Friends of Harbors, Beaches, and Parks (FHBP) works to protect the unique coastal waters and beaches of Orange County. Learn more at www.FHBP.org

By Melanie Schlottbeck, FHBP

Orange County has many attractions including its natural lands and attractions including its natural lands and attractions. Understanding that our natural resources are finite and these resources are subject to pressures from continual use prompted the formation of the Safe Trails Coalition. Audubon of Southern California, Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks, Laguna Canyon Conservancy, Sea and Sage Audubon Society, and Sierra Club founded the Coalition to find the balance between recreational uses and resource protection.

The Coalition will soon release a fact sheet focusing on the financial costs associated with trail misuse and abuse. Confidentural surveys were sent out by the Coalition to land managers at the local, regional, state, and federal level. The respondents included public entities, cities, agencies, and organizations.

After tabulating the results, the most revealing information was the extensive costs involved with the public use, and sometimes abuse, of the public parks. One land manager reported costs to repair illegal trail use of over $100,000 per acre. It is not uncommon to have simple restoration projects cost as little as $3,000 per acre.

Simple restoration projects may cost as little as $3,000 per acre, but complex ones can exceed $100,000 per acre. Smaller habitats, like coastal sage scrub, can be damaged or removed. The goal of the ordinance is to protect the native trees from this damage.

Unfortunately, these days, all trees are severely stressed due to high temperatures. Of course, trees are an important part of our climate. A single tree “is equivalent to ten room-size air conditioners operating continuously.”

Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks (FHBP) is hopeful that the county will make it easier for us to protect the environment by implementing the ordinance. FHBP is a member of the Safe Trails Coalition and is working hard to bring nature to the city and future residents. More information on FHBP is available on our website: www.FHBP.org.
Out of the Ashes

By: Jean Watt, FHBP

When Orange County fell for Chapter 9 protection on December 4, 1994, it was the largest, longest-lasting municipal bankruptcy in history to declare bankruptcy. It swept like a firestorm through county government, raising havoc with many departmental budgets—solely Oak View (now called Department of Harbors, Beaches and Parks [FHBP]).

Many of its had worked alongside FHBP for years as vital parks were acquired and dedicated to the county for operation and maintenance. Now, the future of the growing park system was threatened. While we wrote our hands, the second and third bombs dropped. The FHBP Department would give up an approximate $164 million by 2016 and in restructuring to save money, the Robert Fisher, hardhead.

Adding insult to the state shifted historic state tax burdens to counties, municipalities, and special taxing districts. FHBP's budget was raked to pay this debt as well. All of us in the non-profit world, focused on the future of special places like Upper Newport Bay, Laguna Canyon, the Canyons, and the Ponto-Chino Hills to name a few, put the put to the test. There was much to do in this do nothing to preserve the environmental heritage of the county and serve the growing population.

From this devastation, Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks, Inc. was formed. We devised six objectives:

1. Promote a network of citizens and organizations supporting FHBP in providing outdoor recreation to residents, now and into the future.
2. Promote safe, well-paved parks and open spaces; urban parks, wilderness parks, wetlands, streams, beaches, and trails.
3. Clearly monitor the county budget to assure effective, efficient use of park and open space funds.
4. Complete and implement the Master Plan of Regional Parks, Hiking, and Equestrian Trails.
5. Provide education for interested residents, visitors, and FHBP members on what's needed to care for and expand parks and trails.
6. Fundraise to assist FHBP programs and acquisitions.

In December 2004, the FHBP Board of Directors was reorganized and FHBP is ready to celebrate its 20-year anniversary.

Out of the ashes has grown a whole new perspective and commitment—the Orange County Green Vision.

Coastal Influences Grow

By: Jack Eide, FHBP

How did our present California Coastal Commission lose sight of its mission to protect our coast? Well, once again, it can’t be blamed.

By way of background, voters passed a 1972 initiative (Proposition 20), creating the California Coastal Commission. The Legislature, in 1976, adopted the Coastal Act which made the Commission permanent and established the rules of development, impacts, and access to our coastline.

