

# Baldwin Hills

## Scenic Overlook



### Our Mission

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**CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS**  
**P.O. Box 942896**

**Sacramento, CA 94296-0001**

For information call: (800) 777-0369

(916) 653-6995, outside the U.S.

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### **Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook**

**6300 Hetzler Road**

**Culver City, CA 90232**

**(310) 558-5547**

**[www.parks.ca.gov/bhso](http://www.parks.ca.gov/bhso)**

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*One of the  
last remaining  
undeveloped hillsides  
in the Los Angeles  
basin is returning  
to its natural state,  
with the help of visitors  
and volunteers.*





# ISLAND OF HOPE

Developers planned to build a 241-home subdivision, Vista Pacifica, on this hill. Local residents and conservation advocates pushed a lengthy grassroots effort to save one of the few large islands of semi-wild land left in the Los Angeles basin. Although the hill had been graded and its top leveled for housing, park proponents envisioned an oasis in the urban stampede. After six years of fundraising and community activism, this open space became part of nearby Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area (formerly Baldwin Hills SRA) in 2002. Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook opened to the public in 2009. Volunteers and park staff are restoring native plants, hoping to attract once-abundant birds and wildlife back to the Overlook.



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## COMMUNITY SUPPORTERS

Student volunteers from the Baldwin Hills Greenhouse Program plant prickly pear cactus, hoping to attract cactus wrens back to the park. Los Angeles Audubon supports the Baldwin Hills Greenhouse, Restoration, and Leadership programs for students from L.A.'s urban core. Alumni who develop their natural and research skills in these programs return from college to mentor others.

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**V**isitors find magnificent panoramic vistas at this 58-acre ecological island in the midst of urban Los Angeles. Earn the view after hiking up a steeply inclined trail or by completing a heart-pumping climb up 282 steps.

An uplifting recreational opportunity away from concrete and urban sprawl, Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook's restored coastal sage scrub habitat invites a closeness with nature. As the land is gradually brought back to its original habitat, animals and native plants are returning, allowing future generations to enjoy them. This park tells an unfolding story of restoration, community, and hope.

## PARK HISTORY

### Native People

Evidence shows that humans have lived in this area for about 10,000 years. Traditional Tongva territory encompasses portions of today's Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties and the four southern Channel Islands.

As expert hunters and gatherers with a complex social system, the Tongva were a prosperous, adaptable, and creative people—one of the most populous and wealthy of all California Indian groups. Technological innovations and specialized skills such as building canoes—known as *ti'ats*—were highly regarded. Rituals, healing, artwork, songs, and extensive oral traditions were central to Tongva culture.

Many Tongva villages occupied the fertile basin that is now Los Angeles, including settlements along nearby Ballona Creek. The Tongva were renamed “Gabrieliño” by the Spanish after they recruited the Tongva to build Mission San Gabriel, founded in 1771.

Today's Gabrielino/Tongva people revere and pass along their cultural heritage to future generations.

### Rancho Period

Mexico's governor Vicente de Sola granted more than 3,000 acres, called Rancho Rincón de los Bueyes (Corner of the Oxen), to Bernardo Higuera and Cornelio Lopez in 1821. The rancho is now present-day Cheviot Hills, Rancho Park, northeast Culver City, and a portion of Baldwin Hills with Ballona Creek.

To the west lies 14,000-acre Rancho La Ballona, granted by Governor Juan Alvarado to Ygnacio and Augustin Machado and Felipe and Tomas Talamantes in 1839. The

former boundary between these two ranchos runs through Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook at the top of the steps.

Most of the Baldwin Hills once lay in a third Mexican rancho, Cienega o Paso de la Tijera (Swamp or Pass of the Scissors) granted to Vicente Sanchez in 1843. By 1886, Elias J. “Lucky” Baldwin had acquired most of this rancho. A noted 19th-century pioneer who made his first fortune in gold mining stock, Baldwin owned land and businesses from Los Angeles to Lake Tahoe.

### Earthquakes and Oil Wells

The landform known today as Baldwin Hills was uplifted by earthquakes occurring on the Newport-Inglewood fault.



E.J. “Lucky” Baldwin



Future site of Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook, 1940



Movement along the 40-mile-long fault created the hills with the 420-foot peak now known as the Overlook.

Extraction of fossil fuels—oil and natural gas—has dominated these hills since 1924, when Standard Oil found a sizable petroleum reserve.

Within a year, drillers were pumping more than 50,000 barrels of oil each day.

