

ALISO and WOOD CANYONS WILDERNESS PARK



OPEN HOUSE
and
INFORMATION FAIR

February 21, 2006

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COUNTY OF ORANGE

RESOURCES & DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

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February 14, 2006

RE: Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park
Resource Management Plan
Open House – Information Fair!

An Open Letter to the Citizens of Orange County:

The County of Orange, Harbors, Beaches, and Parks invites you to participate in establishing the goals for the future of Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park.

Considered one of Orange County's most loved natural open spaces, Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park is a valuable asset for Orange County, particularly among many reasons, for its rich and diverse natural environments and trails recreation. Anyone who enjoys hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, nature walks, birding, plein-air painting, photography or natural history, will revel in their experience of this park.

Whether you are one of the many park enthusiasts already enjoying the park's natural beauty and recreation or have wanted to learn more about the park; HBP would greatly appreciate hearing from you and moreover your attendance at the Open House – Information Fair hosted by Harbors, Beaches, and Parks, February 21, 2006.

This Information Fair will be highlighted by the first in a series of community involvement workshops by LSA Associates, Inc.

Exhibits and photos will be on display that relate to the parks natural and cultural resources, as well as the volunteers and support groups. Information will be discussed about upcoming activities including: field trips in the park and design workshops.

LSA is a community and environmental planning firm with nearly 30 years of experience with a variety of open space, recreation, and resource based projects, with expertise in open space, trails, resource management, and GIS. LSA has completed numerous open space and park resource assessments, resource management plans, trails plans and feasibility analyses throughout the state.

LSA has assembled a strong experienced and effective team uniquely qualified to prepare the Resource Management Plan. The Dangermond Group is a parks, recreation,

and resource conservation planning firm with expertise in operations, and financial planning. Dale Flowers is a public and stakeholder facilitator, having worked extensively with California Department of Parks and Recreation.

A vitally important component of this Resource Management Plan planning process will be community participation. Your input will assist our resource experts in creating a balance amongst the competing interests to determine the best management practices to manage the natural resources of the park and allow for compatible recreation.

Please reserve these future dates for Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park – Resource Management Plan’s site tours and workshops:

Open House – Information Fair
Soka University of America
Pauling Classroom Theatre (216) and Outdoor Piazza
Tuesday, February 21, 2006
5:30 to 9:30 pm.

March 25, 2006 Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park – Participant Field Trip (date subject to change)

May 24, 2006 – Soka – Workshop – Evaluate Management Alternatives (date subject to change)

July 26, 2006 – Soka – Workshop – Present RMP (date subject to change)

On behalf of the County of Orange, the Resources and Development Management Department invites you to attend and share your ideas. Please, join us.

Thank you,

Kevin Thomas
Director, Harbors, Beaches, and Parks
Attachment: Agenda

AGENDA

February 21, 2006

Aliso & Wood Canyons Wilderness Park

Resource Management Plan

Open House – Information Fair

Being held at

Pauling Theatre/Hall

Soka University of America

1 University Drive

Aliso Viejo, CA 92656-4105

This initial meeting is to generate public understanding and enthusiasm for the Resource Management Plan (RMP) that is about to be prepared for Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park (AWCWP). Participants at the meeting will become acquainted with the park's natural resources, recreation, stakeholders, project goals and planning schedule. This evening provides an opportunity for stakeholders to both express their opinions and listen to the points of view of others.

5:30 p.m. Public Open House Gathering and Information Exchange

6:30 p.m. Welcome, Introductions, Project Purpose & Goals

- ❖ Wilderness Park Classification
- ❖ Natural Community Conservation Plan & Habitat Conservation Plan
- ❖ Long-Term Vision
- ❖ RMP: Goals and Schedule
- ❖ Natural Resources
- ❖ Recreation
- ❖ Public Involvement
- ❖ Project Outcomes and Products
- ❖ Questions, Comments and Answers

7:30 p.m. Participants Discussion: Identify Issue, Concerns, & Opportunities

8:30 p.m. Participants Insights & Expectations for Achieving Project Success

8:45 p.m. Close and Announce Future Field Trip & Public Workshops

9:00 p.m. Return to Open House Gathering & Informal Discussions

County of Orange – Harbors, Beaches, and Parks thanks Soka University for generously providing the wonderful Linus and Ava Helen Pauling Theatre/Hall and outdoor piazza for this Open House. For campus map see www.soka.edu. for more park information see www.ocparks.com.



