

Outdoors

in Orange County

Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks Summer 2021

Melanie Schlotterbeck

A view of the coastal sage scrub and chaparral covered slopes of Caspers Wilderness Park.

Mapping Our Parks' Legacies

By: Melanie Schlotterbeck, FHBP Consultant

Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks (FHBP) was named after the County Parks Department (Harbors, Beaches and Parks, now called OC Parks) so it is no surprise that we aim to be closely involved with the actions, activities, and protection related to the regional park system. We've learned during the pandemic just how valuable our parks are in keeping us active, physically distanced, and finding peace amid the chaos. Parks are vital infrastructure and necessary for good health. But, have you ever wondered about the history behind the park you are visiting?

Because of the active use, and sometimes misuse, of our parks and trail systems, FHBP decided to research the history behind each park. There are 22 parks (15 regional and seven wilderness). To determine the story, each park must be digitally mapped. Through a multi-step process that involves identifying each assessor parcel number, facility number, and every recorded document behind each parcel; we are cobbling together the heritage of our regional park system.

With funding through the Henry W. and Ellen R. Warne Family Endowment Fund of the Orange County Community Foundation we are building this digital inventory, which when complete, we plan to post on an online story board for each park. This way the knowledge of how and why the land came to be parkland is known and easily found. For example: Was the park used to offset the impacts from a development? Was it saved as mitigation for an infrastructure project? Or are there easements (park, open space, scenic, etc.) that exist on the land?

The research has already allowed us to help ensure protected parkland wasn't given away in the Upper Newport Bay Park & Preserve (see page 3). The Irvine Company gave an Irrevocable Offer of Dedication to the County, including a perpetual easement that allows for certain passive uses. The easement beneficiaries are the City of Newport Beach and California Coastal Conservancy, the latter of which didn't have the easement recorded. We are working to get this corrected.

Here are a few other examples of things we have learned through our research:

Carbon Canyon Regional Park is being leased by the County. That lease expires April 2026. We've marked our calendars to support a lease renewal before the expiration date.

Caspers Wilderness Park doesn't just include the 8,000 acres of land, there are multiple easements that wrap around the edges of nearby communities (Coto de Caza and Rancho Mission Viejo). These easement lands aren't accessible to the public, but count in our open space system.

Irvine Regional Park has a grant deed going back to 1897. It states that "No intoxicating liquors of any kind shall be sold on said property." This is why concessionaires don't offer alcoholic beverages.

Laguna Niguel Regional Park has multiple perpetual avigation easements across the land, which allows for air and flight easements on, upon, over, across, and above the subject parcels for the County and John Wayne Airport.

Our goal is to have each park and its historical documents reviewed and mapped by the end of the year. This has been a time-intensive project with some parks having as few as four parcels, while others have more than 250, with each parcel potentially having three documents aligned with it. Phase 2 of the project will be creating the story board for each park with easy access to those documents. Stay tuned for the launch of this digital legacy project.



Melanie Schlotterbeck

The rare Intermediate Mariposa Lily.

30x30 Campaign



Gloria Sefton

By: Gloria Sefton, FHBP Vice President

Governor Newsom's Executive Order for the state joins with President Biden's "America the Beautiful" initiative around a common goal of achieving permanent protection of 30% of lands and waters by 2030. Both are commonly known as the "30x30" (30 by 30) campaign.

We're currently only at about 12% protected in the US and 22% in California. Some of this land is fragmented and not useful for ecosystem sustainability. To succeed, these bold, life-sustaining state and federal objectives will require not only tremendous amounts of scientific expertise and advocacy, but also political will, leadership, creativity, and funding as well. A vast majority of Americans support these initiatives. Nationally, nearly 680 million acres are needed to achieve the goal. In California, eight million more acres are needed.

30 by 30 is not just a catchy slogan. It's essential that we protect natural and working lands to address loss of plant and animal diversity and provide wildlife movement corridors amidst our rapidly changing climate. California is a biodiversity hotspot, uniquely hosting about one third of all species found in the nation. The responsibility to protect these species rests squarely on us all. And we know all too well that climate change is here: California's wildfires and floods have devastated vast portions of the state, causing loss of human, animal, and plant life, including here in Orange County. The conversion of natural lands to urban uses increases emissions because both housing and cars emit greenhouse gases.

Land conservation provides a direct way to sustain biodiversity and combat climate change through willing seller programs like fee title acquisitions or conservation easements. Protected lands preserve habitats and connect landscapes together, providing wider ranging mating opportunities to sustain wildlife. Saving land also protects plants and soil which play a big role in carbon sequestration (capturing and storing carbon), thereby contributing to the solution.

