

## Harbors, Beaches, and Parks: Riches to Rags?

### 1. Summary

Once considered a premier parks and recreation system, Orange County's Harbors, Beaches, and Parks (HBP), a division of the Resources and Development Management Department (RDMD), today has been wounded by underfunding, understaffing, and county bureaucracy. This results in operations that deal mainly with maintenance and safety issues while neglecting vision and growth opportunities.

Although HBP is entitled to \$67 million a year in revenue, \$7.5 million goes toward repaying the county bankruptcy and \$10 million is diverted to the state budget shortfall, leaving approximately \$50 million annually for operations, maintenance and capital expenditures. In practice, this is just enough to cover daily operations, leaving little or nothing for long-term maintenance or capital projects.

Slim, almost skeletal, staffing has become the norm for HBP. An understandable focus on "safety first" extends to personnel and results in understaffing in many areas, including program interpretation and wilderness protection. There are only 54 rangers assigned to the 39,000 acres of parkland, only some of whom are available to patrol the parks. The problem of staffing will be exacerbated when several key people are expected to retire in the summer of 2005.

Rank-and-file workers perceive a high degree of bureaucracy and extended delays in getting things done:

- HBP's concerns compete for priority with other RDMD concerns
- ideas are sent up the chain of command, but are not acted upon
- lower-level management cannot communicate with decision-makers

Dedicated and enthusiastic HBP employees work to ensure enjoyment of recreational facilities and open space by visitors. However, years of revenue diversion have left the infrastructure threadbare and crippled HBP's ability to expand parklands, facilities, and

#### Some Acronyms and Abbreviations in this Report

<b>ERAF</b>	Educational Resources Augmentation Fund
<b>H&amp;N</b>	California State Harbors and Navigation
<b>HBP</b>	Harbors, Beaches, and Parks
<b>HBPD</b>	OC Harbors, Beaches, and Parks District
<b>OC</b>	Orange County
<b>OCHD</b>	Orange County Harbor District
<b>OCSD</b>	OC Sheriff's Department
<b>RDMD</b>	Resources and Development Management Department

programs. The county is at risk of losing irreplaceable historical and cultural landmarks that contribute to its heritage and quality of life.

## 2. Introduction and Purpose

Harbors, Beaches, and Parks (HBP) is a division of Orange County's Resources and Development Management Department (RDMD). HBP manages facilities and programs associated with Orange County's cultural and natural resources. The facilities consist of more than 39,000 acres of parkland that include:

- eight urban parks
- eight natural parks
- five wilderness parks
- three nature preserves
- three harbors
- nine beaches
- five beach parks
- seven historical sites
- 225 miles of riding and hiking trails
- 157 miles of bike trails and trail staging areas.

In addition to managing facilities, HBP oversees and operates special programs.

- ***General public:*** Interpretive centers, Orange County Zoo, nature walks and talks, and special events
- ***Environmental resources:*** Natural resource preservation and archeological and paleontological resource preservation
- ***Harbor safety:*** Funding of the Orange County Sheriff's Harbor Patrol
- ***Business programs:*** Oversight and development of public and private partnerships, development and oversight of leases and concessions, as well as cooperation with nonprofit foundations and corporate sponsorships

The grand jury's purpose in studying the HBP division was to gain a general understanding of its operations and responsibilities; to learn its vision and goals for the future of Orange County's cultural and natural resources; to understand the business functions that support its operations, responsibilities, and goals; and to gain knowledge of the problem areas and proposed solutions.

## 3. Method and Scope of Study

Grand jurors:

- interviewed HBP management representatives and personnel to gather information on the division's operations
- spoke with park users, maintenance personnel, rangers, and interpretive center volunteers to gain an understanding of how the organization is observed by persons outside of the management arena

- attended Board of Supervisors (BOS) meetings, HBP Commission meetings, and HBP Historical Commission meetings in order to obtain information on the organization's current activities
- reviewed financial reports, various documents containing policies and procedures, and other written material providing regulations and governing requirements for HBP operations
- visited urban parks, wilderness parks, bike trails, hiking trails, beach parks, beaches, harbors, nature centers, interpretive centers, archeological and paleontological storage centers, and historical sites in order to gain a visual appreciation of the scope of HBP's operations and responsibilities

The study intends to reveal broad areas of concern rather than to pursue specific issues.

#### **4. Evolution of HBP and Current Budget**

*In the mid-1930s*, Orange County voters approved the redevelopment of Newport Harbor as a small craft harbor. The Orange County Harbor District (OCHD) was created, and the Orange County Board of Supervisors was its governing board.

