



**For Immediate Release:
September 28, 2009**

**Contact: Jean Watt
President, FHBP
949-673-8164**

Conservation Leaders Urge County To Slow Down on Park Decision

Orange County, CA - The Board of Supervisors is poised to approve a Letter of Intent (LOI) dated September 29, 2009 from OC Parks addressed to The Irvine Company and The Nature Conservancy that may contractually bind taxpayers while completely ignoring the concerns of respected conservation leaders.

While local conservationists and park supporters applaud the concept of the land transfer, they fear the county is moving too quickly and overlooking details that could create liability issues, financial difficulties and stewardship problems down the road. The county has yet to even produce an accurate map of the land under discussion. Despite the long-term implications of entering into this contract, County Counsel has not been required to review this.

There are serious questions about financial and other major impacts to the County that need to be addressed before moving forward. The LOI is quite detailed which could expose taxpayers to financial and legal obligations. Guidelines for such an important and complicated negotiation need to give all of the parties greater flexibility to achieve a mutually satisfactory outcome. This current letter appears to be closer to a final deal, than just the beginning of negotiations, as it is touted.

Park advocates have criticized the LOI, framed by the county as only a starting point, as a time bomb that severely limits its negotiating position. The letter underplays the cost of the acquisition to taxpayers; weakens habitat protections already in place; reduces the role of one of the land's current guardians – The Nature Conservancy (TNC); and places land management and operations responsibilities solely with The Irvine Company's own Irvine Ranch Conservancy at taxpayer expense.

- MORE -

Most government agencies do not accept large tracts of land without a non-wasting endowment to properly manage them. The Irvine Company has not offered an endowment and the county has not asked for one. The deal, as presented in the LOI, will require TNC to give up its conservation easements as well as the endowment it received to monitor the property. If TNC agrees, the County will replace the easements with less protective deed restrictions.

Park advocates will ask the Board to delay approval of the Letter of Intent at its Tuesday, September 29 meeting, and ask that they include a broader group in further discussions about this proposal.

###

Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks is a county-wide non-profit organization working to protect the natural lands, waterways and beaches of Orange County. Learn more at: www.FHBP.org.