



# 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.

## WATER QUALITY

The creation of the San Dieguito River Park began first with an effort to restore water quality in the San Dieguito Lagoon. Ask yourself, if you saw that the natural wetlands near your community were suffering from pollution and lack of fresh water, what would you do?

Here is what one young activist did for the San Dieguito Lagoon, and it has made all the difference.

When Nancy Weare was a young college student, she became concerned about the condition of the San Dieguito Lagoon. Nancy has a PhD in Earth & Planetary Science from Johns Hopkins. She first came to the San Diego area as a student at Scripps Upper Campus in 1969. She recalls that the San Dieguito Lagoon had closed up, there were mosquitoes, and it was a public nuisance. By the early 1970's, development in the upper river valley, roadway crossings, and creation of the Del Mar Fairgrounds had reduced the San Dieguito Lagoon to about 200 acres west of I-5 and its watershed to about 46 square miles west of Lake Hodges. This led to frequent closing of the river mouth, poor water circulation and extreme variations in salinity. The effect was to minimize habitats, decrease the diversity of wildlife, and to limit the lagoon's ability to rid itself of pollutants.

Because she was concerned about maintaining the quality and quantity of water flowing in the river valley, she decided to do something about it. She began by speaking to her friends and neighbors. In 1972, a group of local residents (including Dave Keeling, Joe Lang, Margaret Porter, Rachel Reed, Stuart Resor, Walta Ross, and Nancy Weare) brought a vision of a restored lagoon to the City of Del Mar along with a request to become a standing city committee.

In 1974 the City of Del Mar officially established the San Dieguito Lagoon Preservation Committee for the purpose of preparing a plan for protecting, revitalizing and managing the lagoon ecosystem. (In 2014 the City of Del Mar changed the name to the San Dieguito Lagoon Commttee). Local residents on the original committee included: John Bradshaw, Allan Carson, Don Coordt, Edward Coughran, Charles Keeling, Joseph Lang, Jeannie O'Toole, Margaret Porter, Gerald Winterer, Herb Turner, and Nancy Weare (chair). Working with City staff, the Lagoon Committee developed a more detailed restoration concept. They used this concept to carry out directed efforts to gather the support of the public, government officials and wildlife agencies statewide.



## WATER QUALITY CONTINUED

In 1979, an Enhancement Program for the lagoon west of Interstate 5 was completed utilizing funds granted the City of Del Mar by the Office of Coastal Zone Management , the California Coastal Conservancy, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Preparation of the Enhancement Program was carried out by William Healy, City of Del Mar Planning Director, and the Lagoon Committee, headed by its then Chairman, Don Coordt, along with Dr. Weare. The key issue addressed was how to secure a healthy lagoon by keeping the river mouth open for sufficiently long periods of time. Added to the Program was a schematic drawing of the entire San Dieguito River Valley from the ocean eastward to the mountains in Julian. This was an important critical reminder to readers that a healthy lagoon required an open and healthy watershed area and foreshadowed future efforts to preserve the 70-mile-long San Dieguito River Valley. Subsequently, a Conceptual Plan for the Expansion of the Lagoon (east of I-5) was adopted in 1989.

Dr. Weare has advice for others who are committed to making changes in their community: she says that to effect change, it is important first to make a plan (especially with visuals) so that people can actually see what you have in mind, and second, do the work to take it around everywhere and expose it to as many people and groups as possible. She said you can't keep the baby too close to the heart – you have to put it out there. And then you have to work to get that plan officially adopted. And that is what she did. As a direct result of her efforts, the City of San Diego and the San Dieguito River Park JPA ultimately acquired virtually all of the privately owned lagoon properties for public open space, and the California Coastal Conservancy and the California Coastal Commission encouraged Southern California Edison to restore 150 acres of coastal wetlands at the San Dieguito Lagoon, an \$86 million project that brought tidal water and flourishing wetland plants and aquatic life back to the San Dieguito Lagoon.