The special district was established under and is governed by the California State Harbors and Navigation (H&N) Code, which provides for formation, governance, management, and financing powers of such districts. From time to time over the years, the H&N code was amended to enable changes in the structure of the original OCHD and to expand services for which district funds could be expended. Some code sections were added so that the initial planning for the creation of Dana Point Harbor could begin; others were added so that the district could acquire, improve, and maintain lands for public beaches.

*In 1971*, H&N codes were added for "inland parks and recreation areas." This major change enabled Orange County to merge its parks operations with the separate OCHD to form a single legal entity: the Orange County Harbors, Beaches, and Parks District (HBPD). Later code additions allowed for the expenditure of district funds for open space lands and recreational trails, for museums, and for promoting and advertising HBPD's programs and facilities.

*In 1979*, the Gann initiative established spending ceilings. In order to raise the spending limit of the county, in 1988 HBPD was dissolved and its revenues added to the county total. Harbors, Beaches, and Parks (HBP) was formed, and its assets were maintained separately from the county's general fund.

*In the early 1990s*, the state began diverting funds to the Educational Resources Augmentation Fund (ERAF). Virtually all entities funded through property taxes were required to contribute to the fund. As tax revenues increased, so has the diversion. In 2005, HBP was required to contribute \$11 million to the fund. Since the diversion began, HBP's contribution has totaled approximately \$87 million.

*After the Orange County bankruptcy in 1995*, HBP was required to contribute funds to repayment of the bankruptcy debt. This amount has increased from \$4 million to

\$7.6 million between 1995 and 2004. This figure is based on changes in the annual assessments. Over the past 10 years, debt repayment has totaled approximately \$62 million. This diversion will continue until the bankruptcy debt has been retired, currently estimated at another 12 years.

Thus, between the state ERAF diversion and the county debt repayment, HBP has lost a total of approximately \$152 million. The money has been deducted from HBP's operating revenue, leaving the remainder to fund operations, maintenance, capital improvements and growth. Many projects have had to be postponed or canceled due to lack of these resources. Four special districts have lost money to bankruptcy repayment and virtually all special districts have lost money to ERAF diversion. This study focuses on the foregone opportunities for HBP, alone.

## 5. Effects of Underfunding, Understaffing, and Bureaucratic Delays

The grand jury found effects of HBP's underfunding, understaffing, and bureaucratic delays in the following areas: Natural resources, cultural resources, facilities, public safety, trails, interpretation and education, and technology.

### 5.1 Natural Resources

Natural resources include open space, water and watershed, ecosystems, beaches, plants and animals, paleontological and mineral resources. The Orange County general plan calls for the conservation of these resources. Some challenges in this area are buffering of wilderness areas, funding, regulations, and curation of paleontology specimens.



Deteriorating beach infrastructure

#### 5.1.1 Wilderness Concerns

As rapid urbanization continues, the county has purchased or received donations of large tracts of land to be used for open space. The most pressing need currently is for corridors connecting these open spaces. The county wilderness system consists of entire wilderness regional parks and portions of natural regional parks. To date, the system includes the following existing and proposed facilities:

Orange County's Existing and Proposed Wilderness and Natural Wilderness Parks	Existing or Proposed	Location
Arroyo Trabuco addition to O'Neill Regional Park	existing	Trabuco Canyon
Black Star Canyon Wilderness Park	proposed	Cleveland National Forest
Caspers Wilderness Park	existing	San Juan Capistrano
Featherly Regional Park (portion)	existing	Anaheim

Orange County's Existing and Proposed Wilderness and Natural Wilderness Parks	Existing or Proposed	Location
Hot Springs Canyon Wilderness Park	proposed	San Juan Capistrano
Irvine Regional Park (portion)	existing	Orange
Laguna Coast Wilderness Park	existing	Laguna Beach
Limestone-Whiting Wilderness Park	existing	Trabuco Canyon
O'Neill Regional Park (2 zones inclusive of Arroyo Trabuco, above)	existing	Trabuco Canyon
Peters Canyon Regional Park	existing	Orange/Tustin
Riley Wilderness Park	existing	Coto de Caza
San Juan Canyon Wilderness Park	proposed	Cleveland National Forest
Santiago Oaks Regional Park (portion)	existing	Orange
Upper Trabuco Canyon Wilderness Park	proposed	Cleveland National Forest
Wetlands Area of Seal Beach Naval Weapons Station	proposed	Seal Beach
Weir Canyon Wilderness Park	existing	Anaheim

Experience has shown that it is not enough to maintain large “islands” of undeveloped land; there has to be some way for the animals to migrate between the islands. Accordingly, HBP funded the Orange County Cooperative Mountain Lion Study and the County of Orange Deer Telemetry Study. From these, the county has a clear map of what open space corridors are still needed.

