



## PUBLIC ACCESS: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### WHAT IS THE ENVIRONMENTAL MITIGATION PROGRAM AND WHY DID OCTA BUY THESE CONSERVATION PROPERTIES?

In 2006, Orange County voters approved the renewal of Measure M, effectively extending the half-cent sales tax to provide funding for transportation projects and programs in the County. (In 2017, Measure M2 was rebranded as OC Go.) As part of OC Go, a portion of the freeway program revenues was set aside for the Environmental Mitigation Program (EMP). The EMP allocates funds to purchase conservation properties and fund habitat restoration projects in exchange for streamlined project approvals for 13 freeway improvement projects included in OC Go.

The OC Go freeway projects impact protected habitats and biological resources including plants and wildlife. State and federal laws require that impacts to these resources be reduced (mitigated). To do this, OCTA is coordinated with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife as well as the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (collectively referred to as Wildlife Agencies) and developed a Natural Community Conservation Plan/Habitat Conservation Plan (Conservation Plan). Conservation properties (Preserves) that possess habitat and important wildlife species that are similar to those affected by the construction of the OC Go freeway projects have been purchased and are included in the Conservation Plan. These Preserves will remain in a natural state and will remain forever protected from development.

The Conservation Plan requires that the Preserves have a biologist review the condition of the valuable plants and wildlife (including wildlife movement) on a regular basis to ensure that they are protected and healthy. The biologist also makes management recommendations and works with the Wildlife Agencies to ensure the resources do not degrade in quality and quantity over time.

### WHAT IS A RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN (RMP)?

A Resource Management Plan (RMP) provides guidelines for the management and monitoring of the Preserves in accordance with the goals and objectives in the Conservation Plan. The RMPs provide guidance for the ongoing protection, preservation, and adaptive management of natural resources within the Preserves, including control of encroachment activities (i.e. illegal dumping or trail creation). The RMPs also address fire protection opportunities to accommodate safe access and recreational use of the Preserves, where and when appropriate. A separate RMP was developed for each Preserve and can be viewed at [octa.net/environmental](http://octa.net/environmental).



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### WILL THE PRESERVES BE OPENED TO THE PUBLIC?

Three Preserves are opened to the public during docent-led hikes and includes two in Trabuco Canyon and one in Laguna Beach. Docent-led equestrian rides are also offered at the Trabuco Rose Preserve.

Every Preserve is unique since they each have different attributes, terrains, topography, adjacent land use, etc. These events can be viewed at [perservingourlegacy.org](http://perservingourlegacy.org).

### WILL 24/7 ACCESS BE ALLOWED?

No, each Preserve was purchased by OCTA for conservation purposes and has restrictions on its use. While public access is an important co-benefit, it is not the main purpose for which the Preserves were acquired. Unsupervised and unlimited public access increase the risk of wildlife disturbance, wildfire, and other potential habitat destruction. Any future access must be established and managed to ensure the permit conditions of the Conservation Plan are adhered to in perpetuity. The Conservation Plan requires that any potential recreational access be limited to passive activities such as walking, jogging, hiking, bird watching, non-competitive mountain biking and equestrian use, where appropriate.

In addition, many properties adjacent to the OCTA Preserves are under private ownership and/or currently do not permit public access. In allowing access on the Preserves, OCTA must also consider adjacent ownership as well as adequate staging areas such as parking facilities. In most cases, Preserves are located in rural areas of the County where there are few, if any, safe staging areas for visitors. To minimize traffic and circulation impacts to

adjacent properties, OCTA shuttles hikers into Preserves during public events.

### WHAT HAS OCTA DONE TO PREPARE FOR POTENTIAL FIRES AND FLOODS ON THE PRESERVES?

OCTA works directly with the Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) to comply with fire management guidelines for all of its Preserves, which are located in historically high fire risk areas. This includes the establishment of fuel modification zones in and around habitable structures, as well as the maintenance of the fire roads and Preserve access points. OCTA coordinates on a regular basis with OCFA and complies with the appropriate fire authority standards. The required fuel modification and fire road maintenance is conducted on an annual basis and more frequently depending on vegetation growth and needs. OCTA actively monitors the Preserves to determine if maintenance issues such as degraded trails and access roads can be proactively repaired in advance of potential storm events.

In addition, OCTA participates on the County of Orange Area Safety Task Force (COAST). This task force is a collaboration of nearly three dozen public agencies, municipalities, landowners, land managers and other organizations directly affected by wildland fire in Orange County. Together we have accomplished several important goals, including designation by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration/National Weather Service of a dedicated Coastal weather zone for Orange County, the installation of a high-speed wireless network of fire cameras and weather stations, deployment and expansion of a community Fire Watch Network, and the adoption of a comprehensive Community Wildfire Prevention Plan.



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### WHAT IF THE PUBLIC NEEDED TO ACCESS TRABUCO ROSE DUE TO EVACUATION?

Public safety is absolutely the utmost priority. During an emergency, OCFA and/or the Orange County Sheriff Department (OCSD) would determine if and when the Trabuco Rose Preserve would be used as an evacuation route for the community. These agencies are the authority in emergency situations and OCTA supports their decisions.

If OCFA and/or OCSD determined a community emergency access route was necessary via Trabuco Oaks Drive/ Hickey Canyon Road (north to Hamilton Trails), OCTA would support this evacuation plan. These agencies can open the gate at any time. However, there are at least two other property owners north of the OCTA property within the canyon. OCTA cannot give permission to utilize those properties. Coordination with those owners is recommended.

### IF OCTA PURCHASED THE PRESERVES WITH TAXPAYER MONEY, DOESN'T THE PUBLIC HAVE A RIGHT TO ACCESS THE PRESERVES FREELY?

No. The OCTA Preserves are conservation properties and were not acquired for recreational use. It is correct that these Preserves were purchased with County sales tax money. However, the main purpose of these funds was to acquire mitigation properties in exchange for the OC GO freeway project improvements.

In addition, these Preserves are not part of the County system of regional or wilderness parks. The Preserves require a higher level of conservation protection and stewardship. Some of the reasons these lands were protected include wildlife connectivity, presence of sensitive species, and valuable habitat.