Friends of Harbors, Beaches, and Parks is perfectly positioned to help Orange County meet the 30 by 30 goal. As just one example, our Green Vision Map, developed over two decades ago, is a vital tool for identifying lands that present acquisition opportunities. FHBP is also involved with the SoCal GreenPrint described in the next column. Together, and with proper vision and funding, we can make 30 by 30 a reality.

SoCal Greenprint



Kathleen Shanfield

By: Abigail Ramsden, The Nature Conservancy

Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks (FHBP) is helping shape a greenprint for Southern California: a web-based map that compiles existing data on the region's natural resources into a one-stop, user-friendly tool that makes it easy to integrate nature into future growth and conservation decisions.

The project, called the SoCal Greenprint, is led by The Nature Conservancy, an environmental organization, and the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), the agency responsible for coordinating issues related to regional transportation and growth. FHBP is providing expertise and input on how the tool can be useful for the planners, developers, organizations, and elected officials who are shaping the future of Orange County and beyond.

Set to launch this fall, the SoCal Greenprint will provide insight into how to consider nature when planning for the new housing and jobs that are needed to support the region. For example, developers will have access to information about water resources across SoCal, allowing them to consider the opportunities to recharge groundwater or protect water quality as part of project siting and design.

The SoCal Greenprint will also map out places that have been affected by climate change: examples include high-risk fire areas or places that suffer from what is known as the urban heat island effect, which are urbanized areas where the lack of green space or permeable ground means the sun's heat is retained, affecting community health. The SoCal Greenprint will include an innovative equity focus to highlight opportunities to increase access to natural resources for communities that lack green space or face environmental challenges.

The tool is voluntary to use and free of charge to everyone, providing easy access to information that can otherwise be difficult to compile or understand. Greenprint data comes from publicly available and vetted sources, and the tool will not create any new rules or regulations.

FHBP has been an essential partner in incorporating lessons learned from its Green Vision Map and in providing the perspective of diverse voices committed to preserving the natural resources that make Southern California a beautiful and biodiverse region to live, work, and play.

The Fight for Willowick



By: Flor Barajas-Tena, Rise Up Willowick

Without community and legal intervention, the 102-acre public land, also known as Willowick, would have been lost. However, after a hard-fought lawsuit against the City of Garden Grove, on April 19, 2021, the City commenced the 90-day Good Faith Negotiations for Willowick, between it and three negotiating parties. Willowick, which is in the City of Santa Ana, but owned by the City of Garden Grove, has the potential to become a large-scale park and a space for 100% affordable housing, depending on the outcome of the next 90 days. Willowick is adjacent to mostly working-class, Latinx, and Vietnamese neighborhoods.

Rise Up Willowick, a Coalition composed of organizations and residents from the Santa Anita and Buena Clinton neighborhoods in Santa Ana and Garden Grove respectively, has been working with The Trust for Public Land (TPL) for over two years. TPL's proposal of 90 acres of open space and 12 acres of 100% affordable housing reflects the needs and listens to the voices of residents in ensuring park equity and access. This is desperately needed considering the City of Garden Grove only dedicates 1% of its land to open space and Santa Ana only dedicates 4%.

Despite these efforts, we believe the City of Garden Grove is still trying to monetize this public land and despite the fact that it has to comply with the California Surplus Land Act (SLA). On April 16th, the City opened up the negotiations with a letter notifying TPL that it rejected TPL's appraisal. The City did this without first sitting down to negotiate. The letter asserts that Willowick should be appraised for \$90 million, which given the land's Open Space Designation, is not accurate. The City of Garden Grove is prematurely ending negotiations with TPL and is circumventing the SLA based on unsupported evidence.

The neighborhoods have been grateful for Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks' (FHBP) support on this effort. FHBP and others support preservation and partial development of this site. If you want to get involved protecting this open space AND providing affordable housing, we are asking you to sign the petition linked to the [@RiseUpWillowick](#) Instagram Page. This is an opportunity for a beautiful public park and accessible housing for the nearby Buena Clinton and Santa Anita neighborhoods as well as the larger Central OC area. The property is also along the Santa Ana River and its 50 mile trail.

Newport Land Saved!



By: Melanie Schlotterbeck, FHBP Consultant

While the second Supervisorial District seat was vacant in January, the OC Board of Supervisors moved forward with a proposal to sell one-third of an acre to a neighboring private resident for a mere \$13,000. What's the catch? This land was part of Upper Newport Bay Park and Preserve. Following the rules related to Park Abandonment, the County had to have two hearings and the second hearing was scheduled just weeks after Supervisor Katrina Foley took office.