Unfortunately, sometimes the acreage donated by developers does not fit these needs. Recently there was an offer of 1,100 acres in south county. Although the offer is generous, HBP has several reservations about accepting it. Large grants of acreage are also problematic from a funding standpoint. Although the idea of “wilderness area” implies little or no development, the county assumes liability for accidents, fires and watershed from these areas. These are large potential costs at a time when the county cannot afford to do more than put a fence around the area, if that. In addition, there are limited funds available to develop and maintain trails or interpretive centers, or to operate fee collection booths.

Other reasons for refusing land donations include:

- It is not in the needed open space corridor.
- It contains a drainage area which, as the surrounding land is developed, would carry increasingly urban runoff. As owner of the “creek bottom,” the county would be responsible for potentially very expensive water cleanup.

Additionally, some land donations come with “strings.” For example, the land may be deeded to the county with use restrictions placed in perpetuity, so that the county is unable to use it as a “swap” for more desirable acreage.

HBP tries to determine who would be the most appropriate steward for the property. Some land grants have already been turned over to the Nature Conservancy and other private environmental agencies for management.

Regulations have an increasing impact on the ability of HBP to manage the county park system. For example, the Natural Community Conservation Plan strictly limits the development of coastal sage scrub areas. In practice, this means if HBP wants to pave a small area for parking at a trail head, it must acquire and dedicate coastal sage scrub property elsewhere, as there can be no net loss of habitat. In addition, regulatory permission must be obtained.

HBP personnel are dedicated to the preservation of open and wilderness space in the county and strive to balance preservation with making the lands available for public enjoyment. However, underfunding and understaffing make this goal difficult to achieve.

### **5.1.2 Paleontological Resource Concerns**

Orange County was a leader in requiring developers to excavate and preserve archaeological and paleontological materials. As other counties adopted similar provisions, they also required developers to fund processing of the specimens to the point of identification. Orange County has chosen not to require funding for curation of the specimens. For years, specimens were delivered without cataloging or preparation, resulting in a facility full of undocumented, uncared-for specimens.

In two cases—the toll road construction and the Talega development—funding was required as part of the development approvals. The specimen collections from these two projects have been curated and identified and are currently on display in Ralph B. Clark Regional Park (Buena Park) and the Old Orange County Courthouse (Santa Ana).

The enormous collection of paleontological finds from all over Orange County is otherwise unfunded, unclassified, and mostly non-curated. In 1999, the county obtained a grant and used it to contract with California State University, Fullerton, to assist the county with its archaeological and paleontological collections. Between 1999 and 2004, the university and volunteers diligently catalogued the specimens and placed them in appropriate containers. However, the grant program ended prior to cleaning and identifying most fossils, leaving a warehouse full of unprocessed materials.

One of the most moving examples of the long-term problems with archeo/paleo curation that the grand jury observed was a pickup truck delivering numerous huge blocks of material excavated from a development site to the county storage facility. Inside the crowded, drafty building, a sole volunteer was patiently cleaning a small bone with a dental implement and brush. When new material is delivered by the pickup truckload, and old material is processed with dental picks, it brings up analogies to “shoveling sand against the tide.”

## 5.2 Cultural Resources

Cultural resources include historic buildings, structures, landscapes, and documents that represent Orange County’s heritage. The seven historical sites under the stewardship of HBP are:

Historical Site	Location
Heritage Hill Historical Park	Lake Forest
Irvine Ranch Historical Park	Irvine/Tustin
George Key Ranch Historical Park	Placentia
Arden Modjeska Historic Home and Garden	Modjeska Canyon
Old Orange County Courthouse	Santa Ana
Peralta Adobe	Anaheim
Yorba Cemetery	Yorba Linda

Many agree that the sites are important for a variety of reasons: Some portray a style of living from years past and enrich the understanding of our heritage; some have good use left in them and could be used for other, perhaps commercial, purposes or as interpretive centers or living history museums. Reuse of these facilities would avoid expensive demolition and save materials and craftsmanship that are costly or impossible to replace.

Funding for maintenance and repair has a higher priority than funding dedicated to growth and development. Acquiring additional historical landscapes seems out of the question, financially. However, jurors were told that innovative ideas for revenue generation are often lost in the bureaucracy. Although ideas are submitted, no decision or feedback is communicated to the staff. Employees are discouraged because their ideas are not being used. The stewardship of historical facilities is not given high priority.

Some money-making ideas have already been implemented. The Old County Courthouse, for example, is rented to filmmakers. Several of the historical sites are used for weddings and parties. More innovative ideas should be considered and implemented.