Since then, drilling has lowered the surface of the Baldwin Hills oil field by as much as ten feet. Taking liquid from the ground results in this lowering process, known as subsidence. Visitors can see mechanical pumpjacks still bobbing for oil on the hills near the park.



## BALDWIN HILLS DAM

Despite the presence of many earthquake faults, the Los Angeles City Department of Water and Power built a 20-acre reservoir in the hills between La Cienega Boulevard and La Brea Avenue. Holding nearly 300 million gallons of water, the Baldwin Hills Dam was completed in 1951. Three years later, an oil company began injecting salt water into nearby oil fields to get more oil.

On December 14, 1963, a caretaker at the reservoir noticed the dam was leaking. The area below the dam was evacuated. When the dam gave way, 130 to 180 million gallons rushed out of the reservoir—destroying homes and cars in a swath of mud and debris. Five people were killed, 64 homes were destroyed, and another 117 homes and 96 apartment buildings were damaged.

The dam's failure was variously attributed to oilfield subsidence and water injection, seismic movement, and poor dam construction design. The reservoir's former site is now a large, grassy basin in the Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area, which opened in 1984.

## ACTIVITIES

### Recreation

Within a network of parks and trails in the Baldwin Hills Parklands, take an invigorating walk to the Overlook along a one-mile trail that provides unexpected vistas at each turn, or climb the 282 steps from Jefferson

Blvd. to the park's 420-foot peak. Both birdwatching and picnicking at the top can be rewarding.

## Interpretive Programs and Events

Park staff offer free opportunities year round for the community to engage with nature and L.A.'s dynamic culture. Summer programs such as Junior Rangers for 7- to 12-year-olds, and educational programs for K-12 schools are also available. Please check

[www.parks.ca.gov/bhso](http://www.parks.ca.gov/bhso) for visitor center hours. The park's free film and exhibits illustrate the grassroots efforts that led to the preservation of this "natural" island from the commercial and residential development surrounding it.

## Special Event Rental

The architecturally renowned, 10,300-square-foot visitor center includes a conference room and theater, and an enclosed pavilion next door.

The Skyline Terrace is also available to rent for weddings, meetings, and other events hosting up to 250 guests. Rental prices, photographs, rules, and other guidelines can be found at [www.parks.ca.gov/bhsoevents](http://www.parks.ca.gov/bhsoevents).

## ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

Paved paths lead to the accessible visitor center, its theater, and the outdoor Skyline Terrace amphitheater. Parking and restrooms are accessible. The steps, unpaved trails, and roadway are steep.