The Commission includes 12 voting members appointed by the Governor, Senate Rules Committee, and the Speaker of the Assembly—each gets four appointments. The mission of the Coastal Act is to protect the coast for present and future generations through thoughtful planning and environmental regulation by using science, public participation, and intergovernmental coordinations. Unfortunately, through aggressive lobbying by development interests, the Commission seems to have lost sight of this mission.

Four cases showed how secret meetings between Commissioners and project lobbyists led to decisions rendered in their favor. Called ex-partis communications, these conversations would have been legal had they been disclosed in advance. This lack of disclosure prompted legislation to ban ex-partis communications, along with many other organizations, Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks supported this legislation, but the bill died in the California Legislature.

The four cases in question include: The Ranch, hotel rehabilitation in South Laguna Aliso Canyon, a 30-unit low-income project in Laguna Canyon, a spatial raiding fuel storage facility on south San Onofre Nuclear Power plant, and a residential development on the Central Coast at Pismo Beach. In March 2016, the Commission ignored public outcry and fired the well-regarded Executive Director without providing concrete public reasons. Hence, confidence in the Coastal Commission ability to properly enforce the Coastal Act for the L100-mile shoreline has dwindled among the environmental and public safety community. Whether the Legislature has success moving to correct corruption and improve transparency at the Commission, or public hearings and participate in the process. Our system doesn’t work without the public keeping their interests front and center in land use and development battles. Let’s hope this change!

Conservation Plans Turn 20

By: Jim Coyle, FHBP

When Orange County had its first Conservation Plan in 1995, it was the culmination of a decade of planning to protect the natural lands, waterways, and beaches of Orange County. Understanding that our lands and wetland and riparian areas cost much more to protect the natural lands, waterways, and beaches of Orange County. Unfortunately, the San Joaquin (73) and Foothill Toll (241) have now bisected both sections of the preserve, causing irreparable impacts.

Later, a complementary HCP was approved for the Ranchos Mission Viejo to the south, and links between the plans the Santa Ana- Tocano Canyon were successfully filled in by Orange County Transportation Authority’s Measure M2 mitigation program. Friends of Harbors, Beaches, and Parks (FHBP) supported the purchase of the Mission Viejo National Reserve of Orange County. Unfortunately, the Santa Ana- Tocano Canyon were successfully filled in by Orange County Transportation Authority’s Measure M2 mitigation program. Friends of Harbors, Beaches, and Parks (FHBP) supported the purchase of the Mission Viejo National Reserve of Orange County.

When the passage of time and with new plans experiencing delays before adoption, momentum has slowed down. But more work is needed in the Zoning Code to prevent duplicated or reduced funding for land acquisition. That said, this HCP/ HCP has contributed to Orange County’s environmental legacy and a worthy celebration in the past 20 years.

FHBP’s New Tree Ordinance

When friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks (FHBP) discovered that Orange County does not have an ordinance to protect native trees in unincorporated Orange County, the Southern California Association of Governments region that doesn’t, we went to work in 2014.

The draft Orange County Protected Tree Ordinance, submitted to the county for consideration in June 2016, outlines a process for the county to understand the health of young and mature trees in our parks and preserves. The ordinance provides for a uniform permit process for removing trees with a diameter of 12 inches or more. The ordinance also requires a review by the county’s Tree Advisory Committee. In January 2017, the Orange County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the Orange County Protected Tree Ordinance. This ordinance is one of the only county ordinances tied to the protection of native trees.

Aside from the legal aspect of this ordinance, it is also a tool for building awareness within our parks and preserves. For example, Marine County Parks has already offered to share this ordinance with other California coastal counties to provide a model for state-provided tree protection.

How can you help?

Support the Conservation Ordinance by sending a letter to the Orange County Board of Supervisors in support of this ordinance. Here is a sample email:

Dear Supervisor O’Donnell

Please support the Conservation Ordinance by sending a letter to the Orange County Board of Supervisors in support of this ordinance.

Thank you for your leadership in protecting our environment and natural resources.

John Watt, FHBP

Friends of Harbors, Beaches, and Parks
Out of the Ashes
By: Jean Watt, FHBP

When Orange County fell for Chapter 9 protection on December 19, 1991, it set off a larger crisis in the county’s history to declare bankruptcy. It swept like a firestorm through the county government, raising many with departmental budgets—likely the sharing of county resources, Department of Harbors, Beaches and Parks (FHBP).