Lacking restoration is a building historians believe is the oldest in Orange County (guest house on the Modjeska property)

### 5.3 Facilities

HBP's facilities—buildings, grounds, roads and parking areas, fences, walks, trails, water systems, sewer systems, retaining walls, campgrounds, play yards, and more—depend on ongoing maintenance. Due to tight budgets, there has been a growing backlog of deferred maintenance. While necessary in the short run, this is not cost-effective, as deferred maintenance leads to deterioration of infrastructure that will cost more in the long run. HBP has an estimated \$1-2 million per year in deferred maintenance.

A distinction is made between routine maintenance (painting, cleaning, etc.) and capital expenditures (replacement, remodeling, renovation). Due to diversion of money from HBP for county bankruptcy and state budget deficits, the capital budget has been drained. The only money available for capital projects has come from donations and grants, and is specifically earmarked for certain projects. Often grants require the county to match funds with money that may not be available.

What little money has been available has been allocated on a "safety first" basis. For example, the playgrounds in all the parks are being retrofitted to comply with government regulations. This involves changing from square to round posts, eliminating exposed hardware, making sure play equipment meets minimum standards, etc. While "safety first" is the appropriate priority, this leaves little or no money for other types of maintenance or infrastructure investment.

As a result of a lawsuit, the county was required to make all restrooms compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. A \$4 million program, which was partially offset by a \$1.7 million grant from Proposition 12, enabled the county to perform some much-needed renovation while retrofitting the restrooms for compliance. To construct one restroom facility—a small block building with eight toilets—costs \$336,000. Of this, \$86,000 represents "soft costs," including plan checks and overhead from RDMD. Additionally, once a project is approved and funded, construction is handled by Public Works, and HBP loses the ability to monitor and influence the project. However, in the past two years, HBP has forged a closer working relationship with Public Works.

Examples of deteriorating infrastructure include:

- buildings at historic parks
- bulkhead at Newport Harbor
- watershed drainage
- warehousing of archaeological/paleontological specimens

***Buildings at historic parks:*** The buildings at several of the historic parks need extensive work. The George Key Ranch house needs a new roof and chimney (\$450,000 was allocated for this purpose by the board of supervisors in April 2005). Only one of the buildings at historic Irvine Ranch is usable. Estimates range from \$15-20 million to repair the buildings and construct a replica of the Irvine family home that burned down several years ago. The Old County Courthouse, currently housing the county archives, the county clerk-recorder (some functions), and several cultural and archaeological exhibits, is in

need of repair. The Modjeska House and other historic facilities need significant repair work as well.

**Bulkhead at Newport Harbor:** The Coast Guard pays HBP one dollar per year for its building in Newport Harbor. The bulkhead beneath the building is deteriorating. This is a capital item, and grants are being pursued to pay for replacement. RDMD has successfully obtained state grants to assist with Dana Point Harbor's bulkhead and launch ramp repairs. In addition, perhaps the Coast Guard should be asked for a contribution toward this vital need.

**Watershed drainage:** There is a chronic problem with watershed drainage to beaches. For example, at Aliso Woods Canyon, Aliso Beach outfall, and Poche Beach outfall, HBP is responsible for water quality. However, HBP has little or no control over contamination from sources upstream.

**Warehousing of archaeological/paleontological specimens:** Most acutely, the archaeological and paleontological specimens' warehouse is substandard for the needs of the collection. There is no air conditioning, no dust control, and no humidity control. These environmental controls are essential for the preservation of specimens and for the health of volunteers and curators. Substantial improvements were made to the facility in the 1990s. But, according to a public report from California State University, Fullerton, even with the improvements,

the facility remains undersized with respect to needed capacity and storage for present and future collections. Additional productivity-compromising limitations include: lighting that is generally substandard; dust/dirt that is pervasive owing to poor sealing of side panels and door jambs; the lack of restroom facilities; no temperature/humidity control for sensitive specimens and documents; work space that is cramped; and safety and security issues that are real problems, especially with regard to fire suppression and intrusion detection. In short, realistically, the facility can function basically only as a warehouse storage building; conditions necessary for the kinds of activities needed to develop a sustained curation program are lacking. This condition adversely impacts the level of volunteer effort and the day-to-day working conditions of trying to manage the collections. It is important to note, the



Orange County fossils in substandard warehouses

condition of the facility was assessed early on, so that potential capital improvements to the facility would be prioritized and their feasibility evaluated. *It was ultimately decided that money for capital improvements would not be funds wisely spent; any capital improvement money would be better allocated to improvements to a more workable facility* [emphasis added].

