

Outdoors

in Orange County

Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks Summer 2023



Jean Watt (left) in the garden with her parents (1940s), (center) as a Newport Beach Councilmember (1980s), (right) speaking at the Orange Coast River Park Gala (2008).

Jean Watt: The Ultimate Visionary

By: Theresa Sears, FHBP Board Member

Jean Watt co-founded Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks (FHBP) in 1997 as a residents' group determined to protect parklands when county officials had little interest in natural open space. FHBP grew to become the umbrella organization it is today, embracing environmental interests and issues across the spectrum.

FHBP was not Jean's first foray into community activism. When her family started spending summers on Balboa Island in the 1930s, no one could imagine that Jean's childhood experiences in that undisturbed setting would influence her to play a leading role as she grew up in the preservation and protection of open space, waterways, and habitats of that area.

Jean followed family tradition and attended Stanford, where she got degrees in Economics and Political Science. She went on to become a registered nurse. In 1953, Jean married and moved to Newport Beach. As the mother of four children, she immersed herself in Parent-Teacher Association and Girl Scouts, serving as President of this, Treasurer of that. Without hesitation, Jean always jumped right in.

In 1974, Jean co-founded SPON (Stop Polluting Our Newport) with the goal of protecting and preserving Newport Beach's unique environment. It focused on keeping Upper Newport Bay undeveloped, clean, and natural. She was President for 14 years and SPON didn't limit itself under her leadership. It tackled land use issues, traffic congestion, building density, loss of

open space, and protection of natural resources using every tool available.

As she neared retirement age, Jean launched into a political career. She was elected to the Newport Beach City Council in 1988 and served as the "people's advocate" for two terms. She was named Citizen of the Year in 2013.

Jean loved people. For her, community activism was about the people you met, the friends you made and the relationships you developed, and the trust you built. She thrived on mentoring people and watching them succeed. She was always willing to let others shine. Jean was consistent, patient, caring, thorough, kind, persistent, inclusive, thoughtful, and open minded. She never overreacted and had a great sense of humor. She was also smart.

Perhaps her greatest gift was motivating and giving permission to those around her to be greater than themselves, to tackle tough projects and move city, county, even state policies toward the greatest good. She never asked someone to do something she hadn't done herself.

Jean's legacy has and will continue to impact generations to come.

Board Member Recruitment

FHBP is looking to grow its board and we are asking our supporters and donors if you or someone you know might be interested. Specifically, we are looking for individuals with experience in land use planning, conservation, bookkeeping, writing and communications, or public speaking. Our board meets every other month on the 4th Monday from 6:30 – 8:00 PM by Zoom. We require a resume, interview with our Nominating Committee, and review/approval by our Board. The process can take about two months to complete.

If this sounds like something you might be interested in, please reach out to: President@FHBP.org.





DRAFT

A Green Vision for Orange County...

This parcel-level map is the result of an ongoing collaborative project between Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks and local conservation and community organizations. It is a work in progress and intended for use as a general planning tool only.

Acquisition Opportunities

- Active Conservation Project
- Potential Conservation Land

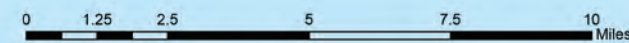
Other Land Designations

- Public Conservation Land
- Private Conservation Land
- Public Not Protected
- Easement / H.O.A. Land
- Golf Course / Cemetery
- Landfill
- Military Land
- Utility Land

Other Map Layers

- Nature / Education Center
- Stream Corridor
- Sacred Site
- County Boundary
- Watershed Boundary
- Highway

Data compiled from a variety of sources including First American Title, the Orange County Transportation Authority, OC Parks, the California GAP Program at the University of California, Santa Barbara, the California Resources Agency - Legacy Project (2023), the City of Brea, Irvine, and San Juan Capistrano, the California Protected Areas Database (2020), the California Conservation Easement Database (2020), and Flanders Marine Institute: Global Oceans and Seas, version 1 (2021). © FHBP 2023. All Rights Reserved.



Detailed descriptions of the categories used in this map can be obtained from the Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks website at: www.FHBP.org.

