



California State Park Access Pass *Providing Free Park Access for Californians*

On June 15, the Legislative Budget Conference Committee voted to reduce the budget for state parks by \$70 million, essentially adopting the budget proposal suggested by the Governor in late May. Tied to that action, however, the committee also voted to develop a dedicated funding source to keep California's state parks open. The committee approved a new surcharge on Californians' vehicle license fees, essentially adopting the State Park Access Pass that the California State Parks Foundation and park advocates pushed in 2008.

Background

California's state park system is the largest system in the nation. More 1.5 million acres of land are managed for natural, cultural and historical resource values in the 279-unit park system. California's state park system hosts more than 77 million visitors annually and houses over 3,100 historic buildings and more than 14,000 individual and group campsites.

Current Situation

On May 26, representatives of the Department of Finance indicated that, specifically, the proposal is to take \$70 million of the Department of Parks and Recreation's (DPR) General Fund allocation in the 2009-10 Fiscal Year (which starts July 1, 2009) and the remainder of their General Fund – another \$73 million – in the next budget year, FY 2010-11, for a total removal of \$143 million. As a result, a total of 220 state parks were proposed for closure. Under the Governor's proposal, entire regions of the state will see all of their nearby state parks closed and virtually every kind of park is on the chopping block—from redwood parks on California's north coast, to the deserts in the Inland Empire, coastal beaches on the Central Coast to wooded campgrounds along Lake Tahoe in the Sierra. Only 59 parks are proposed to remain open, largely based on the presence of special funding, or because a park has an agreement with a local government for its operations.

Solution

The State Park Access Pass will provide a dedicated, stable funding source to help support the necessary maintenance and operations activities to keep our state parks maintained and available to the public. Californians will pay a \$15 surcharge on their annual vehicle license fees, which will raise approximately \$363 million annually, net of lost revenues and costs to implement.

Providing Californians Free Access to State Parks

As a benefit of paying the fee, Californians will receive free day-use access to California's state parks. Given that current day use fees are typically \$6-\$8 per day, (and \$10 in southern California beaches) this proposal creates significant benefits to Californians in exchange for their annual \$15 support.

Creating General Fund Savings

This proposal recognizes the immediate need to create savings in the state's General Fund. The \$143 million in General Fund support that is currently provided to the state park system would be available for reallocating to other state purposes.

The Save Our State Parks (SOS) Campaign is a statewide, grassroots campaign to keep California's magnificent state parks open. In partnership with organizations, businesses, local governments, and individuals around the state, the California State Parks Foundation is leading SOS Campaign activities and generating awareness and action about budget proposals that would result in unacceptable park closures. For more information visit www.savestateparks.org.