

**Additional Information about OC Parks Agenda Item
Regarding Open Space Lands Transaction**

STEVE FRANKS
DIRECTOR
OC COMMUNITY RESOURCES

RYAN DRABEK
INTERIM DIRECTOR
OC ANIMAL CARE

KAREN ROPER
DIRECTOR
OC COMMUNITY SERVICES

MARK DENNY
DIRECTOR
OC PARKS

HELEN FRIED
COUNTY LIBRARIAN
OC PUBLIC LIBRARIES

BACKGROUND:

The OC Parks Commission will on Sept. 12, 2009 consider an item that could ultimately increase the parkland and open space OC Parks manages by roughly 50%.

OC Parks, The Irvine Company and The Nature Conservancy have had preliminary discussions about permanently transferring more than 20,000 acres of open space in central and coastal Orange County to OC Parks. These areas are currently owned by The Irvine Company and managed by the Irvine Ranch Land Conservancy.

The OC Parks Commission will consider at their Sept. 12 meeting a recommendation that the Board of Supervisors approve a letter to The Irvine Company and The Nature Conservancy, identifying the County's intentions regarding the transfer of Irvine Company lands to the County.

Why does the County want to acquire more open space land?

The Orange County General Plan, Recreation and Resource Elements, define the County's objectives to acquire open space land contingent upon availability of land suiting a regional parks system and open space needs, as well as availability of funds. Management of these lands by the County is also consistent with the Board-approved OC Parks Strategic Plan of 2007.

How much will the County pay for the land acquisition?

The open space being discussed would be donated to the County, not purchased. The Irvine Company in 2001 announced its intent to preserve this land as permanent open space. It further specified its commitment to convey the land over the next 10 years to "an appropriate municipality."

Is the County in a financial position to take possession of this land and manage it?

While the current economic troubles throughout California remain a concern, OC Parks is currently prepared to accept financial responsibility of these lands as envisioned in the County's General Plan and OC Parks Strategic Plan. OC Parks receives approximately 70% of its revenues from a dedicated stream of property tax, with the remaining 30% coming from fees, leases and licenses. A portion of these property taxes has long been diverted to a County bankruptcy recovery fund, hampering parks operations and acquisitions. However, recent growth in the County's assessed valuation has positively impacted OC Parks' financial condition. Preserving undeveloped open space remains a priority for the County.

What land is involved?

The discussion involves more than 20,000 acres of open space conservation lands. OC Parks currently operates nearly 40,000 acres, so



13042 OLD MYFORD ROAD
IRVINE, CA 92602
PHONE: 866.OCPARKS
FAX: 714-667-6511

the addition would represent a roughly 50% increase. The proposed acquisition would include areas of Limestone Canyon, Weir Canyon, Black Star Canyon, Fremont Canyon, Santiago Canyon, Gypsum Canyon, Loma Ridge and Laguna Laurel.

When was the last time the County had a significant acquisition of park land or open space?

OC Parks' newest wilderness park, Laguna Coast Wilderness Park, opened in 1993. That park encompasses 6,300 acres of land that is currently owned by the County, the State of California and the City of Laguna Beach, much of it paid for with taxpayer funds. Conservation efforts in that area began in the 1970s with the Board of Supervisor's approval of a Laguna Greenbelt in the San Juaquin Hills. Nearby, the State purchased coastal land for Crystal Cove State Park and the County opened Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park. But a swath of privately owned land at the center was slated for 3,200 homes. Laguna Canyon Conservancy coordinated a walk in 1989 to demonstrating support for preserving the land for parkland. Soon after, negotiations ensued between landowner, The Irvine Company, and representatives from the County, the City of Laguna Beach and community and environmental groups. These negotiations resulted in a five-year, \$78 million purchase agreement for the 2,150 acre site. In 1990, Laguna Beach residents passed a \$20 bond measure to help purchase the land.¹ An additional \$12.5 million from 2000's State Proposition 12 went toward the purchase.

How will this new acquisition of open space be managed? Will it be open to the public?

Staff is recommending that the Board of Supervisors continues to support the ongoing efforts on the land by the Irvine Ranch Land Conservancy for a period of not more than three years. This will allow all of the current resource management, scientific and public programs under way to remain to ensure no interruption in services of the land and people. During that period, OC Parks staff will establish its program to effectively manage the land in identifying and understanding the requirements better than are currently known and applying the appropriate strengths of other organizations, such as nonprofits committed to OC Parks vision and mission and internal County staff.

What happens next?

The OC Parks Commission will consider this item the morning of Saturday, Sept. 12, followed by a tour of the land. If approved, OC Parks will prepare a "Letter of Intent" and the item will go to the Board of Supervisors for consideration Tuesday, Sept. 29. If the Board approves moving forward, they will direct OC Parks staff to prepare the documents necessary for completing the land transfer transaction with the Irvine Company and The Nature Conservancy.

####

¹ Laguna Coast Wilderness Park General Development Plan, 1998