Although the Chestnut facility is less than ideal, the County HBP/Office of Cultural and Historical Programs has responded well to upgrades and requests for assistance, including: a new “lean-to” (carport-type) structure on the north side of the yellow building to house additional vertebrate fossil jackets; erection of new heavy duty racks and shelving along the northeast wall of the main records building; additional racks and shelving for the yellow building; electrical upgrade in the main warehouse building; repair of a ceiling heater; work crew manpower and forklift rental to move heavy items such as plaster jackets; and weed and pest control. (See Section 10, References, Item 4.)

Although the artifacts and fossils have been in the ground for thousands or even millions of years, they are now exposed to cycles of heat and cold, high and low humidity that can



Orange County fossils exposed to the elements

cause rapid degradation and loss of irreplaceable specimens.

HBP is responsible for the repair, maintenance, and accessibility of its facilities. As demonstrated in the areas above—historic buildings, harbor bulkheads, watershed drainage pipes, and archaeological warehousing—unless more money is made available for repair of HBP facilities, the problems will get worse, and will cost the county more in the long run.

## 5.4 Public Safety

As mentioned previously, HBP devotes considerable resources to public safety. Two areas of concern to the grand jury involved the granting of citation authority to park rangers and the provision of harbor patrol services by the sheriff’s department.

### 5.4.1 HBP Ranger Citation Authority

In the early 1990s, HBP began to gather information on providing the park rangers with the authority to issue citations. In mid-2004, the board gave HBP a deadline to gather the necessary information for a presentation to be made in early 2005.

At the March 2005 monthly meeting of the Harbors, Beaches and Parks Commission, staff presented a Park Ranger Citation Authority Implementation Plan. The Commission reviewed and recommended that the Orange County Board of Supervisors approve the Implementation Plan and related implementation

recommendations. However, as this report is being prepared, the plan has yet to be presented to the board for review and direction.

During the development of this report, the grand jury interviewed a variety of HBP administrative personnel, gathering information about the problems and advantages associated with the proposed program. A brief overview of the ranger program and information about the plan follows.

- Penal Code Section 831 identifies park rangers as being directly involved in and with public protection. Since 1991 the rangers have been considered peace officers, with their primary role being public safety for those visiting the county park system. However, they were never required to undergo the training and screening mandated for peace officers.
- New hires into the ranger program enter a training program of approximately 400 hours. The training does not include any instruction in the proposed citation authority plan, which is an additional 84 hours of classroom lectures.
- HBP will not invest the time to train rangers who are near retirement or those rangers who are not qualified for the citation program. Rangers not interested will be relocated to a position within HBP that is not involved with the program.
- Once the citation training has been completed, there are concerns that the traditional role of the rangers may change from facility and program involvement to a focus on law enforcement. Reduction in time for interpretive programs will limit the opportunities for the many young people coming to the park to learn about nature (see discussion in Section 5.6, Interpretation and Education).
- During the months of developing the citation plan, HBP staff identified 254 steps that would be required to get the plan fully implemented. Among these many considerations, five stand out as being vital and time consuming:
  - medical examinations
  - background investigations
  - psychological exams
  - training schedule
  - review peace officer hiring requirements and the effect on ranger hiring procedures

It is obvious to the grand jury that there are many obstacles to be overcome in order to provide citation authority to the rangers. In addition to the areas mentioned in this report, there are concerns being expressed by the employee union groups on the proposed changes in the ranger program. Will having citation authority inevitably change the role of park rangers as we know it today?

#### **5.4.2 Harbor Patrol**

The Orange County Harbor Patrol provides service to three harbors: Dana Point Harbor, Huntington Harbor, and Newport Harbor. The harbor patrol provides

firefighting and rescue services for boats, enforces boating laws in the harbors, and provides backup for the United States Coast Guard.

In the 1970s, the Orange County Board of Supervisors transferred harbor patrol supervision from HBP to the Orange County Sheriff's Department (OCSD). However, HBP provides total financial support, which amounts to approximately \$10 million per year or



On the left, Orange County Harbor Patrol headquarters, Newport Beach



Above, the dispatch desk at Orange County Harbor Patrol, Newport Beach

approximately 16% of HBP's total budget. This figure includes wages and benefits (medical and retirement), equipment, facilities, uniforms, and an 11-member dive team. HBP has no oversight responsibilities for the harbor patrol staff. The supervision of the harbor patrol remains with the sheriff's department.

During January and February 2005, HBP and OCSD management staff met to discuss the harbor patrol budget. It was determined that for FY 2005/2006 the harbor patrol expenditures will remain at the current spending level approved in FY 2004/2005. However, after these negotiations were completed, the sheriff's deputies received an across-the-board 8 percent wage increase over the next two years. This will add \$1 million in FY 2006-2007. It also will increase pension obligations.