ALISO and WOOD CANYONS WILDERNESS PARK

Workshop Introduction

As part of the process for creating a Resource Management Plan for the Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park, a series of workshops are planned as means for the communities and interests surrounding the resource area to help share their thoughts and shape the management plan and park.

The workshops are intended as forums for engagement for you and other members of the community regarding key discussion points pertaining to the Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park resource area. The planning team includes an array of professionals that will compile prior studies, map and assess and analyze the resource area including contextual factors, management needs and existing public use patterns. However, your help is needed in determining the optimum balance between all the different planning considerations. The workshop process therefore, along with other survey and outreach efforts, enable the involvement of you and other members of the community to express your concerns, identify issues and opportunities and then ultimately shape the various plan alternatives and final preferred alternative.

The Open House – Information Fair workshop tonight initiates the public input part of the process with the exchange of information about the preserve area. Various organizations and interest groups have been asked to bring displays and pertinent background information pertaining to their area of interest. The session will then involve a facilitated dialogue regarding issues and concerns and then opportunities. All of which will be recorded for plan input.

Our next step will involve a field trip to allow participants to experience the wilderness park and see first hand specific points of concern and or opportunities. Following that session we will meet again to explore and develop strategies and solutions for incorporating the various functions of the wilderness park in a compatible manner. Subsequently you will be asked again to provide input regarding selecting and shaping the preferred management plan alternative.

Resource Overview



Setting

The Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park encompasses approximately 4,000 acres of open space that includes the hills, canyons, and floodplain surrounding Aliso and Wood Canyons and portions of the Laguna Canyon/El Toro Cliffs area. The park's landscape consists of rugged topography characterized by steep hillsides surrounding deep canyons. The landscape ranges from lush, oak woodlands to broad expanses of grassland and coastal sage scrub. The diversity of the landscape and topography provides spectacular views and opportunities for a variety of visitor experiences. The steep topography coupled with conservation efforts by the County and others have ensured that most of the open space remains undeveloped and natural resources preserved. The park is designated as a habitat reserve.

The Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park is bordered on the north and east by residential and commercial development associated with the communities of Aliso Viejo, Laguna Niguel, and Laguna Woods. Residential areas also border the west side of the park in the Temple Hill (a.k.a. "Top of the World") vicinity of Laguna Beach. At its southern end, the park borders Aliso Creek Golf Course. Soka University is a small private college also located adjacent to the park that overlooks Wood Canyon.

Public open space located adjacent to or near the park includes: Moulton Meadows Park and the City of Laguna Beach Open Space, Laguna Niguel Regional Park, Laguna Coast Wilderness Park, and Crystal Cove State Park.



Existing Facilities

The park's location within a growing metropolitan area with good highway access and opportunities for use year-round have made it an extremely popular recreation destination for local residents and regional, national, and international visitors alike. Visitors enjoy the rugged topography, steep hillsides, and deep canyons accessed through the park's 30-mile network of trails. The park offers many opportunities for recreation use, including hiking, running, mountain cycling, equestrian use, nature viewing, birding, painting, photography and wilderness education. Hitching rails located at the park entrance, Wood Canyon at Mathis Trail, and at the Old Sycamore Grove accommodate equestrian uses, and a family rest area located under the Sycamore Trees provides for small gatherings in the park. Visitors may find maps at the Visitor Center and Orange County Natural History Museum located at the park main entrance (staging area) and at many of the park trail heads. Those that enter the Orange County Natural History Museum can visit the small gift shop and view the animal exhibits and other interpretive displays depicting the natural history of the area.

Primary public vehicular access to the park is located from Alicia Parkway near Aliso Creek Road. Visitors enter the park at this location, park their vehicles at the staging area and continue west to the confluence of Aliso and Wood Canyons. Trails from Laguna Beach open space areas also provide limited access into the park. Public access into Wood Canyon is permitted on designated trails only, and trail use is not currently permitted south of the Aliso and Wood Canyons confluence.



Natural Resources

Coastal sage scrub, chaparral, and annual grassland are the three major plant communities, each covering approximately one-third of the site. Coastal sage scrub is widespread on slopes, except in the southernmost portion of the park and along Aliso Creek above Wood Canyon. Chaparral co-exists with coastal sage scrub in many areas but is most common at higher elevations and in the southern extreme of the park. Annual grassland is found primarily along Aliso Creek and in lower Wood Canyon, with a large isolated patch located at Moulton Meadows.