Article: 1 - Nicole Padron, 2 - Tina Thompson, 3 - Claire Schlotterbeck, 4 - Mike Wellborn, 5 - Linda Pemberton, & 6 - Norm Grossman

Project Updates

1 Lands Protected in OC

Rivers & Lands Conservancy recently acquired the 98-acre Watson and 306-acre Saddle Creek North properties in unincorporated Orange County. Located in the foothills of the Santa Ana Mountains near the Cleveland National Forest, the properties provide habitat protection in an important wildlife corridor frequented by mountain lions and a variety of wildlife species. The Conservancy also holds two conservation easements that connect to protected open

space near Chino Hills State Park: Kerrigan Ranch (16.8 acres) in Yorba Linda and Soquel Canyon Mitigation Bank (313 acres) in both Chino Hills and parts of unincorporated Orange County. In total, Rivers & Lands Conservancy stewards 3,045 acres of protected open space in Southern California.



2 Creek Protection Efforts Continue

Santiago Creek is 34 miles and starts in the Cleveland National Forest. A portion of the Creek runs from the Santiago Dam to the Santa Ana River. The portion that runs through East Orange has been cited for preservation in several specific plans dating back to 1972. The Creek may be getting renewed attention with a task force created by the City of Orange to explore restoration and public recreation options for the embattled waterway. Of immediate concern is a creek-

adjacent contaminated dump that the property owner refuses to clean up. Just downstream, another property owner plans to dump tons of construction waste atop a two-acre riparian habitat—also creekside. East Orange residents continue their five-decade fight to protect the Santiago Creek environment.



3 Brea Canyon Road Expansion Withdrawn

Orange County Public Works' proposal to widen the rural two-lane Brea Canyon Road to four lanes north of Brea raised concerns from advocates working to protect the Puente-Chino Hills Wildlife Corridor. The road expansion would have also assisted in the development of the hills that serve as the backdrop of north Orange County. This project could have severed the Corridor and it threatened the long-standing investment in natural resource protection in

the area. Near universal opposition by agencies and residents submitted as comments to the Draft Environmental Impact Report, as well as escalating costs, convinced the County to drop the project. Next step will be to remove the widening from the Master Plan of Arterial Highways.



4 New OC Park - Saddleback Wilderness

It was a beautiful sunny day on March 27, 2023, when County officials, park and open space representatives, and invited guests enjoyed the grand opening of Saddleback Wilderness Park—a new OC Park. Located in the hills just west of Irvine Lake, the park is on the former site of the extinct Saddleback Motocross Park. Now utilized in a bit more sedate form, the hills were green, the wildflowers were out, and the views were tremendous.

Saddleback Wilderness Park is only accessible through scheduled self-guided and docent-led public programs with advance reservation. Public access opportunities began on Saturday, April 1. For more information visit: OCParks.com/irvine-ranch-open-space.



5 Fund Created to Protect Wetlands

The Los Cerritos Wetlands Fund was established in 2019 by a group of conservationists, landowners, and businesses with a shared interest in preserving the Los Cerritos Wetlands and its surrounding watershed. Their vision is a protected ecosystem for future generations. The Fund aims to bridge a funding gap by supporting projects focused on the conservation, management, restoration, and enhancement of wetland and upland habitats. It also facilitates environmental planning, permitting, and public

access. Through grants, the Fund empowers individuals and organizations aligned with its objectives. The first Listening Event was held at the Aquarium of the Pacific, and the inaugural grant cycle will be announced soon. Stay tuned.



6 Statewide Coalition Advances Local Projects

Power In Nature, Laguna Greenbelt, Inc., and FivePoint will host a press event and tour for elected officials to celebrate the Irvine-Laguna Wildlife Corridor in the coming weeks. This multi-benefit corridor traverses a highly urbanized portion of Irvine to connect the Santa Ana Mountains with the South Coast Wilderness. This project has been ranked as a first priority for climate resiliency by the 30x30 Southland Regional Power In Nature Coalition. Additionally, this year marks the 10th

anniversary of the City of Irvine's adoption of the Irvine Wildlife Corridor Plan for the Corridor's central portion - a 2.5-mile long section in the Great Park funded and implemented by FivePoint. Stay tuned for more information!



Recent Policy Wins!



