



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

*"Parks Make Life Better!"*

Russ Guiney, Director

John Wicker, Chief Deputy Director

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**COMMUNITY EVENT TO COMMEMORATE 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF BALDWIN HILLS DAM COLLAPSE, CELEBRATE MAGNIFICENT COUNTY PARKLANDS**

***Los Angeles County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, Department of Parks and Recreation and Baldwin Hills Conservancy welcome public to Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area for Dec. 14 remembrance of historic event. Guest speakers, live entertainment, storytelling and more will be part of commemoration.***

Looking on from the lot next to her family's Baldwin Hills home on Dec. 14, 1963, Laurie Kelson saw images she says are "emblazoned in my memory. There was an unbelievable amount of water in a short period of time. Homes filled with water, and they just burst apart."

What she witnessed that day was the destruction wreaked by the undoing of the Baldwin Hills Dam. Without warning, close to 290 million gallons of water began flowing from the collapsing structure, resulting in a tragic flood that spread water, mud and debris over a total of one square mile – causing five deaths, washing away a number of structures and impacting more than 9,000 residences. It also represented a milestone in broadcasting, as a helicopter from local television station KTLA pioneered aerial disaster coverage with dramatic images of the event as it unfolded.

Exactly a half-century later, survivors, witnesses, elected leaders, community organizations and representatives of first-responder agencies will gather together in the very spot where the dam once stood. The public is invited to a commemoration of the collapse and celebration of the beautiful parklands in what is now known as Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area.

"The failure of the Baldwin Hills Dam was a monumental event in Los Angeles history that changed the way we think about public safety and disaster preparedness," said Los Angeles County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas. "Fifty years later, we come together to remember those who perished and recognize the significant park and community improvements that have been realized in its aftermath."

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On Saturday, Dec. 14, 2013, the gathering will be held from noon to 4 p.m. in the section of the park known as Janice's Green Valley, a beautiful open space that was once the bowl of the reservoir. There will be live musical performances; storytelling sessions at a booth dedicated to the history of the dam collapse; presentations by the Department of Parks and Recreation; participation by Mujeres de la Tierra, Village Green Owners Association and other community groups; and representatives from a number of first-responder agencies.

Guest speakers at a 2:45 p.m. ceremony are scheduled to include: Supervisor Ridley Thomas; Lorraine Bradley, daughter of the late Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley, whose rapid response and coordination with heroic first-responders is credited with saving lives; Department of Parks and Recreation Chief Deputy Director John Wicker; and members of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power Board of Commissioners.

To remember those who lost their lives, a moment of silence will be observed at 3:38 p.m. – the precise time of the reservoir collapse in 1963.

"In spite of the devastating losses, the community has forged ahead on a new journey, making gains that will benefit generations to come," said Baldwin Hills Conservancy executive officer David McNeill. "The public's ongoing stewardship will keep the splendor of the Baldwin Hills parklands alive, and the Conservancy is proud to be a part of that."

Following the tragedy, then-Supervisor Kenneth Hahn began setting aside funding for a park that would include the former site of the reservoir. The state-owned park opened as Baldwin Hills State Recreation Area on Nov. 14, 1983, and was officially renamed for Supervisor Hahn in 1988. Since its opening, the county-operated park has stood as an urban oasis and a lasting symbol of community pride and cohesion that welcomes hundreds of thousands of visitors each year from throughout the region.

"We are honored to host the commemoration of this historic event," said Department of Parks and Recreation Director Russ Guiney. "We look forward to a day that will pay tribute to those affected and provide an uplifting message about a beautiful park that serves the community so proudly today."

Public transportation to the event is available via The Link–Baldwin Hills Parklands shuttle operated by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. (<http://dpw.lacounty.gov/pdd/transit/thelinkbaldwin.cfm>), and pedestrian access is encouraged for adjacent neighborhoods.

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