



Outdoors

in Orange County

Irvine

Hopeful Times

By Jean Watt, FHBP

Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks' (FHBP) Green Vision Map is a carefully prepared depiction of park and open space properties in Orange County. Its intent is to provide up-to-date and accurate information about both existing protected lands and those which need to be acquired in order to make sure that Orange County's rich natural heritage and biological diversity has a sustainable future. Many non-profits and community groups have worked very hard to this end and we continue to hope to achieve much of the Vision.

HOPE - it is not a word just captured in the field of politics by recent successful elections. Hope is a very meaningful concept born of serious thinking and well meaning people. Hope is, by its very nature, an articulation of intent of peaceful action based on trust that responsible and collaborative solutions will be found for serious challenges.

In this case, hopeful times means that we are experiencing an articulation of intent to balance the natural environment with the built environment in Orange County. The most current and most important way that this is happening is through the Orange County Transportation Authority's Renewed Measure M (M2). This Measure, which passed in November 2006, continues a one-half cent sales tax for transportation projects. This did not just happen because we HOPED. It happened because our serious and well meaning conservation coalition along with serious and well meaning members of

OCTA worked together to produce a plan that would bring a responsible and collaborative solution to the balance of the natural environment with the built environment.

The first real evidence of this solution was a description in the Renewed Measure M Plan, prepared as part of the information sent to voters. In the Transportation Investment Plan it read: "Innovative Environmental Mitigation: A minimum of \$243.5 million will be available, subject to a Master Agreement to provide for comprehensive, rather than piecemeal, mitigation of the environmental impacts of freeway improvements."

Relying on this new innovative concept and the resulting formation of an Environmental Oversight Committee to make recommendations, a consortium of 30 conservation groups supported the transportation measure. Most believe this played a major role in the approval of M2 on its first pass with the voters. M1, in 1990, took three costly tries. The vote, requiring a 2/3 majority, passed with 69.7% of the voters.

OCTA and the M2 environmental coalition collaborated to develop the Measure's Ordinance. It clearly states that this program will provide for the "permanent protection of areas of high ecological value, and associated restoration, management and monitoring, to comprehensively compensate for numerous, smaller impacts associated with individual transportation projects." In other words, the program will maintain a comprehensive approach and not revert back to the smaller less beneficial mitigation projects historically undertaken.

This collaborative effort on behalf of the OCTA Board and the Measure M environmental coalition commemorates unique progress in planning in Orange County. If the hopes of all parties are met, it stands to be a prototype which has already been studied for adoption in other counties and even at the state and federal level.

Of course there are risks associated with this program. Over time, mitigation opportunities can be lost and costs of acquisition increased. Competing priorities may make deciding on acquisition or restoration sites more difficult or the Resource Agencies may have difficulty making the necessary commitments for permitting. The benefits of this program outweigh the risks and are outlined in OCTA's Early Action Plan, which states, "The project has the potential to minimize or reduce regulatory delays and the implementation of freeway projects and to result in greater environmental benefits than could be achieved through traditional project-by-project mitigation."

Though there have been stumbles along the way, we are pleased to report that all parties are working hard to show the value of this new collaboration. Hope is not a natural product of wishful thinking in our case - Hope is based on hard work and trusting alliances built over time among people and organizations. To reiterate a letter sent by our M2 coalition to then OCTA Chair Carolyn Cavecche: "Because of your foresight Measure M is a model for transportation measures throughout California."

Learn more about Renewed Measure M at: www.FHBP.org.

Wetlands Conservancy Hosts National Media Event

By: Dr. Gordon Smith, Huntington Beach Wetlands Conservancy

The Huntington Beach Wetlands were selected as the location for the June 30 announcement of a nation-wide grant program administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Undersecretary of Commerce and NOAA administrator Dr. Jane Lubchenco, speaking in front of the soon-to-be-restored Magnolia Marsh, described the program of 50 grants totaling \$167 million in federal economic stimulus funds. The Huntington Beach Wetlands Conservancy (HBWC) will receive \$3.3 million for the 40-acre Magnolia Marsh restoration project. Dr. Lubchenco praised the project, indicating that it rose to the top tier of the more than 800 grant applications received. Also speaking at the event were Mike Chrisman, California Resources Secretary and Huntington Beach Mayor Keith Bohr.

The tour following the announcement gave attendees an opportunity to view three distinct stages of coastal wetland restoration: the degraded but restorable Magnolia Marsh, the Brookhust Marsh just reopened to the ocean

in June, and the mature Talbert Marsh which was restored in 1989.