By: Amy L. White, FHBP Consultant

Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks (FHBP) is pleased to announce that in early February of this year, the Regional Council of Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) unanimously approved a Regional Advanced Mitigation Planning (RAMP) policy framework. RAMPs are a proven tool for expediting infrastructure and development projects by planning comprehensively for required mitigation to reduce environmental impacts. SCAG's 2020 Regional Transportation Plan anticipated projects using the RAMP could generate nearly a billion dollars for conservation. This is incredible news for our region!

FHBP collaborated with numerous conservation, social equity, and environmental justice groups, as well as housing advocates and transportation agencies, to advance the RAMP policy framework. SCAG's decision was widely supported and ensures included projects are streamlined while critical conservation efforts are realized. The environmental community and building industry aligned to support this program that benefits the whole community. It was a great example of all community stakeholders working together for common goals.

As part of the RAMP approval, FHBP also advocated for the associated Greenprint's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to have a seat specifically reserved for a member of the conservation community. SCAG's Energy and Environment Committee already unanimously voted to support our request, so we're thrilled the Regional Council agreed, as well. Having a seat at the table for environmental and conservation interests furthers our goals of building a healthy future for SCAG residents and visitors, while guaranteeing environmental interests are integrated into the critical discussions shaping the outcomes of the Greenprint.

FHBP's final piece of amazing news is that our very own Green Vision Coordinator, Melanie Schlotterbeck, was appointed in May to serve on the TAC in the environmental and conservation seat! She is a great choice to represent our community's interests given her extensive background working for smart policies that protect our local environment. FHBP applauds SCAG for honoring Melanie's extensive institutional and local knowledge and her passion for conservation.

Community Partnership



By: Amy L. White, FHBP Consultant

Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks (FHBP) is actively working on Connect SoCal, a plan developed every four years by the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG). Connect SoCal 2024 fulfills the federal mandate for a Regional Transportation Plan and the state mandate for a Sustainable Communities Strategy. To fulfill our own policy goals related to Connect SoCal, in April of this year, we applied for and were awarded a grant from SCAG to be a Connect SoCal Community Partner. We are honored to be the sole conservation non-profit chosen to participate. As a community partner, FHBP was responsible for reaching out to our friends and allies to explain SCAG's process for developing Connect SoCal 2024. We also collected feedback on what policies our community wants included to protect the environment and realize conservation outcomes.

SCAG's process to develop Connect SoCal is an opportunity for everyone in our six-county region to share their thoughts on important issues that affect our everyday lives, and FHBP is active in ensuring the environment gets the proper attention. While the environment is one policy "pillar" of the Connect SoCal plan, conservation participation guarantees the policies reflect this priority.

During the months of April and May, FHBP hosted a Spanish translated webinar about Connect SoCal 2024, presented on the plan's process at two environmental community meetings, and posted many informational items on myriad platforms. We also created a survey that assists our future advocacy regarding what environmental and conservation policies should be included in the updated Plan.

The policies included in SCAG's Connect SoCal 2024 should reflect what the community wants, but the community must actively participate to ensure the policies are appropriate. FHBP will continue to advocate for smart initiatives in Connect SoCal, so the region's local planning agencies make decisions informed by the public. We'll continue to expand interest from community-based organizations and non-profits about the strategies SCAG and its member agencies (transportation commissions, cities, and counties) will use to meet housing, transportation, and economic targets while also reducing greenhouse gas and vehicle miles traveled.

Conservation Workshops



Melanie Schlotterbeck

By: Melanie Schlotterbeck, FHBP Consultant

Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks (FHBP) received grant funding to offer workshops to tribes, non-profits, community groups, social and environmental justice organizations, and land trusts to help promote the state's goal of protecting 30% of California's lands and coastal waters by 2030 (30x30). Of course, our aim is to ensure Orange County based groups get the benefits of this information so that we can individually and collectively advance properties on the Green Vision Map.

These free virtual webinar-based events are offered the fourth Thursday of every month—except November, which will be the fifth Thursday—from 10-11:30 am. As part of our effort to be inclusive and accommodate the needs of a range of participants, the events include live Spanish simulcast, closed captioning, and are posted on YouTube for later review. Registration details are available on the FHBP website: www.FHBP.org.

The first workshop (April) focused on three of the 10 strategies the California Natural Resources Agency identified as ways land can be protected through 30x30. Three other workshops on the remaining seven strategies are scheduled. The second workshop (May) highlighted funding opportunities for organizations to apply for to fund acquisitions, capacity building, climate resilience projects, and more. June's workshop focused on tools and tips for land conservation.

