

NEWS RELEASE



SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY

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Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, Los Angeles City Councilmember Antonio Villaraigosa dedicate new hillside park near Downtown

Heidelberg Park protects one of the best California black walnut woodlands in Southern California

Los Angeles--At a dedication ceremony at the top of a winding hillside road in the historic Mount Washington neighborhood near downtown Los Angeles, City Councilmember Antonio Villaraigosa joined the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy to celebrate the preservation of one of the last California black walnut woodlands in Southern California. Local residents, who have banded together for more than ten years to protect the beautiful pristine canyon, exuded pride at the neighborhood's ability to secure the eighteen acre property as parkland in lieu of the development of as many as twenty new houses.

"I am thrilled to have played a role in preserving this beautiful canyon," said Councilmember Villaraigosa, a longtime champion of urban parkland. "Parks and open space are essential to the quality of life--for our children, our families and our communities," he added. As Speaker of the Assembly, Villaraigosa authored the \$2.1 billion Villaraigosa-Keely Act, the urban parks initiative approved by voters in 2000.

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Heidelberg Park is the second large natural park permanently protected by the Conservancy in the Mount Washington area, known for its twisty streets, city views and rural character. The Conservancy purchased nearby Elyria Canyon Park in 1994, with the energetic support of the Mount Washington Community.

“In fifty or one hundred years, students of urban planning will look at what we have done today and say, ‘Of course they maintained a natural park in a densely populated area near four schools,’ ” said Joseph T. Edmiston, Executive Director of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. “We are simply doing the right thing, and looking to the future of this great community.”

Heidelberg Park provides a rare glimpse of the natural appearance of Mount Washington prior to European settlement of the Los Angeles basin. The park’s steep slopes have harbored one of the best remaining examples of California black walnut woodland in all of Southern California. The California Department of Fish and Game ranks the ecological community as “very threatened.”

The California black walnut is a native, deciduous tree that grows up to 50 feet tall. The aromatic trees live to be about 100 years old. The Heidelberg woodland sports bright green leaves in early spring and beautiful yellow fall foliage. Native people made use of the walnuts, which taste much like commercially-grown English walnuts, as a nutritious food source. Native Americans used the shells as dice and in making baskets. The trees provide food and excellent cover for wildlife and critical roosting and nesting sites for numerous songbirds and birds of prey. Over 100 species of birds have been sighted in Heidelberg Park.

The property was purchased for \$468,000 with funding from the California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Act of 2002 (Proposition 40). Located within walking distance of four neighborhood schools--

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Mount Washington Elementary, Aladama Elementary, Buchanan Elementary, and Monte Vista Elementary—the park provides the potential for science education and nature studies, as well as passive recreational use. It will be managed by the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority.

The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy is dedicated to the preservation and acquisition of open space and parkland throughout Southern California.

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