The Huntington Beach Wetlands are owned and managed by the HBWC - a nonprofit land trust. Once fully restored, the wetlands system, along with the recently constructed Wetlands and Wildlife Care and Education Center, will become part of the planned Orange Coast River Park. Planning will soon begin for a trail system connecting the Santa Ana River with interpretive and educational displays at the Care Center.



General Plans and Their Impacts on Communities

By Claire Schlotterbeck, FHBP Consultant

If anyone ever asks you to sit on a General Plan Advisory Committee, do it!

Putting pen to paper has never been more important than in the updating of your city's General Plan. Required by state law, these documents define the type, amount, and location of future growth. They form the basis for a city's planning activities and its decisions regarding how and where development occurs - housing sites, road size, sewer capacity.

For example which areas of the city should be commercial? Industrial? Residential? If so, what should the intensity of the housing development be? Should it be low density (single family residences with a few units per acre) or high density (an apartment complex at 30 units per acre)? How many acres of open space per 1,000 residents will there be? Is the work force housing located near mass transit? Will the community have pedestrian- and bike-friendly transportation opportunities?

Many of us find ourselves fighting housing that is proposed to be built in sensitive ecosystems and many times we find it has been allowed under an outdated General Plan. New laws are passed (e.g. AB 32 - the Global Warming Solutions Act), and we learn lessons about the mistakes of earlier planning decisions (e.g. placing housing next to fire prone areas), and species in undeveloped lands can teeter on the brink of extinction. That is why the Housing element of General Plans are required to be updated every ten years.

All General Plans are required to have seven elements: land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open space, noise and safety. Optional elements may include recreation, public services and facilities, air quality and economic development. These optional elements would address issues of local concern - for example dwindling agricultural fields. Each of these elements discuss the policies and implementation actions needed to reach the goals that achieve the community's vision.

Land Use is a particularly important element. Historically it has not been tied to circulation - but the two are inextricably linked. Allowing housing far from mass transit corridors creates sprawl and contributes to gridlock for everyone. A Land Use Map lays out the distribution of the various land uses and roads. The Circulation element (where the roads are and how they link) is key in light of the contribution cars have to global warming.

Sadly many times a city will amend the General Plan to allow more housing than originally envisioned in exchange for a public amenity. For example, a developer may pay for widened roads, a developed park or a golf course. If many cities follow this haphazard practice (of allowing more housing than what is in the General Plan), it can lead to gridlock of surrounding communities since the roads were sized for a certain level of development.

As you look at your city's parks, shopping centers, and roads, rest assured their location was outlined in the General Plan. If you are a conservationist, invite yourself to the table or your informed and caring voice will not be heard as the city determines its future.

In May 2009, FHBP's Green Vision coalition members began the task of researching Orange County cities' General Plans to determine what, if any, policies should be applauded for their innovation. Members are reviewing the General Plans looking for specific policies on water conservation measures, pedestrian-friendly communities, smart developments, sustainability measures, carbon neutral developments and open space measures, to name a few.

The end product of this effort will be a ceremony acknowledging those innovative policies and a resource guide that includes sample policy language which decision makers and planning staff could adopt to have a cutting edge General Plan and Climate Action Plan.

Photo provided by HBWC.

Photo: CanStockPhoto.com

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO ORANGE COUNTY CACTUS WRENS?

Nature Reserve Seeks Solution for Declining Population

By: Lyn McAfee, Nature Reserve of Orange County

The coastal cactus wren, a small songbird making its home in cactus patches in Orange County wildlands, is disappearing in coastal Southern California. The bird is listed as a California Species of Special Concern. The Nature Reserve of Orange County (NROC) wants to find out why the population is declining so that something can be done about it.

Volunteer naturalists, OC Parks rangers and biologists are helping with a project this year to learn about cactus wren reproduction, dispersal and survival. It is part of a larger regional study spearheaded by NROC, The Nature Conservancy and Sea and Sage Audubon.

Birds are captured in mist nets and unique color band combinations are placed on each wren's legs. Over time, biologists and volunteers observe and track nesting activities and movement of the banded birds. Genetic samples are also collected for analysis.

NROC believes this study will help determine why the cactus wren population is declining. One reason is likely habitat loss from recent wildland fires which has had a major impact in both the central and coastal parts of the NROC reserve. It takes many years after a fire for cactus to regrow to a height that wrens will build a nest in. Other factors for decline might be drought, predation or West Nile virus.