By way of background, the land had been included as part of a dedication from The Irvine Company to the County of Orange as permanent parkland for allowing development in Newport Beach in 1989. Supervisor Foley immediately asked for the item to be delayed while she did research. Meanwhile residents and non-profits organized to stop the park sale—writing letters of opposition.

Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks focused its comments on the violations of the Irrevocable Offer of Dedication (IOD). Because of our Park Legacy project described on the newsletter's cover, we knew right where to go for information. The main concerns were the apparently illegal and precedent-setting decision of the proposed abandonment and sale of the parkland.

Conversion of this land to private ownership, abandonment or sale of the property, and/or breach of the IOD would be a violation of the property's terms of use. And if sold, the land would revert back to The Irvine Company. Further, historical documents show the land had a perpetual easement for open space and passive public uses like hiking, biking, and picnicking—which could not be rescinded.

Friends of the Back Bay was formed to collect the needed 200 signatures to stop the sale. More than 1,200 Orange County voters signed the petition, which was submitted to the County. And after viewing the property, Supervisor Foley asked the item be removed from the agenda—ultimately stopping the park abandonment and sale. We are so grateful for her leadership and for listening to residents.

With new state laws, the property could have had an accessory dwelling unit put on it with spectacular views of the Bay—completely ruining the park experience. The same neighbor also illegally erected a fence on the County parkland. The County will now be requiring its removal.

Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks (FHBP) works to protect the natural lands, waterways, and beaches of Orange County. Learn more at:

www.FHBP.org



Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks
P.O. Box 9256
Newport Beach, CA 92658

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Trail Pilot Program Launches



Melanie Schlotterbeck

By: Tina Thompson Richards, FHBP Board Member

OC Parks launched a pilot program in three county parks intended to increase trail safety for all users.

Beginning June 1, select trails in Santiago Oaks, Aliso and Wood Canyons, and Laguna Coast are either designated for hikers/horses only, restricted to mountain bikers, or specified as one-way. The test program hopes to address trail use concerns including conflicts between users, habitat impacts, trail quality/conditions and overuse, user and wildlife safety, and insufficient enforcement.

Right now 45 OC Park Rangers oversee some 60,000 acres of wilderness that accommodates hikers, bikers, equestrians, runners, birdwatchers, and protected wildlife and plants. The number of trails in these areas is limited by funding and land use restrictions. OC Parks and trail users must find the balance for recreational uses while protecting the finite and sensitive natural resources.

When identifying current multi-use trails for the pilot program, OC Parks considered safety, feasibility, and connectivity. At Santiago Oaks, designated use and direction are being tested on the Peralta Hills, Chutes Ridgeline, Yucca Ridge, Cactus Canyon, and Pony Trails. Peralta Hills is limited to hiking and equestrian use. The Chutes Ridgeline Trail is designated for bikers traveling downhill only. The parallel Chutes Trail is open to all users in both directions. Yucca Ridge and Cactus Canyon are available to all users, but are downhill only. The Pony Trail is limited to hikers and horses only.

In Aliso and Wood Canyons, the Lynx Trail is designated downhill for bikes only; bidirectional for hikers and equestrians. The parallel Cholla Trail is restricted to uphill only for bikes, but is bidirectional for other users.

In Laguna Coast the Laguna Ridge Trail is restricted to bikes going downhill only. Hikers and equestrians may use Big Bend instead. Old Emerald Trail is limited to downhill only for bikes, but bidirectional for other users.

The 10-mph speed limit remains in all parks. OC Parks will periodically assess the effectiveness of the temporary restrictions and invites user feedback at the parks or online at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/OC Parks Trail Study>



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Green Vision



Articles: 1 Ray Hiemstra, 2 Derek Ostensen, 3 Mike Wellborn, 4 Angela Lindstrom, 5 Kim Kolpin, & 6 Melanie Schlotterbeck

1 Poseidon Desalination Plant



A large, two-story house with a stone and brick exterior, multiple windows, and a covered front porch. The house features a prominent stone chimney and a covered front porch with a dark roof. The exterior is a mix of light-colored stone and brick. There are several windows, including a large arched window on the left and a smaller arched window on the right. The house is surrounded by a lawn and some landscaping.

was coordinated by The Conservation Fund with assistance from Hills For Everyone. The eastern ridgelines of the Park have been a priority for conservation for over 40 years. The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority will close escrow on both soon. Thanks to the support of FHBP and others on these projects.