

MARCH IS WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH: WOMEN SAVING THE PLANET **by Supervisor Linda Parks, March 2009**

March is Women's History Month and this year's theme is "Women Saving the Planet." It makes me think of the many women in our region who have taken stands and worked tirelessly to "save the planet." These women could not have done otherwise because their desire to protect the environment is part of their very make-up, a make-up that also includes guts, nerve, passion, and persistence. It is through their efforts, and the efforts of others like them across the nations, that give future generations the ability to enjoy beautiful forests, thriving wetlands, abundant wildlife, and clean oceans and skies. From Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* documenting the impact of DDT on wildlife, to Fran Pavley who has established landmark laws to rein in greenhouse gas emissions, to activist Heather Wylie who ended her career with the Army Corps of Engineers when she kayaked down the L.A. River to show that it is "Navigable" and warranting of protection, to Carol Olson and Carrol McDonald who gathered thousands of signatures for an initiative to prevent the game hunting of mountain lions, to Jean Harris and Roma Armbrust who with gentle strength encouraged elected officials to preserve the Ormond Beach wetlands, to Hueneme High School student Erica Fernandez who joined the successful fight to stop the LNG terminal off the coast of Oxnard and teamed up with Jane Goodall starting a Roots and Shoots organization to encourage youth to be conservationists—they all share the knowledge that without people to stand up for the environment, it will be lost.

While I've only room to profile a few in this column, I will be presenting profiles of a dozen women from our area who have distinguished themselves saving our planet, at this year's Women's History recognition luncheon at Cal State Channel Islands March 12th.

We are fortunate to live along the foothills of the Santa Monica Mountains with its diversity of wildlife in a Mediterranean climate that offers native grasslands, oak woodlands, beautiful ocean views, wildflowers, and rare and endangered plants. Margot Feuer (from Malibu) understood the importance of preserving these mountains and had already earned many battle stripes challenging coastal freeways, a nuclear power plant, and countless housing tracts when she met Sue Nelson and Jill Swift. Together these three ladies are largely responsible for protecting one of our nation's most scenic mountain ranges. Along with Sue and Jill, Margot successfully fought for legislation that created the 153,000 acre Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. Margot had joined Sue (from Tarzana) and Jill (from Brentwood), who were mothers who liked to take their families hiking in their neighborhood hills. Sue published a local neighborhood newsletter and helped defeat a neighborhood freeway. Jill was a Sierra Club member who began leading hikes on her "Sundays in the Santa Monicas," a hiking series that continues today. When Jill announced a "March on Mulholland" and the crowd swelled to 5,000, they knew they had a movement on their hands. By focusing their efforts on Washington D.C., and receiving the support of Congressman Anthony Beilenson, these three pioneers helped establish the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, one of 15 national parklands approved in legislation and signed by President Jimmy Carter in 1978.

Margot later joined Save Open Space, a non-profit organization headed by Mary Wiesbrock (from Agoura Hills) who, along with her neighbor Sue Boecker (from Oak Park), also took a path to activism for open space that started on the trails they hiked with their families. In the beginning we were a handful of women with toddlers who joined to protect the rolling hills that separate the San Fernando Valley from the Conejo Valley, areas known as Jordan Ranch and Ahmanson Ranch. In the end, we were women who took an incredible journey in order to continue to walk the trails. Through protests in front of corporate headquarters of the developer, leafleting, fundraising, demonstrating, attending countless meetings, hearings, and events, connecting with environmental groups, suing, testifying, knocking on doors, writing comments to EIR's, organizing events, lobbying in Sacramento, hiring experts, campaigning for candidates to help, pleading with congressmen, putting up websites and defending them in international court, preparing radio ads and airing them on KNX, and finally bringing in celebrities, cities, the Mayor of L.A., the County of L.A., and finally the Governor of California; these ladies learned how to fight for something their children and all of our children's children can enjoy.

People who protect the environment often do so because they realize that if they don't act, it won't be saved. These women working to "save the planet" proved Margaret Meade's quote: *"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."*