Whenever you... I think early on in the conservation process, in the sixties or seventies, people thought they could go into areas and restore wetlands, restore biologically sensitive areas, but I think that biologists generally agree now, that's—they created a lot of sterile areas that way. Because they basically wiped out something and replanted it with what they thought ought to be there. I think they found that that doesn't work. What you have here is an ongoing biological entity of wild land in the form that it's in right now. That's with the encouragement of Chevron, and you know, anyone that's up there. Basically, it's still wild, and it's still reasonably natural, but the process of 200 years of occupation of this area has certainly modified that area. So I think we have a long process, so we're starting out with a very conservative plan. We seem to have the funding and ability to maintain it at this level as a wild land, which is what our policies dictate. And we'll go slowly. We're planting oak trees, sycamores, we've got elderberry, I think is another one, and this is stuff that really isn't going to have a great impact. I mean, it's a positive impact. We're replacing non-naturals, non-natives, with these types of native plants that can survive very well, so it's going to gradually change back to a more natural, more survivable area. The issue of the eucalyptus trees has come up—

**CH:** They are imported, right?

**DC:** They're imported from Australia, right. And we find a group of people on Mar Vista who love the eucalyptus trees, and so what our plan was, let's get the eucs out of there. The only positive thing they provide is rookeries for raptors. Most everything else about them is negative. They pretty much sterilize the ground below them. And so as habitat, they're not very valuable

at all. Our idea was, let's get those guys out of there. You don't need them. Let's put in trees that will create—

[Side B]

--Oak trees is a strategy... not the oak trees. Removal of the eucalyptus trees is a strategy, as a non-native species up here, it's really good, because they're going to be replaced with more native plants – trees – that will create an environment that will be conducive to the development of the habitat. Even though it's a habitat in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, almost the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that has been changed by all this occupation, it is a more healthy habitat than the eucalyptus habitat that's there now. So we're going to improve things. And this is seen as – so there really are no drawbacks to removing the eucs. Some people see them as a – there's a view thing there, it's a quality of life thing for a few people, but on the other side, they are destructive to the habitat, and also they're very incendiary. It's a big fire hazard. And so removing some of these non-natives... now there are other non-natives up there that are quite invasive, too. And they ought to come out. And as we slowly get into this, and getting all the groups involved to plant trees, I think at this point we have about 250 oaks, sycamores, elderberries, things like that...

**CH:** This brings to mind a couple of questions – where the money will be coming from for replanting natives, and who will be doing the monitoring of these areas, and how will that come about?

**DC:** Well, I think the MRCA and the Park Department are providing the monitoring, I think that's why the MRCA...

**CH:** MRCA is?

**DC:** Mountains Restoration and Conservation Authority. They are... I guess contracting with the City to provide the ranger operation of the park.

**CH:** And the funding, did I miss the funding?

**DC:** The funding, no, okay, well, originally the funding came from Prop A. I can't remember what all the... it's a bond act that was passed a few years ago...

**CH:** Wasn't there a tax on transportation?

**DC:** No. No, this is just a straight, you know... bond, I guess it was funded by property tax, and it... There were funds dedicated from... but it's pretty much the County Parks Department runs this through the board of supervisors. The Board of Supervisors of the County of Los Angeles, and so they're – we have a certain amount of money that was dedicated to our endeavor here, and so... I'm not sure of the status of the funds. Hideo would really be more knowledgeable, but I understand, but I believe, that the pot of money that's generated by the remediation of the Puente Hills will also come into this at some point. And this creates a – you know, it's kind of the next step in this is sort of the... the whole corridor is... I'm not real clear on this organization, but there's a joint powers agreement along the corridor, along the backbone of Whittier, between all the cities, they all participate in a big committee, and you know, Whittier is a part of this. Bob Henderson and other people are very active in this whole corridor, so we're going to be getting money from that pocket as well.

**CH:** Do you happen to recall when Prop A...

**DC:** No, I really don't. I can't give you an exact date on that.

**CH:** With the Whittier Hills policy, they may be implemented by the MRCA, how well do you think the policy will be implemented? Do they have a track record?

**DC:** Oh, they do. Yeah, definitely. I mean, it's a state authority, state rangers, they will absolutely... well, we created... the City adopted these documents, which have policies and standards in them, and I think part of our role, the OSAC role, is to monitor, to suggest, to recommend, how this is going.

**CH:** OSAC being the Open Space Advisory Committee.

**DC:** The Open Space Advisory Committee. Sorry. We all have out hats. This is the latest benefit. We have a green hat with OSAC on it.

