



March 3, 2021

Submitted electronically via email to: ocparkscommission@ocparks.com

Joe Muller, Chair & Commissioners
OC Parks Commission
13042 Old Myford Road
Irvine, CA 92602

Dear Chair Muller and Commissioners:

This letter serves as an introduction, or re-introduction for others, to our organization: Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks (FHBP) and our goals for regional conservation opportunities.

Background

In 1997, ten Orange County environmental volunteers created the non-profit to organize a new consolidated approach that strengthened and coordinated the voice of parks, water, open space, and environmental education groups.

The main event, which crystallized the concerns of regional conservation leaders was the reorganization of County government in 1996-1997 in the wake of the loss of funds through state reallocations and the County bankruptcy. The vision to form a countywide parks and open space advocacy and support group now became a mandate. The organization was named after the parks department, then called: Harbors, Beaches and Parks.

Our mission is “to promote, protect, and enhance the harbors, beaches, parks, trails, open spaces, natural preserves, and historic sites in Orange County.” Over the last 20+ years, we created a unified voice for conservation and community groups working on local environmental and park issues.



Green Vision Coalition & Map

The Green Vision Coalition was formed and comprises some 80 conservation and community groups. The Coalition collectively supports finding or creating funding for parks, open space, and water quality. Our first major task was the creation of the Green Vision Map, which documents lands that have been protected, those in need of protection, and those threatened by development. The map is available on our website (www.FHBP.org) for download and it is updated annually.

In addition to this Coalition, one of FHBP’s primary focus areas is to support acquisitions of natural lands in and

around Orange County. As seen on the map, the red and orange parcels are possible sites for conservation opportunities. FHBP wholly supports acquisition for open space purposes by the County of Orange the following Orange County properties (in alphabetical order):

1. Esperanza Hills (County unincorporated)
2. Joplin Ranch (Trabuco Canyon)
3. Newport Banning Ranch (Newport Beach)
4. Saddleback Meadows (Trabuco Canyon)
5. Trails at Santiago Creek (Orange)
6. West Coyote Hills (Fullerton)
7. Willowick Golf Course (Santa Ana)

Safe Trails Coalition

We are also one of the founding members of the Safe Trails Coalition (www.SafeTrailsCoalition.org). The goal of this coalition is to find a balance between recreational use and habitat protection on our parklands (local, regional, state, and federal). Many of the lands protected in Orange County have additional conservation related requirements through state and federal planning tools. Those requirements must be upheld.

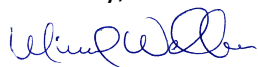
To this end, **FHBP wants to provide our preliminary support for the proposed Pilot Program in Santiago Oaks Regional Park, Aliso & Wood Canyons Wilderness Park, and Laguna Coast Wilderness Park.** It is our understanding that these parks were identified because of the high number of mountain bike users and where observed/alleged user incidents and injuries have occurred. Based on our review of the materials, we believe there to be a benefit to looped, one-directional trails. We also believe this is not the time to allow or introduce the e-bike component onto County trails—except where they are already allowed.

We believe FHBP's goals align with those of OC Parks: to ensure the trail system is maintained to provide for appropriate recreational use—that does no further harm to habitat, wildlife, or people. Further, we continue to support education efforts for trail users and park visitors, as well as enhanced enforcement by OC Parks staff of trail rules.

Conclusion

We remain available to answer any questions, provide additional background to you and staff, and support OC Parks' efforts to provide quality visitor experiences in Orange County's exceptional natural lands. We also offer to provide a short presentation of our work, organization, and support of the regional trail and park system.

Sincerely,



Michael Wellborn
President

CC: Orange County Board of Supervisors
Stacy Blackwood, OC Parks Director