

Coastline Pilot

Newport resident takes over as chief of Crystal Cove protective group



The sun sets over the Crystal Cove Beach Cottages. (Allen J. Schaben | Los Angeles Times)



By **Bryce Alderton** · Contact Reporter

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he nonprofit dedicated to preserving Crystal Cove State Park has a new leader.

Alix Hobbs of Newport Beach leaves as president and chief executive of Santa Monica-based Heal the Bay to step into the same role with the Crystal Cove Alliance, an organization charged with protecting the park's historic district, 3.2-mile coast, 2,400-acre backcountry habitat and 1,100-acre marine life refuge. The park extends into Laguna Beach as well as the Newport Beach community of Newport Coast.



Alix Hobbs is the new president and CEO of the nonprofit Crystal Cove Alliance. (Courtesy of J. Christopher Launi Photography)

But Hobbs' hiring is especially noteworthy. She will become the first person to lead the alliance while also overseeing its subsidiary, Crystal Cove Management Co., said Laura Davick, Crystal Cove Alliance founder and vice president. The management company oversees cottage

rentals and food concessions within the park.

Hobbs steps into the role at a pivotal time in the long history of attempts to protect the 46 1920s-era, beachfront cottages, part of the Crystal Cove Historic District. Davick, in a news release, described the alliance as entering "phase III of our signature restoration program, enabling [the alliance] to renovate the remaining 17 cottages deteriorating at the north end of our beach."

"One leader over both entities made a lot of sense, so that people, as they visit Crystal Cove State Park, [understand] the work being done here," Davick said in a phone interview.

The alliance is seeking a coastal development permit for the work. Davick said California Coastal Commission staff told her a public hearing could be scheduled in two to three months.

The community of vintage cottages, considered the last intact example of a Southern California beach colony, has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places, according to the alliance's website.



Historic District Cottage No. 2 at Crystal Cove as it appeared during Prohibition times. (Photo courtesy of Crystal Cove Alliance)

In 1979, the land was sold to the state for preservation as a state park, "and the cottage dwellers faced a 22-year countdown before they would have to go," the site says.

In 2001, the historic cottages were empty and the state awarded a private developer rights and a 60-year lease to turn them into a luxury resort, but Davick and others pushed back, proposing that the cottages remain intact and be used as overnight rentals and for educational purposes. From this effort, the Crystal Cove Alliance was born.

The alliance's board selected Hobbs from a nationwide search that took 10 months and included dozens of highly qualified candidates, according to the news release.

She replaces Harry Helling, who became executive director of the Birch Aquarium at Scripps Institution of Oceanography, part of UC San Diego, according to an alliance spokeswoman.

Hobbs spent 19 years with Heal the Bay, working her way up from a beach cleanup volunteer in 1993, according to the agency's [website](#). Heal the Bay is an environmental nonprofit dedicated to protecting coastal waters and watersheds in the greater Los Angeles area.

"I immediately fell in love with Crystal Cove the moment I stepped foot on the sandy shores and saw the potential of the outdoor classroom with a backdrop of the historic cottages," Hobbs said in the release. "What has been created here is everything I have dedicated my life to, and I am thrilled to join this hardworking, visionary [alliance] team."

Hobbs' professional background has primarily focused on environmental work in the nonprofit sector.

While with Heal the Bay, Hobbs advocated for successful passage of a statewide plastic-bag ban and helped create a program in the South Bay to educate anglers and the public about sharks, according to Heal the Bay's website.

Passed in 2014, the plastic-bag ban has yet to take effect pending the outcome of a veto referendum backed by the plastics industry that qualified last year for the November ballot, the Los Angeles Times has reported.

Before her tenure at Heal the Bay, Hobbs, a Cal State Northridge graduate, led advocacy and policy campaigns aimed at protecting the Hudson River Valley with Scenic [Hudson](#), based in Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

"Alix's extensive knowledge, coupled with her dynamic leadership, will make her invaluable as together we realize our vision of preserving the wonders of Crystal Cove for future generations," Davick said in the release. Davick noted not only the work on the cottages but also the alliance's rapidly expanding environmental science education programs.

Through a partnership between the alliance and California Department of Parks and Recreation, 29 of the beachfront cottages have been renovated and made available for overnight stays.