Several other projects have been conducted by NROC to learn more about cactus wrens, starting with a symposium in 2007 focused on this species. Additionally, wrens were successfully relocated from an area about to be developed to Upper Newport Bay, where they then built nests. In a telemetry study tiny radios were placed on the wrens and a receiver tracked their activity.

NROC is also beginning a cactus habitat restoration project, funded by the California Department of Fish & Game, to restore a habitat linkage for the wrens within the coastal reserve.

For more information about NROC, visit:
www.NatureReserveOC.org.



Photos provided by NROC.



ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION CONTRACTORS AND WORKERS FORMS

By: Mike Wellborn, California Watershed Network

In early March of this year, an ad-hoc meeting was added to the agenda of the 27th Salmonid Restoration Conference in Santa Cruz. Reeling from the state bond freeze and resulting cutoff of funds for conservation projects, a dozen people gathered in a side room to explore, vent and exchange ideas about the status of conservation projects - past, present and future. Inspired by a committed team of North Coast residents led by David Simpson, the discussion featured status reports from representatives with their projects floundering due to past-due invoices, concerns for projects underway that have had to close down in mid-construction,

and potential efforts that could raise the awareness in Sacramento and around the state. The result was the formation of the Association of Conservation Contractors and Workers (ACCW).

The ACCW is made up of a broad, diverse group of organizations and individuals who regularly provide services to and/or enter into contracts with government, non-profit organizations, private landowners or other entities to accomplish projects that protect and increase the health and productivity of the land, air and waters of the state of California.

The mission and purpose of the ACCW is to represent, support and advocate for conservation contractors and workers and the organizations that employ them. The ACCW seeks development of a robust "green" economy and a knowledgeable, empowered workforce. The need for the organization has become apparent in order to respond to the bond freeze funding cut and to protect and restore California's natural "infrastructure." ACCW will act on behalf of its members to affect policies, laws and public perceptions to enhance the ability to deliver maximum benefit to society in the form of sustainability, productivity and environmental quality. For further information, contact the ACCW at: accw.california@gmail.com.



Photo: iStockPhoto.com

Birds of a feather...

Be a part of Friends of Harbors, Beaches & Parks.

Help our practical, realistic projects make Orange County a better home for all of us.

Your help, large or small, is deeply appreciated.



Yes! I want to help Friends of Harbors, Beaches & Parks.

FHBP contributions are tax-deductible. Donors receive newsletters and other information on our conservation activities. Please check the category you wish:

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Please clip and mail to: FHBP, P.O. Box 9256, Newport Beach, CA 92658

New Website Launched!

This summer marked an important milestone for Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks (FHBP). As the OC Fair was kicking off in early July, FHBP launched its brand new website!

Set up to be user friendly and easy to navigate, the new site includes environmental updates, descriptions of FHBP projects and programs, as well as electronic copies of our bi-annual newsletters. Visitors can download presentations from the last Green Vision Workshop and even a high resolution version of the Green Vision Map.

Check it out: www.FHBP.org.



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Laguna Coast Celebrates Parks Event

On Saturday, May 23 at the James and Rosemary Nix Nature Center in Laguna Coast Wilderness Park, the Laguna Canyon Foundation in partnership with OC Parks held their annual Celebrate Parks Event. The ceremony honored those responsible for the facility's success. One of the highlights of the event was the unveiling of the new interpretive signs, signaling the completion of Mary's Trail – a .20-mile interpretive loop adjacent to the Center and named after the Founding Executive Director of Laguna Canyon Foundation, Mary Fegraus. Foundation volunteers were available to lead the public and guests on guided tours of the Center as well as the newly completed trail.



Mary's Trail Unveiling

Visit: www.LagunaCanyon.org

Parks & Programs Receive C+ Grade

FHBP's Jean Watt and Melanie Schlotterbeck participated in the American Society of Civil Engineer's 5 year Report Card on OC's infrastructure. Since 2005, Parks, Recreation and Environment (PR&E) has seen improvements in the investment of park programs and parklands bringing the overall grade up from a C to a C+ in 2009. Due to the passage of Park Bond Acts and per capita allocations from Propositions 12 and 40, there has been a flurry of activity related to park rehab and development statewide. However, the 2008-2009 economic recession means the outlook for PR&E will change. Three major challenges for PR&E are unstable funding, decreased outdoor activity and increased wildland fires.



