



Senator Dianne Feinstein Joins the County of Orange and its Partners in
Launching the Upper Newport Bay Ecosystem Restoration Project
October 11, 2005

SANTA ANA, California — Today (Tuesday, October 11th) at 1:30 p.m. at the Peter and Mary Muth Interpretive Center located at 2301 University Drive in Newport Beach, Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-California) will join Orange County Supervisor Jim Silva and other state and local officials in launching the first year of a three year ecosystem restoration project in Upper Newport Bay. The Upper Newport Bay Ecological Reserve is one of the last remaining wetlands in southern California and continues to play an important role in providing critical habitat for a variety of migratory waterfowl, shorebirds and endangered species as well as native habitat while providing a picturesque backdrop for recreational activities such as bird watching, kayaking and trail hiking.

“Upper Newport Bay is an Orange County treasure with national significance. This effort will ensure that our local treasure is protected for generations to come. Of all County facilities, the Upper Newport Bay is a haven for naturalists, environmentalists as well as recreationalists,” stated Supervisor Jim Silva.

Silva continued, “More than one million visitors each year actively utilize the Upper Newport Bay. Birders, joggers, bicyclists, hikers, kayakers, horseback riders, educators and others enjoy the Bay’s natural beauty and its variety of opportunity.”

Senator Dianne Feinstein added, “This effort marks the beginning of the effort to restore the Upper Newport Bay. The Upper Newport Bay is an oasis in the midst of southern California sprawl. It provides a vital refuge for the people of Orange County to escape urban life. But the ecosystem of this bay is in danger -- due to decades of increasing sedimentation. That's why I am pleased that the Senate Energy and Water appropriations bill includes \$7 million for this project. I will work to see that this funding remains in the final bill.”

In addition to the natural habitat and recreational benefits the Bay provides, it also serves as a critical water quality element, filtering pollutants carried downstream, prior to emptying directly into the ocean.

“Today’s effort protects the Bay from any future degradation while adding an important natural water quality benefit that actually begins to filter pollutants out of the water prior to reaching our ocean...not only is Upper Newport Bay a sanctuary for endangered species and natural habitat, it is an important natural tool for protecting our beach water quality,” stated Larry McKenney, Manager of the County’s Watershed and Coastal Resources Division.

McKenney continued, “This project has relied on an innovative partnership that includes several cities and special districts as well as Orange County CoastKeeper and The Irvine Company.

The three year project is estimated to cost approximately \$39 million with project costs being shared by federal, state and local agencies as well as the private sector. The first year of this project consists of constructing the ecosystem restoration component (approximately \$11.4 million) and will be predominantly financed with non-federal funds (granted by the California Coastal Conservancy to the County of Orange), along with the remaining allocated Fiscal Year 2005 Federal funds (\$500,000). The ecosystem restoration component will include restoring habitat islands and adjacent channels, restore wetland habitat near 23rd Street, construct a new least tern island and enhance “hot dog” island.

The second and third year entails dredging Sediment Basin II, and is hoped to be financed with federal funds as appropriations are made available in 2006 and 2007, at a total cost of approximately \$5.0 million. The remaining efforts will involve the dredging of Sediment Basin I and III, and will be constructed when federal funds become available. Dredging of these sediment basins will allow the ecosystem restoration work to function effectively and meet the Regional Water Quality Board’s total maximum daily load criteria for sediments within the bay.

The project consists of:

- Dredging 2.3 million cubic yards of material from the Upper Bay to deepen and expand two in-Bay basins;
- Relocating a tern island from the upper basin to the lower basin;
- Wetlands creation/restoration along Northstar Beach, Shellmaker Island, and a section of the northwestern edge of the upper basin (Bullnose);
- Side channels will be restored around the least tern island in the upper basin, New Island, Middle Island, and Shellmaker Island.

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