The grand jury is concerned about the effect on HBP of the increased wage and benefit package for the sheriff's department approved in 2005 by the board of supervisors. Although HBP had no input into this decision, it is responsible for funding the increase for the harbor patrol personnel.

During the history of the current Harbor, Beaches and Parks and the former Orange County Harbors, Beaches and Parks District, non-sworn staff has performed harbor patrol duties. Whether with sworn or non-sworn staff, the harbor patrol is responsible for patrolling seven miles of county coastline. Patrolling 34 miles of city coastline with no compensation from those cities (San Clemente, Dana Point, Laguna Beach, Newport Beach, Huntington Beach and Seal Beach) is another responsibility.

The OCSD contracts police service to 11 Orange County cities. However, there are no contracts with any of the coastline cities that are supervised by the harbor patrol. The services provided as a backup to the Coast Guard are not subsidized by the funds the sheriff receives from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, nor are ERAF recovery funds paid to OCSD shared with HBP.

The business community around Newport Harbor generates large sums of revenue for the city of Newport Beach, but the city does not reimburse the county for services provided by the harbor patrol. Harbors and Navigation Code Section 5900.7 states:

If any portion of the harbor is situated within the boundaries of any incorporated city, the board of supervisors may enter into arrangements or contracts with the governing body of that city, upon such terms as may be agreed upon, for the purchase and maintenance of fireboats, patrol boats, sanitary and other equipment which the board deems necessary for the proper protection of the harbor.

In conclusion, HBP has no control over the scope or price of harbor patrol services, yet it bears the entire cost.

## **5.5 Trail System**

The trail system that will eventually extend from the mountains to the sea is a key component of county recreation. The trails are used by hikers, trail runners, bikers, and equestrians. The county master trail plan calls for nearly 655 miles of trails. When development takes place the county's goal is to obtain an easement from the developer for the trail right of way. The developer is often required to either build the trail or contribute money for its construction.

The grand jury learned there have been occasions when the county planning department has not coordinated with the trails office and developments have been approved and completed without the needed easements or construction.

It becomes very expensive, if not impossible, for the county to go back and obtain easements after development. Often, new residents are disconcerted to find that a trail is supposed to be located near their residences. Too, new cities in developing areas are often reluctant to enforce the county trails plan. For these reasons, it is necessary that the relevant agencies work together for the development of the master trails plan.

## **5.6 Interpretation and Education**

An interpretive program is one of the best ways to learn the significance and value of Orange County's natural and cultural resources. This hands-on approach leads to an understanding of the need to preserve resources. As the population becomes more diverse, the need to understand and protect the county's natural and cultural heritage is increasingly important.

HBP provides many interpretive programs, including guided tours, living history programs, natural history programs, environmental education, school tours, and public programs related to museum displays. As in other areas of HBP operations, lack of funding and lack of staffing have limiting effects on this important area.

The policies and procedures call for an interpretive specialist position to be part of the Special Programs Section of HBP operations. Currently, the position does not exist, and the special programs supervisor, along with various district supervisors, provides distant oversight over the interpretive programs. The strategic plan (see Section 7, below) provides for creation of the interpretive specialist position.

The policies and procedures indicate that when a new interpretive program is being considered, the facility staff should submit a plan to the special programs supervisor that addresses all aspects of the program. This procedure is not being followed and, consequently, HBP's special programs unit is often unaware of the goals, content, and costs of a new program.

Although the procedures indicate that the special programs section is responsible to provide interpretive training to park rangers and park ranger reserves, this is being done only occasionally. Again, there is no interpretive specialist to handle this type of training, and the special programs section does what it can in this regard.

The grand jury did not find any written procedures calling for assessment of the visitor's perception of the quality of HBP's interpretive programs or for the visitor's perception of the opportunities for learning. It did not find any standards at all by which HBP measures the success of its interpretive programs. No standardized queries or surveys of the public were evident.

## **5.7 Technology and Business Processes**

One of the bright spots in HBP has been the application of prudent business processes to park operations. HBP has exercised vision and growth by using technology to increase its efficiency and to advertise park amenities and opportunities. The operations division has taken the lead in exploring opportunities to save money and still provide quality service.

### **5.7.1 Website**

The public will find pertinent information concerning all HBP entities at [www.OCParks.com](http://www.OCParks.com). The well-designed site offers historical data on many of Orange County's harbors, beaches, and parks as well as information about the locations of the parks, the types of activities offered, fees, current events and programs, links to other related sites, and much more.

