



SAN DIEGUITO RIVER PARK

THE HISTORY OF OUR CREATION



The story of the San Dieguito River Park, and how it came to be, and how it progressed, is the story of citizens like you who were concerned about preserving an important part of their community. These were real people, who didn't just stand by as valuable wetlands and natural open space were lost to development – they did something about it – and as a result, a regional park extending from Volcan Mountain in the east to the beach at Del Mar, an expanse of 55 miles, came into being, providing lasting benefits for animals and humans.

POLITICAL WILL

Grass roots pressure from citizens such as Karen Berger, Bob Sensibaugh and Diane Coombs was powerful, but would not have achieved the desired goal without the political will and leadership of certain key elected leaders who listened to these citizens and other early supporters and determined to make it happen. Among those political leaders, two stood out as early proponents: Abbe Wolfsheimer Stutz and Susan Golding.

Abbe Wolfsheimer Stutz (1938-2014) was a Founder of the San Dieguito River Valley Regional Open Space Park. Abbe was born to Colonel Irving Salomon and his wife Cecile Salomon in Chicago in 1938. The family moved to Rancho Lilac in Valley Center when Abbe was 7, where she attended school in a one-room schoolhouse on the ranch. Her father was a noted philanthropist who served as the United States Ambassador to the United Nations during the Eisenhower administration. During this period Rancho Lilac was visited by many notable persons, including Eleanor Roosevelt and President Dwight Eisenhower.

In 1985, Abbe ran for and was elected to the City of San Diego City Council, representing District One, which at the time included all of the City's jurisdiction in the San Dieguito River Valley - the coastal area of the City up to Via de la Valle, and eastward to and including Rancho Bernardo and San Pasqual Valley. Later the District boundaries were modified so that the Coastal area of the Park was in District 1, and the eastern area of the Park was in District 5. Abbe believed strongly that a Councilperson should leave a tangible legacy, such as parks and libraries. Almost immediately after her election, she began promoting her vision of a regional, open space park in the San Dieguito River Valley. She campaigned for SANDAG to create a regional task force, she created a citizens committee in her District to advise her about the proposed park, and she urged the creation of a separate government agency, the San Dieguito River Park Joint Powers Authority to design, implement and operate the regional park. Ramona Salisbury Kiltz was a member of Abbe's planning committee from its beginning, representing the League of Women Voters and the Rancho Bernardo Planning Board. She later served as Vice-Chair of the River Park's Citizens Advisory Committee.

Despite these accomplishments, Abbe felt that her biggest value was in helping to find the funding that would be needed to acquire private land in the river valley for public open space. For example, she secured \$1.3 million in Wetland Priority Funds from the City of San Diego that was matched by the County with \$700,000 in 1988 Bond Act funds to make the first JPA land purchase, the Birtcher Del Mar 88 property. She also negotiated \$2 million for the Park as part of the City of San Diego's approval of Highway 56.



POLITICAL WILL CONTINUED

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Abbe served as Co-Chair (with Supervisor Susan Golding) of the San Dieguito River Valley Regional Open Space Park Executive Committee at SANDAG in 1987/88, and as first Chair of the San Dieguito River Park Joint Powers Authority after its creation in June, 1989. She said that creation of the San Dieguito River Park was her proudest achievement during her term in office. She often said that coming to the JPA meetings each month was her dessert after the stresses of her other work responsibilities. After leaving office, she continued her support as an Advisory Board member of the San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy.

Abbe Wolfsheimer is recognized as a founder of the San Dieguito River Park whose invaluable contributions, dedication and zeal led to its creation and ensured that it would remain as a lasting legacy for future generations.

Susan Golding, born in 1945 in Oklahoma, was County Supervisor from 1985-1992, later becoming Mayor of San Diego. She was the daughter of Brage Golding, who served as President of San Diego State University from 1972-77. During her term as County Supervisor she encouraged comprehensive planning in the San Dieguito River Valley, created an Upper San Dieguito River Valley Task Force in her district, and worked successfully with SANDAG to approve the multi-agency task force in the form that was later molded into the San Dieguito River Joint Powers Authority as it still stands today. It was through her efforts that County staff and the other supervisors agreed to relinquish separate control for park planning in the San Dieguito River Valley and instead join in the new coordinated regional planning effort. Susan served as Co-Chair (with City Councilwoman Abbe Wolfsheimer) of the San Dieguito River Valley Regional Open Space Park Executive Committee at SANDAG in 1987/88. In that capacity she exerted leadership that helped define and shape the Park.



POLITICAL WILL CONTINUED

While we recognize the enormous role of these two leaders at the City of San Diego and County of San Diego, it is important also to note the roles of leaders at the smaller entities as well, in particular Jerry Harmon, City Council, City of Escondido, Margaret Schlesinger, City Council, City of Solana Beach, and Jan McMillan and John Gillies, City Councilmembers, City of Del Mar. Each of these players was instrumental in persuading their respective agencies to join and fully support this experiment in planning a multi-agency regional park.

Another key political supporter who had a long history with the San Dieguito River Park was Mike Gotch (1948-2008), who served on the San Diego City Council from 1979 to 1987, representing the Mission Beach/Pacific Beach area. He was an early voice for conservation who urged funds to be set aside for the acquisition of wetlands. Later he served briefly in 1989 as the first Executive Director of the San Dieguito River Park Joint Powers Authority, before becoming a State Assemblyman for two terms and later a policy aide to Governor Gray Davis. In the latter capacity he was instrumental in writing funding for the San Dieguito River Valley into a park bond act.

In studying the history of the San Dieguito River Park, certain individuals are clearly responsible for its creation, and we consider them Founders of the Park. But others had a very key role in it becoming the Park we know today. One of those was Emily Durbin (1933-1990), who played a monumental role in preserving the stunning 3,700-acre valley known as Pamo Valley, which is located just north of Ramona, and makes up a large part of the natural open space in the regional park. Pamo Valley was acquired by the City of San Diego in the 1950's for the purpose of damming the Temescal Creek that runs through it and converting the valley into a reservoir for the City of San Diego's long-term water needs and to serve as an emergency backup water supply. Emily was conservation coordinator and then county land use chairwoman of the San Diego Chapter of the Sierra Club in the late 1980's. Pamo Valley was dotted with rare Englemann oaks, with more than 300 acres of natural wetlands, home to golden eagles, bobcats, mountain lions and more than 100 species of resident and migratory birds. Emily argued that there were less environmentally damaging ways to enhance San Diego's water supply than by filling Pamo Valley with water. She suggested that the level of San Vicente Dam could be raised and that Lake Hodges should be used more efficiently so that overflow water didn't run out to sea and that it be connected to the City's potable water system so that imported water could be stored in the lake. In addition to her diligent pursuit of the agencies who would be issuing the permits for a future reservoir at Pamo Valley, she conducted weekly field visits for over six months to introduce people to the resources of the valley, trusting that they would become advocates when they saw its beauty and value.



POLITICAL WILL CONTINUED

She was named as an intervenor, along with the Sierra Club, in a federal and state lawsuit against the city of San Diego for its failure to comply with the U.S. Clean Water Act. Her efforts led to success in 1988 when the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) citing the Clean Water Act, ruled that in fact less environmentally damaging alternatives had not been studied, and threatened to overrule the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' approval of the project. As a result, the County Water Authority set aside their plans to make a reservoir at Pamo, and over time implemented the alternatives that Emily had advocated.