# PORTS

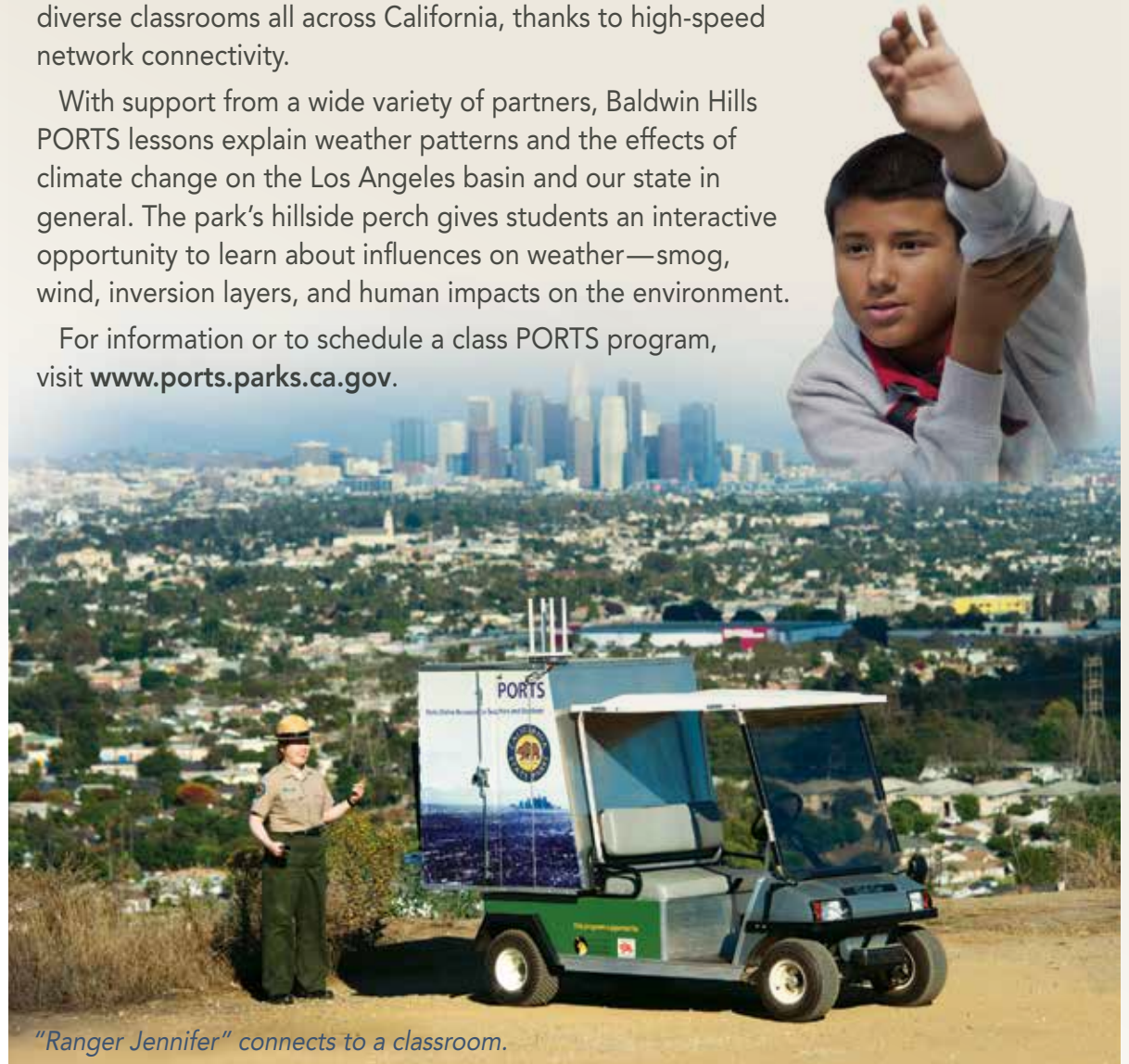
Parks Online Resources for Teachers and Students™

Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook hosts the Weather and Climate segment of the California State Parks PORTS program.

One of several statewide PORTS programs showcasing differing state parks' habitats, Baldwin Hills' PORTS segments are delivered through live videoconferences into diverse classrooms all across California, thanks to high-speed network connectivity.

With support from a wide variety of partners, Baldwin Hills PORTS lessons explain weather patterns and the effects of climate change on the Los Angeles basin and our state in general. The park's hillside perch gives students an interactive opportunity to learn about influences on weather—smog, wind, inversion layers, and human impacts on the environment.

For information or to schedule a class PORTS program, visit [www.ports.parks.ca.gov](http://www.ports.parks.ca.gov).



*"Ranger Jennifer" connects to a classroom.*

## PLEASE REMEMBER

- Pedestrians are encouraged to use the trails, not the road. Please do not walk in the center of the roadway. Face oncoming traffic when walking uphill and downhill.
- All natural and cultural resources are protected by state law and may not be removed or disturbed.
- Stay on designated trails to preserve natural features. Shortcuts through park habitat contribute to erosion.
- Except for service animals, leashed dogs are allowed only on the paved road and parking area. Do not leave dogs in a car.
- Alcohol and drug use is prohibited.
- Firearms and fireworks are prohibited.
- Riding a bicycle on unpaved trails is not allowed.

## NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Los Angeles State Historic Park  
1245 N. Spring St., Los Angeles 90012  
(323) 441-8819
- Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area  
4100 South La Cienega Blvd.  
Los Angeles 90056 (323) 298-3660
- Will Rogers State Historic Park  
1501 Will Rogers State Park Road  
Pacific Palisades 90272  
(310) 454-8212



## NATURAL HISTORY

### Plants

The park's native vegetation, as in most urban areas, has suffered from years of soil disturbances and invasion by non-native grasses and such plants as fennel, wild radish, and black mustard. Volunteer and park staff restoration efforts are bringing back essential wildlife habitat to the park.



*Anise swallowtail butterfly*

Coastal sage scrub habitat supports species diversity. Some of the native species commonly seen here are drought-tolerant and can be used in residential landscaping — California sagebrush, coastal prickly pear cactus, toyon, deerweed, giant wild rye, laurel sumac, and mulefat.

A native plant garden near the pavilion is surrounded by terraced seating.