**CH:** [chuckles]

**DC:** It's very special. Heh. No, I think that our role, the committee's role, is to monitor what goes on out there, and we have a great working relationship

with the Park Department, Hideo Hamano, and the ranger, Kim Hughes [?], the ranger up there, and you know, we have a very... they are looking to use for our professional view, and our knowledge of the policies of the plan. And so we get down to the nitty gritty, and I think we come to conclusions about what ought to happen. We're advisory to the Council, so you know, we give them advice, and they can act on it, spending the money, and we interact with the County Fire Department, because they have a certain role up there for fire protection, and you know, it may, sometimes fire protection is not – is at odds with conservation goals, and so we sometimes knock heads about things like this, but all in all, I think we're beginning to implement the tree planting process, we've implemented some trail construction, and some demolition of some of the trails that are no longer necessary, and started slowly but surely... you know, people are being paid to work, and you know, it's happening, and our role is to monitor what goes on on a volunteer basis.

**CH:** What's the time frame, or how long do you expect it to take to – you mentioned planting, replacing, non-native vegetation with the native planting, oak trees and so on. How long do you think it will take to make these changes?

**DC:** Longer than I'm going to be around.

**CH:** So this is a very long—

**DC:** No. This is an ongoing process. I mean, I can't speak for future city councils, but this land is public park land now, dedicated, purchased with public park land funds, which makes it really difficult to convert to another use. It's within the city, but you know, it's dedicated park land.

**CH:** And protected.

**DC:** My understanding of all this – you know, a lot of these details are very important. It does make a difference who has title. It does make a difference what the words are in the resolutions that create the joint powers agreement, all that stuff, all those fine details are very important. We didn't get involved in that. I think we know about it, because members are involved with the City Council know about this stuff, monitor the City Council activities, read all the documents, particularly Chuck Hanson. In this respect, the City has been very up front on this. They've always been a wonderful assistant. It

helps to know the City Council people know what they're doing. You can actually call them up and ask them, What are you doing? And that really helps a lot. You just can't... You know, my friend at the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy is exactly correct, as it turns out. The council does reflect the population. The feeling of the population. And so being sort of on the inside of all this, I know how this works. You talk to the city councilman, you talk to people who have influence, and work it out as to how this is... and you know, these are broad policy. Even though there are standards in there, very specific standards in there about how we want to do it, still, it's all new interpretation. So the role of OSAC, Open Space Advisory Committee, is to help guide the City through this. Since we created it, it helps to, you know, implement it. It's our role.

**CH:** I'd like to ask a question about something I came across in the material. There was mention of a bill pending before Congress that I believe was called the National Historic Area Bill... are you familiar with that?

**DC:** No.

**CH:** You're not, okay. I'll have to do that research then. Let me just ask you, what else would you like to say, for this interview, about the Hillside Taskforce? What else would you like to cover?

**DC:** I think I've probably [laughs] exhausted the subject. Sounds like the last question of the interview.

**CH:** Well, it's not quite the last question.

**DC:** Not quite the last question.

**CH:** Not quite the last question.

**DC:** Well, I mean it is a unique process. (10:48) It started in a unique economic situation in Los Angeles County, a unique set of landowners, and I was very upset with the city people. I mean, there were times in the beginning when I had absolutely no hope that anyone would like this concept. I remember going to a particular Parks Department meeting one time, and I had passed out my little books that I created, painstakingly drawn maps – every one was an original map, and given to these people to look at – and I went down there in my suit, just like I do at my real job, and gave a

presentation. So I'm walking out of the room and these people are throwing these things in the trash can.

**CH:** Oh...

**DC:** I don't even remember who was on the committee at the time, but I was real impressed with that. It really made me angry. But it's beyond my wildest expectations that we're where we're at on this. Beyond anything I could have conceived. And that's what makes it unique. And it's happened, it's happened in other places. People who put their lives into these things – I appreciate it, that they have done this, I mean it takes a tremendous... far more and above what I have done, these people deserve a tremendous amount of gratitude and thanks on the part of the City. I mean, Dave Fretz puts in a tremendous amount of time. And he has a real job. He puts in – he basically wrote these things. I mean, we all review them and all of that, and Ray was very extremely helpful, and these guys are unique. And what's really interesting about it is, we're sort of apolitical. We're not... this isn't a democrat thing or a republican thing. We're not there for the notoriety. We haven't gotten any great riches or benefits from this. This is the City – a pure love of city thing. A citizen initiative in its purest form, as far as I can see. I mean, that's really nice. It's nice to have been a part of that. It really was. Still am. Still am a part of it.

**CH:** I'm glad that you were willing to be a part of this archive project, too. And so I want to thank you for consenting to do this interview. And I hope that we can talk to you about – as we move onto some of the other organizations – talk to you maybe about their role in preserving the hills. And I just wanted to confirm with you, too, that it is all right for the library to preserve the tape and make it available to the public, and to researchers.

**DC:** Sure. Sure. Absolutely.

**CH:** Well, thank you again. Anything else? This was an interview with David Cowardin from the Hillside Preservation Taskforce.