Freeway Complex Fire

Visit: www.InfrastructureReportCard.org

High Speed Rail Comes to Orange County

With the passage of Proposition 1A last November, voters chose to spend nearly \$10 billion to construct a high speed train system that would stretch from Southern California to San Francisco and Sacramento. The system is expected to save 12.7 million barrels of oil by 2030. With an elevated track mounted on a continuous wall rather than on pillars, the train route will cut California in half, seriously impeding wildlife movement. In Orange County, only Anaheim and Irvine are slated to have high speed rail stops. The proposed system will not connect the OC to San Diego directly, instead it will go through LA County to Ontario Airport, down to Murrieta and end in downtown San Diego.



Train Station

Visit: www.CAHighSpeedRail.ca.gov

Treehugger's Ball a Success!

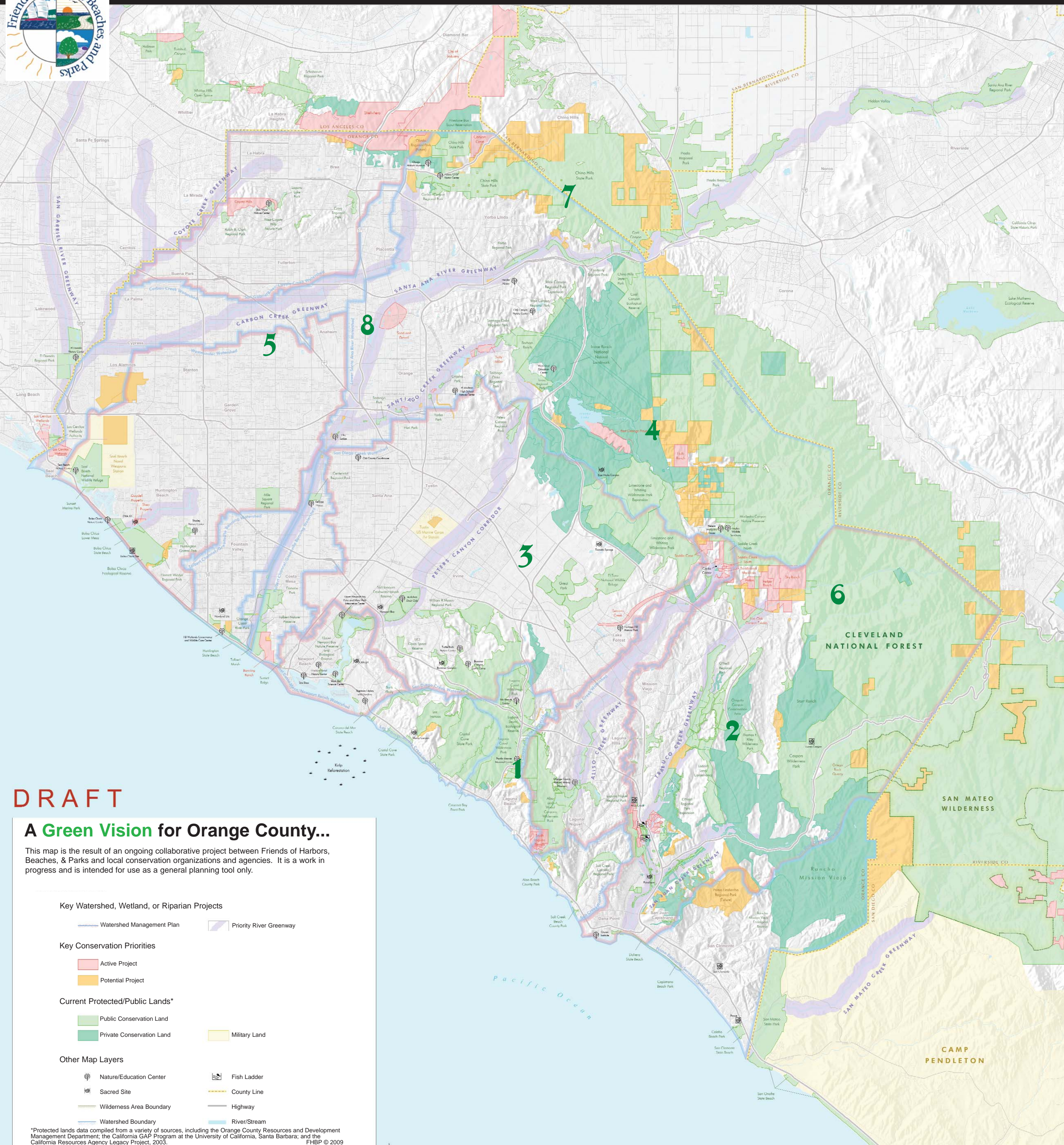
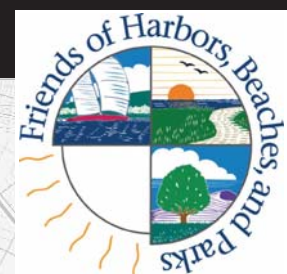
A coalition of several conservation groups with the objective of preserving wildlands east of Irvine Lake, in the foothills of the Santa Ana Mountains, held the "Treehugger's Ball" in June. The 5th annual event was a great success with nearly 350 participants from around Southern California. Folks enjoyed a festive atmosphere, clowns and even a daring man on tall stilts! Roughly 15 vendors with sustainable themes educated participants, sold merchandise and showcased environmental products during the Go Green Expo and Eco Fair. Live music was performed by Lost Hills, Robin Sanbar and Friends, and DNA. The hit of the night was a special appearance by the Grateful Dead cover band Cubensis!