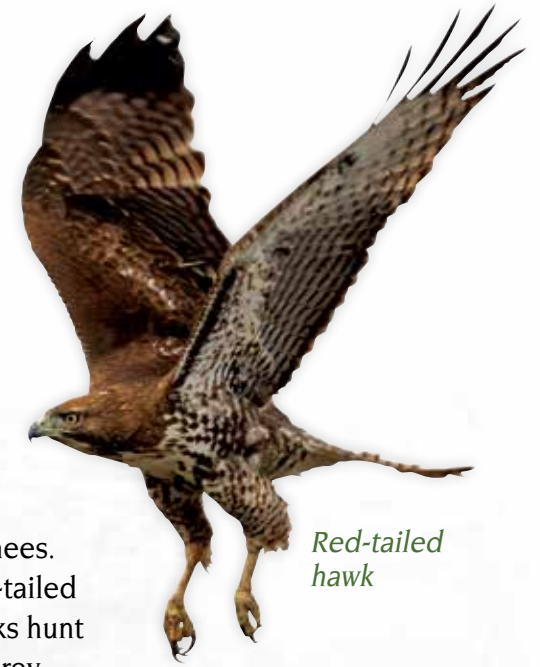
### Wildlife

Walkers may spot a desert cottontail rabbit or a gray fox. Gopher, coachwhip, and California king snakes are nonvenomous, protected residents of the park. A side-blotched lizard or a western fence lizard may dart onto the path.

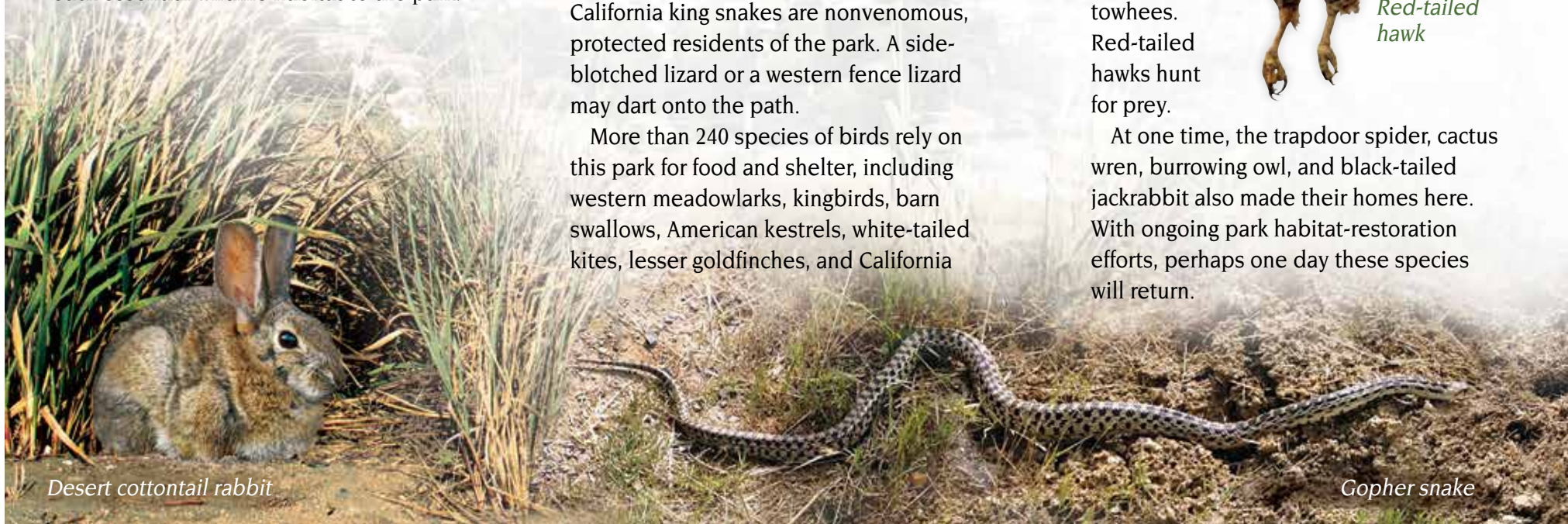
More than 240 species of birds rely on this park for food and shelter, including western meadowlarks, kingbirds, barn swallows, American kestrels, white-tailed kites, lesser goldfinches, and California

towhees. Red-tailed hawks hunt for prey.

At one time, the trapdoor spider, cactus wren, burrowing owl, and black-tailed jackrabbit also made their homes here. With ongoing park habitat-restoration efforts, perhaps one day these species will return.



