

## ORANGE COUNTY PERSPECTIVE



# Park Would Serve Many Purposes

Orange County has had no shortage of battles over development. But each passing year brings the increased awareness that residents need large stretches of open space, not just small parks surrounded by houses and businesses.

Last week, backers of a plan to create a regional park in Huntington Beach, Costa Mesa and Newport Beach unveiled their proposal. To be known as the Orange Coast River Park, the 971 acres would include wetlands, marshy areas, a nature preserve and an existing park. The area also would serve as a wildlife corridor.

Earlier this month, the Board of Supervisors approved spending \$1 million to help buy a part of Coal Canyon. Keeping that area from being transformed into a housing development would benefit animals such as mountain lions and deer that need larger areas to roam.

The canyon links Chino Hills State Park and the Cleveland National Forest near the border between Orange and Riverside counties. An underpass beneath the nearby Riverside Freeway serves as a wildlife corridor.

Plans call for the county's money to be pooled with state funds to buy the property from a private owner. Without a connective corridor, the

Chino Hills park would be isolated in a sea of homes. Biologists said that would make it far less attractive to animals and birds.

In coastal Orange County, supporters of the proposed park said the natural flow from Fairview Park down to the wetlands near the Pacific Ocean would preserve open space and a range of habitats.

Cities and the county would continue to manage the properties they own. Much of the land would be maintained as nature preserves and passive parkland.

Keeping as much land as possible free from development can go far to maintaining Orange County's quality of life. That's especially true in the northern and central parts of the county, which have less open space than South County.

It can be difficult to coordinate several public agencies, private landowners and nonprofit groups, identify sources of funding and map out plans. In the case of the coastal park, a nonprofit organization received planning funds from the three cities and the California Coastal Conservancy. If all works as planned, the coastal area can be a refuge for those who increasingly feel hemmed in by development.