Many of us had worked alongside FHBP for years as vital members of the county’s culture and maintenance. Now, the future of the growing park system was threatened. While we wore our hands, the second and third bombs dropped. The FHBP Department would give up an approximate $164 million by 2016 and in restructuring to save money, the Director, Robert Fisher, was fired.

Adding insult to injury, the state shifted historic state tax revenue to county parks. If only a bill was passed to re-route this money, the FHBP budget was raided to pay this debt as well.

All of us in the non-profit world, focused on the future of special places like Upper Newport Bay, Laguna Canyon, the Canyons, and the Pintos-Chino Hills is a name to few, put the tool. There was so much more to do to preserve the environmental heritage of the county and serve the growing population.

From this devastation, Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks, Inc. was formed. We devised six objectives:

1. Promote a network of committees and organizations supporting FHBP in providing outdoor recreation to residents, now and into the future.
2. Promote sale, well kept parks and open spaces: urban parks, wilderness parks, wetlands, streams, beaches, and trails.
3. Create a county budget to assure effective, efficient use of park and open space funds.
4. Complete and implement the Master Plan of Regional Filing, Hiking, and Equine Trails.
5. Provide education for interested residents, visitors, and FHBP members on what’s needed to care for and expand parks and trails.
6. Fundraise to assist FHBP programs and acquisitions.

With the OC Parks budget cut, in restructuring to save funds, FHBP is ready to celebrate its 20-year anniversary.

Out of the ashes has grown a whole new perspective and commitment—the Orange County Green Vision.
Developers have eyed Carbon Canyon in northeastern Orange for decades. Yet, the cost of extending infrastructure in the steep canyon and onto the overloaded two lane road, have impeded these efforts. One developer, a bankrupt insurance company in Idaho, nevertheless received approvals from the County Board of Supervisors, including amendments to the Silverado-Modjeska Specific Plan (Sil-Mod Plan) in 1997. These plans guide appropriate development in the canyons, but recent actions by the Orange County Board of Supervisors, including amendments to the F/TSP to facilitate the Saddle Crest development, have started to unravel these Plans. The county took a new position that the Sil-Mod Plan isn’t a legally enforceable, although a recent legal analysis funded by canyon conservation groups concludes that it is indeed enforceable. Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks united with other local groups to ensure the integrity of the Plans to preserve these unique rural areas and the biological and recreational resources they provide.

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Esperanza Hills, above Yorba Linda (Map #2)
Residents in Yorba Linda barely survived the 2008 Freeway Complex Fire. In fact, over 280 of them lost their homes. During the fire many were stuck on gridlocked streets unable to evacuate safely. So when a developer proposed adding another 340 houses deeper in the hills and next to Chino Hills State Park, residents organized. The land is in county jurisdiction. After Supervisor Todd Spitzer led the approval of the project, residents filed suit against the county and the developer in July 2015, challenging the adequacy of the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and project approvals. In June 2016, Superior Court Judge Claster agreed with the residents and found the EIR to be inadequate, overturning all project approvals. Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks joined this lawsuit as a co-plaintiff.

Foothill Communities, Unincorporated (Map #3)
To maintain the rural character of our canyon communities, two plans were created by the County of Orange: the Foothill/Trabuco Specific Plan (F/TSP) in 1991 and the Silverado-Modjeska Specific Plan (Sil-Mod Plan) in 1977. These plans guide appropriate development in the canyons, but recent actions by the Orange County Board of Supervisors, including amendments to the F/TSP to facilitate the Saddle Crest development, have started to unravel these Plans. The county took a new position that the Sil-Mod Plan isn’t a legally enforceable, although a recent legal analysis funded by canyon conservation groups concludes that it is indeed enforceable. Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks united with other local groups to ensure the integrity of the Plans to preserve these unique rural areas and the biological and recreational resources they provide.

Banning Ranch, Newport Beach (Map #4)
Coastal Southern California’s last privately owned open space may be paved over by 900 homes, a resort hotel, shops, and restaurants. The Newport Banning Ranch combines a rare convergence of diverse topography with habitat for wildlife and protected sensitive plants. Furthermore, it has unique potential for wetland rehabilitation. The more recent history of oil drilling contaminated much of the soil and the developer lacks a cogent cleanup plan. The proposal includes digging a football field full of oil-contaminated soil and stockpiling it in the wetlands for years. Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks joins the Banning Ranch Conservancy—and many others—to support the preservation and responsible site clean up. Join us September 7-9 at the Newport Beach Civic Center when this project is heard by the Coastal Commission.