### **5.7.2 Reservation System Computerized**

On May 2, 2005, HBP replaced its outdated point-of-sale reservation system with a computerized reservation system. The new system improves customer service and efficiency by allowing real-time, secure access to reservations from any computer or calling area. When HBP processed the reservations manually, it charged \$12 per

reservation. HBP contracted with a company which charges the customer \$11 for a reservation, costing HBP nothing. HBP still receives a fee for the use of the facility (ball field, picnic area, campsite, etc.). If the customer wants to make a reservation for a facility which has already been booked, the computerized system gives information about alternative sites and dates throughout the system. This means that otherwise “lost” revenues can be captured, the facilities are better utilized, and users are happier. Users can access the system online at [www.OCParks.com](http://www.OCParks.com), or by calling 1-800-600-1600 to place a reservation through a call center.

### **5.7.3 Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP)**

The internal telephone system used to contact field personnel was run through a central switchboard. Given the movement of staff in the field, it was often difficult to contact them. HBP operations implemented a phone system using voice over internet protocol (VOIP), essentially connecting phones through the computer rather than over phone lines. Field personnel are now easily reached, and HBP has saved \$9,030 per month in phone costs.

## **6. Mitigating Factors**

Despite budget constraints, HBP personnel remain enthusiastic and focused on providing recreational opportunities to visitors and being good stewards of the county’s open space and wilderness areas. Staff members generate many innovative ideas for augmenting the limited budget and using staff time efficiently. Some of the ideas that have been adopted and are currently generating revenue are:

- rental of cell tower sites
- ads on the trash cans at county beaches
- offering RV rental storage
- obtaining fees for use of historic locales in movie production
- ensuring market rates for leasing and concessions

HBP calculates that volunteer efforts are valued at \$3 million per year. Donations are encouraged from businesses and individuals. There is some evidence that county regulations on use of donations limit HBP’s ability to generate these funds. For example, there are strict guidelines on naming county facilities, which may deter donors who want recognition for making contributions. There is no organized program to obtain in-kind donations from corporations or endowments from individuals.

## **7. Strategic Plan**

HBP is undertaking a large-scale strategic planning process, expected to be completed in 2006. It is establishing a vision statement and is currently obtaining public and staff input. The focus of the plan at this point is to: 1) Ensure HBP is organized to successfully complete its mission and 2) engage the public, BOS, and all stakeholders in the planning process. This will be accomplished through:

- optimizing facilities operations and efficiency

- optimizing protection of natural and cultural resources
- optimizing public education of natural and cultural resources
- supporting and maintain facility infrastructure to ensure public safety
- generating additional revenue

Because HBP's operations division expects to lose several key people to retirement this summer, it has already submitted a proposal for its portion of the plan. The plan calls for a complete revamping of the operations career path. Instead of being jacks-of-all-trades, the staff will have the opportunity to specialize in interpretive programs, maintenance or enforcement. Part of the staff rearrangement would permit better and more efficient deployment of groups of rangers to areas with greater need. For example, when weed abatement or storm damage repair is needed, a task force can be dedicated to the effort.

The development of the strategic plan is an opportunity for the county to divest itself of



Poche Beach after a storm

some holdings which are not considered to be regional, but rather local, in scope and which consume a disproportionate amount of resources. Two in particular are Thousand Steps Beach (Laguna Beach) and Poche Beach (Capistrano Beach). These properties have no public parking, are difficult and expensive to maintain, and are quite small. They could be better cared for by local entities. Recently, Ladera Sports Park, Buck Gully, and five pocket overlook parks have been relinquished by the county.

## 8. Findings

Under California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, responses are required to all findings. The 2004-2005 Orange County Grand Jury has arrived at the following findings:

- 8.1** *HBP Autonomy*: HBP's status as a division of RDMD subjects it to an additional layer of bureaucracy and HBP funds are being used to subsidize RDMD overhead.
- 8.2** *Developers' Land Grants Proposed*: Land grants from developers sometimes do not meet the needs of the county's wilderness plan.
- 8.3** *Archeological and Paleontological Treasures*: The county's archeological/paleontological program is underfunded and lacks appropriate housing and curation for archeological and paleontological treasures.
- 8.4** *Feedback for Employees' Ideas*: Innovative ideas by employees often receive no feedback.
- 8.5** *Construction Projects*: HBP loses the ability to control or influence projects once they are approved and funded.