By teaching other organizations how to complete an acquisition or restoration project, we are helping bring expertise, skills, and knowledge to the region that not only helps projects close to us get protected or restored, but also contributes to the larger effort of 30x30. Based on the state's analysis in May 2023, there are 24.8 million acres protected (24%) and 524,000 coastal acres protected (16.2%). There is room for improvement, but we are off to a good start.

FHBP has consistently provided the community groups and non-profits in Orange County and beyond with the tools they need to be successful. And, with luck, funding, and willing sellers, additional lands will be conserved because of our collaborative work. If you or an organization you work with would like to attend these workshops, visit our website to register: www.FHBP.org.

CEQA Under Attack



By: Gloria Sefton, FHBP Vice President

The Little Hoover Commission, the state's independent oversight agency, has been holding hearings on the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) since March of this year. The current study of CEQA focuses on the recurring debate around California's premier environmental law. Critics complain that CEQA holds back housing construction, infill development, and infrastructure projects. On the other side are those, including Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks (FHBP) who strongly credit CEQA for keeping California beautiful, healthy, and livable.

Enacted in 1970, CEQA provides the tools to understand a project's environmental impacts and allows decisionmakers to determine if those impacts are adequately mitigated. Often, a project's impacts disproportionately affect disadvantaged communities that, without CEQA, may not have a voice. In some instances, FHBP and its partners have challenged inappropriate development plans under CEQA where environmental impacts could not be mitigated to insignificant levels. In cases we've been involved in, CEQA has improved mitigation, safeguarded regional parks, protected habitats, and even funded fire protection planning in a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone.

The Commission's study on CEQA has prompted FHBP to support CEQAWorks (www.CEQAWorks.org), a coalition of nearly 200 environmental justice and conservation organizations working to keep CEQA strong. CEQAWorks disseminates facts about CEQA, including independent studies that show that CEQA is not a major impediment to housing production or a drag on the economy, and that CEQA litigation rates are low.

FHBP has attended and testified at the Little Hoover Commission hearings held thus far. After the June hearing, the Commission will report whether changes to CEQA or the CEQA process are merited. With proposals in trailer bills weakening CEQA, FHBP launched an action alert requesting calls to the Governor. Your voice is crucial in keeping CEQA strong to foster public participation in evaluating projects that have an impact on California's citizens and its rich resources. Consider reaching out to your State Senator or Assemblymember to let them know you support CEQA.

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



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Trip Reveals Visitor Duty



Melanie Schlotterbeck

By: Melanie Schlotterbeck, FHBP Consultant

Having just returned from a trip to many of California's state parks (and a few national parks), I noticed a few things. Every park had a signpost near the main entrance dedicated to informing visitors about the park rules. Second, the park brochure also included information about the park, its trails, and the rules. Park managers can post information, put it in a brochure, or share it on social media—but ultimately, it is the responsibility of each park visitor to learn and follow the rules.

Familiarizing yourself with these rules in advance of the visit has several benefits such as: reducing staff time educating visitors about the rules or enforcing them, makes you familiar with the do's and don't's in advance of enjoying an activity, and keeps more people safe!

I also learned on my trip that sometimes people rely on apps for information. This can be helpful, but it can also be flat wrong. For example, there are apps for drone users to learn where they can fly unmanned aircraft. Unfortunately, the app may post that the park allows drones, but the park has a sign on the ground showing that it isn't allowed. Who do you trust? You trust the park.

Oftentimes on a trail you reach a decision point and need to pick which way to go. If it is signed, then you know you are on a legal trail authorized by the Park. If there is no sign, the first question should be "how do I stay on an authorized trail?" Apps like AllTrails may show lots of trails, some of which are authorized and some aren't. I had an instance in the Cleveland National Forest, where the AllTrails app showed a loop I had planned, but when I got to a decision point—the loop contained land that was private and I would have been trespassing taking that route.

Form great habits and check the park's website before you head there to understand the current situation, potential closed trails or dangers (like flood, erosion, etc.). Having more recreational enthusiasts take greater personal responsibility and accountability will help our parks and park staff and sets a good example for those you recreate with to model your behaviors. Enjoy the outdoors!



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