Several additional plant communities are less common in the park. Oak woodland intermixes with sycamore woodland in Wood Canyon, and with chaparral throughout the northwestern area of the park. Riparian vegetation is found along the length of Aliso Creek and in the lower portions of Wood and Mathis Canyons. Grassy wetlands/marsh are found along Aliso and El Toro Creeks. Significant concentrations of native grasses occur in the western portions of the park, often at the edge of coastal sage scrub areas.

These plant communities include a number of sensitive plant species including: many-stemmed dudleya, Pomona rattleweed, Orange County Turkish rugging, Palmer's grapplinghook, aphanisma, western dichondra, Laguna Beach dudleya, scrub oak, hummingbird sage, ocean spray, and crown beard.

Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park constitutes a major portion of the native habitat preserved in the San Joaquin Hills. For this reason, it is very important for the



maintenance of healthy populations of large mammals such as coyotes and bobcats. The park also serves as a refuge for several sensitive wildlife species, including the California gnatcatcher, southwestern pond turtle, San Diego horned lizard, orange-throated whiptail, pacific pocket mouse, great egret, black-shouldered kite, northern harrier, sharp-shinned hawk, Cooper's hawk, ferruginous hawk, cactus wren, yellow warbler, and yellow-breasted chat.

Cultural Resources

The park contains a wide array of archaeological features that reveal a complex pattern of prehistoric land use and settlement. The types of prehistoric cultural resources represented within the park include open air shell middens, rock shelters, and stone tool manufacturing and re-sharpening sites. The varied and abundant archaeological resources contained within the park represent a valuable source of information about the prehistoric land use of the region over a long period of time, as well as a source of anthropological information about cultural ecology, adaptation, and interaction. The sites and their collections are important for the public interpretation of local prehistory, general anthropological concepts, and the science of archaeology.

The lands within the park boundaries were historically part of the *Rancho Niguel*, granted to Juan Avila in 1842. Since that time, the park lands have been used for cattle and sheep grazing, and cultivation of barley and oats. The rise in population, floods, droughts, heat spells, freezes, plant disease, the 1933 earthquake, and the Great Depression created difficulties for area farmers and the subdivision of Rancho Niguel soon followed. Sites related to these historic land uses located within the park include: Moulton Cement Plant, Bacon House site, and Tischler Rock. In addition, at least two pieces of old farm equipment have been identified in the park. These artifacts have historic value as remnants of the historic agricultural operation of Moulton Ranch and also have interpretive value, as they may be used to help portray the history of the ranch.



Paleontological Resources

The Pecten Reef area is an exposure of the Monterey Formation, which is a marine unit of the middle to late Miocene age. It consists of a series of siltstones, mudstones, sandstones, diatomites and cherts. The Monterey Formation is rated high in paleontologic sensitivity with the Pecten Reef area considered a particularly sensitive site. This unit has yielded thousands of specimens of marine mammals, birds, fish, and reptiles, as well as invertebrates, microplanktons, bryozoa, and plants. Scientific understanding of the evolutionary trends, paleoenvironments and paleoclimates during the Miocene in Orange County is largely based on specimens collected from this formation. The Pecten Reef area is particularly important for both scientific understanding and public education purposes.



Workshop Checklist

Please mark your calendars to reserve the following dates; as it is important to the planning process that you provide a time commitment with respect to future park tours and workshops.

Proposed Public Workshops Schedule (Dates subject to change):

Tuesday, February 21, 2006, 5:00 p.m. – 9:30 p.m. – Open House – Information Fair

Saturday March 25th, 2006 – Participant Field Visit and Workshop

Wednesday, May 24, 2006 – Public Workshop

Wednesday, July 26, 2006 – Public Workshop

Workshop 1 will be held at the Pauling Hall at Soka University.

Workshop 2 will include a site field trip and the details and logistics for the second workshop have not yet been finalized. If you are planning on attending this session please let us know because space will be limited. For more information, please visit our website @ www.ocparks.com

Workshops 3 and 4 will be held at Founder's Art Gallery, Soka.

Your participation is greatly appreciated!