- 8.6** *Deferred Maintenance*: Maintenance is being deferred, creating substantially higher future costs and potentially causing irreparable harm to harbors, historical facilities, paleontological specimens, and infrastructure.
- 8.7** *Developers' Specimen Processing Rates*: Developers are not charged to cover the cost of preparing archaeological and paleontological specimens to the point of identification and curation.
- 8.8** *Park Ranger Citation Authority*: HBP, the OC Board of Supervisors, and employee unions are working together to overcome obstacles to provide citation authority to park rangers.
- 8.9** *Harbor Patrol Services*: HBP has no control over the scope or price of harbor patrol services, yet they bear the entire cost.
- 8.10** *Easements and Dedicated Land*: There is a lack of coordination between HBP and the planning department in dealing with developers to ensure the completion of wildlife corridors and trail systems.
- 8.11** *Visitor Feedback*: HBP has no organized system of obtaining feedback from visitors.
- 8.12** *Interpretive Specialist*: HBP does not maintain an interpretive specialist to oversee interpretive programs as called for in its policies and procedures.
- 8.13** *HBP's Business Practices*: Business practices have saved money and improved services in HBP's operations division.
- 8.14** *Donations, Endowments*: There is no organized system to pursue donations, endowments, or other philanthropic contributions.
- 8.15** *HBP Holdings*: Some HBP holdings are neither regional in scope nor cost-effective.

**Responses to Findings 8.1 and 8.9 are required from the Orange County Board of Supervisors.**

**Responses to Findings 8.1 through 8.15 are requested from the Harbor, Beaches, and Parks Division of the Orange County Resources and Development Management Department (RDMD).**

**Responses to Findings 8.1 through 8.15 are requested from the Orange County Resources and Development Management Department (RDMD).**

## 9. Recommendations

In accordance with California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, each recommendation will be responded to by the government entity to which it is addressed. The responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Officer of the Superior Court. Based on the findings, the 2004-2005 Orange County Grand Jury makes the following recommendations:

- 9.1** *HBP Autonomy*: Autonomy for HBP should be explored in light of the needs of the county (see Finding 8.1).
- 9.2** *Developers' Land Grants*: Land set aside as open space by developers should be negotiated in concert with the county's master corridor and trail plan (see Finding 8.2).
- 9.3** *Archeological and Paleontological Treasures*: Priority should be given to finding appropriate funding and housing for the county's archeological and paleontological treasures (see Finding 8.3).
- 9.4** *Feedback for Employees' Ideas*: A protocol for encouraging, tracking and responding to employee suggestions should be established (see Finding 8.4).
- 9.5** *Construction Projects*: A provision for continuing HBP input on construction of projects should be established (see Finding 8.5).
- 9.6** *Deferred Maintenance*: Careful analysis of the future costs of deferring maintenance is needed to ensure projects are prioritized properly (see Finding 8.6).
- 9.7** *Developers' Specimen Processing Rates*: The board of supervisors should charge developers the same rate for processing and curating archaeological and paleontological specimens as other counties do (See Finding 8.7).
- 9.8** *Park Ranger Citation Authority*: HBP, the OC Board of Supervisors, and employee unions should continue to work together to provide citation authority to park rangers (see Finding 8.8).
- 9.9** *Harbor Patrol Services*: All beneficiaries of harbor patrol services, including coastal cities, should contribute to costs. HBP should be consulted about the appropriate level of service to be provided by harbor patrol at HBP expense (see Finding 8.9).
- 9.10** *Easements and Dedicated Land*: The county planning department should better coordinate with HBP so RDMD speaks with one voice to ensure easements and dedicated land in new developments meet the county's needs (see Finding 8.10).
- 9.11** *Visitor Feedback*: HBP should establish an ongoing program to obtain and use information from visitors regarding their experiences and perceptions of parks and programs (see Finding 8.11).

- 9.12 *Interpretive Specialist:*** HBP should hire an interpretive specialist or establish an alternative way to ensure interpretive programs are appropriate, accurate, cost-effective, and consistent system wide (see Finding 8.12).
- 9.13 *HBP's Business Practices:*** Business practice analysis should be extended to all levels of HBP (see Finding 8.13).
- 9.14 *Donations, Endowments:*** Establish a centralized program for obtaining donations, endowments, and other philanthropic contributions (see Finding 8.14).
- 9.15 *HBP Holdings:*** As part of the strategic planning process, HBP lands and facilities should be analyzed for their appropriateness as county-level holdings (see Finding 8.15).

**Responses to Recommendations 9.1 and 9.9 are required from the Orange County Board of Supervisors.**

**Responses to Recommendations 9.1 through 9.15 are requested from the Harbor, Beaches, and Parks Division of the Orange County Resources and Development Management Department (RDMD).**

**Responses to Recommendations 9.1 through 9.15 are requested from the Orange County Resources and Development Management Department (RDMD).**

## 10. References

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## **11. Acronyms and Abbreviations in this Report**

ERAF	Educational Resources Augmentation Fund
H&N	California State Harbors and Navigation
HBP	Harbors, Beaches, and Parks
HBPD	OC Harbors, Beaches, and Parks District
OC	Orange County
OCHD	Orange County Harbor District
OCSD	OC Sheriff's Department
RDMD	Resources and Development Management Department