Goodell Acquisition, Huntington Beach (Map #6)
In May, the Bolsa Chica Land trust and the Trust for Public Land announced a major conservation milestone along the coast. The highly coveted 11.1 acres, known as the Goodell property, is inching closer to acquisition with a willing seller. The property overlooks the Bolsa Chica wetlands and is just one of a few remaining parcels non-profits have yet to secure to finish the original vision for the mesa and wetlands. The particular site includes a 9,000 year old archaeological cogstone, which will remain protected forever through this conservation effort. Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks tracks the high priority conservation areas in and around Orange County through its Green Vision Map. With a little hard work, this active conservation project will convert to parkland on the 2017 Green Vision Map!
Adding trail signs (such as mile markers and signage) can help deter trail misuse and abuse. Some reported expenditures of up to $25,000 per year and some land managers reported costs up to $18,000 per year to manage trail misuse. Financial costs associated with trail misuse and abuse can be significant and efforts to prevent such misuse are ongoing. The Coalition will soon release a factsheet focusing on the formation of the Safe Trails Coalition, the importance of trail management, and other topics.

By: Melanie Schlotterbeck, FHBP

Staying on Trails = Saving $$$

In short, our Coalition study concluded that creating and maintaining the existing resource and adding trail technology like counters and cameras are effective ways to identify and deter trail misuse. After tabulating the results, the most revealing information was the increase in the number of trail users and the potential cost savings. For example, a single trail stretch can save up to $1,500 per month by using trail technology. This cost savings can be significant over time and allows resources to be redirected to other critical needs.

The ordinance provides a uniform permitting process for consultants, tree care contractors, tree experts, and others interested in planting, maintaining, and removing trees. The ordinance also includes provisions for tree removals during emergency conditions, ensuring that the tree “is equivalent to ten room-size air conditioners operating 20 hours a day. “ Clearly, the cooling effect is something we need to protect.

In conclusion, FHBP’s new Tree Ordinance is a valuable tool for ensuring that Orange County native trees—including oak, sycamore, walnut, and eucalyptus—are protected and maintained. This ordinance will help preserve the unique natural resources, and native trees are some of the most valuable.

Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks (FHBP) selected three park poor cities: Stanton, Westminster, and Garden Grove. These cities have well below the average number of parks and trails. Parks and trails present opportunities for art, greenery, bicycle parking, and demonstration areas. Restaurants, coffee shops, bookstores, and other neighborhood gathering places could provide space to create a parklet.

2. Bring Nature to the City

Numerous organizations already exist that can provide residents with a personal experience with wildlife ambassadors. These programs could educate the populace and increase their understanding and appreciation of nature at active, managed exposure to it.

3. Create Pop-Up Parks & Programs

Pop-Up Parks, an evolving concept, get people outdoors and can be life-changing. They can be temporary or permanent, and can be temporary or permanent. These parklets can be used for art, greenery, bicycle parking, demonstration areas, restaurants, coffee shops, bookstores, and other neighborhood gathering places. FHBP members on what’s needed to care for and expand parks and trails.

4. Offer Local Park Camping

Based on the economics of parkPoor communities, it is likely many residents will never have been camping. Cities could explore this idea and provide an Overnight Camp Out in one or more of the local parks. Partnering with recreational stores, hotel or other facilities, and with varying time frames. If you can't create new parks by adding parkland, create new parks by bringing the recreational opportunities to the people. The report contains comments and many other recommendations. FHBP is hopeful that the county will consider incorporating these ideas as funding is available. Conversely grants or partnerships may provide funding as well—be creative! FHBP aims to provide our leaders with creative ideas that can be replicated in any city. A few of our ideas is that they can be replicated in any city. A few of our ideas include:

- Parklets present opportunities for art, greenery, bicycle parking, and demonstration areas. Restaurants, coffee shops, bookstores, and other neighborhood gathering places could provide space to create a parklet.

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