Treehugger's Ball

Visit: www.CanyonLand.org

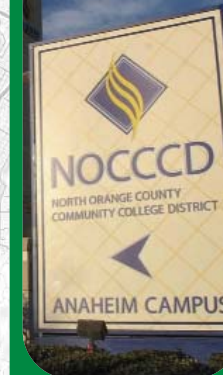
Orange County



Green Vision Map

Greening Colleges and Training Leaders

The LA/Orange Environmental Training Center (ETC) is located in Anaheim and is a part of the North Orange County Community College District. ETC wants the open spaces on the campuses to be attractive for the sake of our communities, as well as our students. And ETC has a stake in city plans which make our facilities accessible by mass transit so that the campus can serve the broadest possible spectrum of students. Interestingly, students constantly inquire with staff as to how they can reduce their carbon footprint(s). LA/Orange ETC looks forward to working at the individual, business and municipal levels for a more sustainable future.

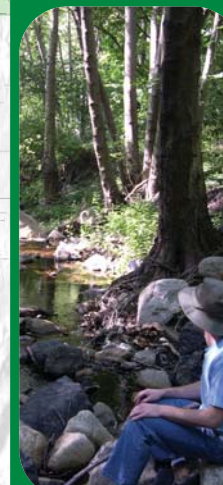


The Anaheim NOCCD Campus

Visit: www.ETC-LAOC.org

Nature Hikes Available for the Public

Naturalist For You (NFY) is an Orange County based non-profit which provides the general public with free, guided interpretive tours of wilderness areas throughout Southern California. Tours are primarily conducted on publicly owned land, including national forests and national parks, state parks, county wilderness parks, and city nature reserves. They occur 4-5 days a week and are posted 2-3 months in advance on NFY's website calendar. Difficulty levels range from easy family excursions to strenuous backcountry trips. Volunteer naturalists are trained to observe and interpret natural and cultural history, with an emphasis on plant and wildlife identification and tribal survival skills.



A Naturalist For You Hike

Visit: www.Naturalist-For-You.org

Fate of State Parks Unclear with Cuts

With a budget gap of over \$26 billion, Governor Schwarzenegger proposed massive cuts to state programs, including the removal of \$143 million of State Park funding. This cut required closing of 86% of the 270+ park units. The only Orange County park affected by this proposal was Chino Hills State Park. The Governor and majority/minority leaders from the Senate and Assembly agreed to an \$8 million cut, but later the Governor slashed the Parks budget down a total of \$14.2 million. Though some parks will likely close, it is unclear if Chino Hills State Park will be one of them. For every dollar spent from the general fund on the Park program, \$2.35 is brought back to the state in associated sales.



Chino Hills

Visit: www.SaveStateParks.org

Floating Island Protects Birds & Nests

Dick Zembal, with the OC Water District and FHBP's Advisory Board, is at it again. Through the District he has created a floating island in the Santa Ana River's Burris Basin to allow an endangered bird, the Least Tern, flexibility when water levels change in the Basin. Attempting to avoid drowning the nests when the water level needed to rise while at the same time preventing coyotes from reaching the nest sites when the water was low was the hitch. Zembal orchestrated a floating island for the birds that raises or lowers with the water level. As of late June, more than 60 chicks have hatched on the island, which also serves as a sanctuary for other birds in the Santa Ana River basin.



A Least Tern

Visit: www.OCWD.com