

‘Heart Park’

Restoring our Coast for the People

Long before we lazed along our comfortable beaches, Spanish explorers plied our coastline for territories to conquer for their homeland. And for thousands of years before the Spaniards arrived, there lived a thriving culture of Native Americans right here in Redondo Beach enjoying an abundant life rich in natural resources. Known as the Tongva Indians, their life was centered on a coastal wetland where the AES power plant sits today.

This wetland was formed by annual wave and tide action washing over the dunes. The evaporation process precipitated large amounts of salt that the Tongva used for bartering with other tribes and sustaining their own culture. Just adjacent and underneath this brackish wetland were two large fresh water aquifers that still exist today, one of which sits a mere three feet below ground level. There was also a mix of coastal vegetation which supported the native wildlife – and both migratory birds and native wild fowl flourished. And of course, there was the ever present and abundant sea life that made the local Tongva so successful for thousands of years. They had it all!

Shortly after the start of the 20th century, Pacific Light & Power decided to build the first power plant on part of the wetland. The easiest way to meet the cooling needs of these plants was to site them on the coast and use sea water for a process called ‘once-through cooling’, now banned for new plants. Pacific Light & Power became Southern California Edison, and they expanded to several areas on the coast such as El Segundo and Morro Bay. Edison also added capacity and expanded their footprint in Redondo Beach over the years and completely eliminated this wetland in the 1950s.

The current facility was bought by AES Corp. for approximately \$250 million in 1998. It is old and inefficient by modern day standards, and operates infrequently - mostly in the summer. It is now surrounded by 10,000-12,000 residents per square mile in a coastal zone that is ‘park poor’ and congested by any measure. Several large development projects have been proposed to replace this plant when its useful life is exhausted, and all have been soundly rejected by the local community.

The Heart Park vision is to restore as much of the coastal wetlands as possible so that native birds will return, and migrating birds will use it as a resting place on the Pacific Flyway. And a native plant garden that people can stroll through to enjoy what was once so abundant. We also envision educational facilities and an expansion of the SeaLab, and to house an interpretive center to honor the natural history of this area – this area is also a California State Landmark (#373).

The land, approximately 65 acres, is large enough to have an active recreational area with the potential to house an aquatic center, soccer fields, and walking paths that connect to the Hermosa Greenbelt - something for everyone to enjoy in a waterfront park that will improve all aspects of the region. This is the vision that won the advisory vote in March of 2005.

Now, the newly formed **South Bay Parkland Conservancy** is looking to all the various conservation groups such as the Sierra Club, Surfrider Foundation, Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission, Heal the Bay and State Coastal Conservancy to help us with our struggle to restore this piece of the Santa Monica Bay. It’s a wonderful opportunity!

Please join our group! We need your support. <http://www.SouthBayParks.org>

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