

Laguna gains national honor as a Historic American Landscape



“Seascape Laguna Beach Downcoast” depicts the Laguna Beach coast looking south with the Hotel Laguna in the distance. Laguna Beach has received a Historic American Landscape distinction. (Courtesy of Tom Lamb)



By **Bryce Alderton**

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Laguna Beach and its coastal wilderness areas recently joined the ranks of Mount Vernon in Virginia and Golden Gate Park in San Francisco by gaining recognition as a Historic American Landscape.

The National Park Service, in partnership with the American Society of Landscape Architects, decided to give Laguna the designation, allowing it to join the ranks of more than 700 sites similarly honored across the United States, according to a news release from local advocates.

The distinction does not confer any special environmental protection but rather recognizes the area as part

of the country's heritage and development, in this case, Laguna's role in the early history of coastal towns in Orange County, according to the landscape society's website.

In addition, the documents gathered locally for submission to the park service for review — photographs, maps, painting reproductions and a historical narrative — will be housed in the [Library of Congress](#) in Washington, D.C., and available for public viewing, giving Laguna national stature.

"During the past few decades, the concept of historic preservation has grown beyond protecting a single building or urban district to include the historic landscape that provides the setting and context for a property," according to the landscape society's website, suggesting that preservation is the goal even when no mandate for such exists.

The American Society of Landscape Architects and National Park Service established the Historic American Landscape program in 2000.

Ann Christoph, a landscape architect and former Laguna Beach mayor, first heard of the honor in 2009, when a Cal Poly Pomona professor called her asking for nomination ideas.

Christoph told other groups, such as the South Laguna Civic Assn., about the landscape program, and about two years ago Laguna's push began in earnest when resident Ron Chilcote organized a committee to gather the supporting documents. It is known as the Committee for Preservation of the Laguna Legacy.

"I'm committed to anything that would explain to the world what this beautiful area is all about," said Chilcote, a member since 1975 of [Laguna Greenbelt Inc.](#), a grassroots organization that has worked to protect wildlife habitat in Orange County, including Laguna Coast and Aliso and Wood Canyons wilderness parks.

"This presence will serve not only present generations but acknowledge contributions of past generations."

The narrative, Christoph said, "tells the story of how the landscape influenced the condition of the city and greenbelt today. It was inspired by the artists who came here."

"Laguna's history, including isolation from other development, its role as an arts colony, and its leadership in environmental preservation all stem from the characteristics and disposition of the landscape itself," said the news release, from the Committee for Preservation of the Laguna Legacy.

Laguna Greenbelt members will discuss the recognition and unveil a book titled "Laguna Beach and the Greenbelt: Celebrating a Treasured Historic American Landscape" at the organization's annual meeting at 7 p.m. Feb. 15 at the Neighborhood Congregational Church, 340 St. Ann's Drive. The meeting is open to the public.

Committee members, who are not all Laguna Greenbelt members, and their duties include Barbara Metzger, writer and editor; Ann Christoph, writer; Tom Lamb, graphic design, photography and collections; Mark Chamberlain, photography and collections; Eric Jessen, art history and collections; Verna Rollinger, Bob Borthwick and Harry Huggins, greenbelt history and mapping; Alison Terry, representative of the American Society of Landscape Architects, advised and coordinated submission of the materials to the National Park Service, according to the release.

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