*Red-tailed hawk*



*Desert cottontail rabbit*

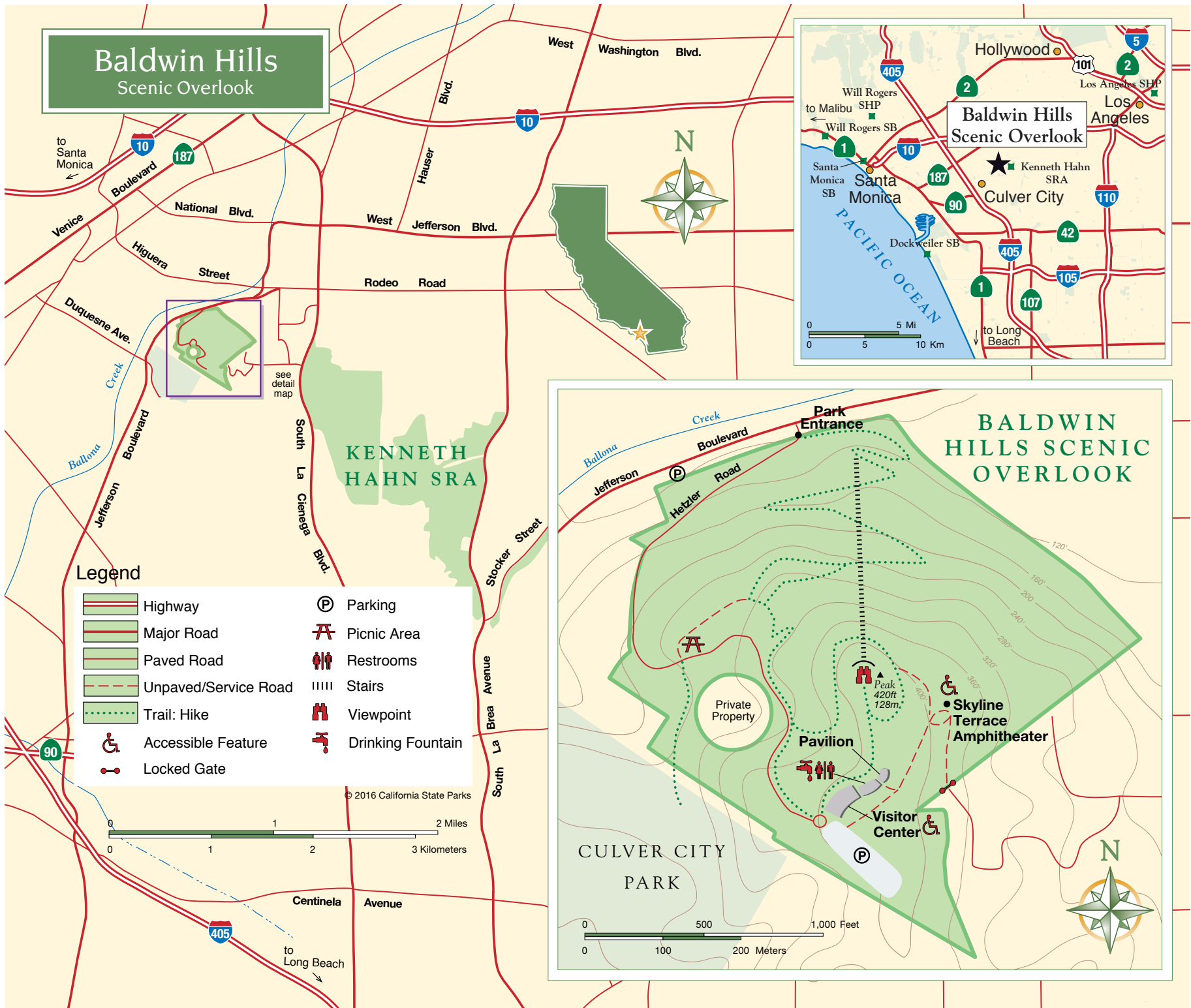
*Gopher snake*



*Native plants from left to right: Bush sunflower, white sage, blue-eyed grass, evening primrose, and red toyon berries*



# Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook



## Legend

- |  |                      |  |                   |
|--|----------------------|--|-------------------|
|  | Highway              |  | Parking           |
|  | Major Road           |  | Picnic Area       |
|  | Paved Road           |  | Restrooms         |
|  | Unpaved/Service Road |  | Stairs            |
|  | Trail: Hike          |  | Viewpoint         |
|  | Accessible Feature   |  | Drinking Fountain |
|  | Locked Gate          |  |                   |

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