



*California's
State Parks*

WORTH PROTECTING



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Research & Policy Center

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Introduction

FROM THE ANDERSON REDWOODS State Reserve in Northern California to Montaña de Ora State Park in Central California to South Carlsbad State Beach near San Diego, California is home to some of the most beautiful natural areas in the world. Two hundred and seventy eight of these areas are so beautiful, that we have bestowed them the designation of State Parks, vowing to preserve their beauty for future generations.

California's state parks are a perfect place to swim, hike, fish, boat, surf, and simply relax. These areas are also

vital to our state's heritage and unique geographic beauty, providing habitat for thousands of plants and animals, many of which cannot be found anywhere else in the world.

In addition, the state parks are an economic resource for California's economy. A study prepared for the California Department of Parks and Recreation in 2002 determined that approximately \$2.6 billion was generated by visitor spending in local communities during that year. These dollars were estimated to support over 100,000 jobs statewide.



A Case for Increased Funding

CALIFORNIA'S 278 STATE PARKS include beaches, reserves, recreational areas and historical sites. Since the 1980's the state legislature has reduced general fund support for our state parks. At the same time voters have approved ballot measures for bonds that help fund parks, but these funds cannot be used for general operating or maintenance expenses.

According to the California Parks and Recreation Department, from 2001 through 2008 the general fund operating budget for state parks was reduced by \$10.5 million. During this same period, fees were increased or implemented to help offset the reduction from general fund support.

To look at these cuts in another light we can examine what the state is spending

in relation to the number of park visitors. In 1990-1991 the state spent \$4.16 per park visitor. Since then this figure has declined. In the latest budget proposal (2008-2009) funding drops to \$2.80 per visitor, a 32% drop in funding.

Years of decreasing funding mean less money to take care of the parks. For instance, deferred maintenance, which includes repairing roofs, bathrooms, fences and trails has grown over the years and is now over \$1.2 billion. The annual shortfall in the budget for on-going maintenance is \$117 million.

In order to protect our parks, elected officials need to create a dedicated funding source to ensure that our parks are properly protected for future generations.

State Parks in Need

OVER THE PAST 30 YEARS, the well-being of the state parks has declined sharply. The most pressing threat to our parks is increased fragmentation. This 'death by a thousands cuts' is having a devastating impact on the parks. Mega dairies, toll roads, transmission lines, casino expansions, and other developments are all degrading the individual parks and the system as a whole.

Our parks are also plagued by a host of other environmental problems, such as air and water pollution, invasive species, and effects from global warming. In fact, our state parks, which are supposed to represent the purist places in our state, are often the most polluted.

Governor Schwarzenegger's 2008 budget proposed closing 48 state parks. According to The California Department of Parks and Recreation, "48 parks will be closed or partially closed and placed in caretaker status and will not be open to the public."

The plan would reduce the number of lifeguards, park aides and others who provide public protection at state beaches and work to clean restrooms and other facilities at parks and campgrounds. These cuts would have an immediate impact on the safety of the visitors and damage their experience in the parks.

Conclusion

THE GOVERNOR NEEDS TO KEEP OUR PARKS OPEN. California has some of the most amazing parks in the world. But these places need care and attention. In addition, they need permanent funding in order to reduce the dangers from development, extractive activities, and other threats. We must take steps to protect our parks and ensure that we leave a lasting legacy to California's future generations.

California State Parks



Park Profiles

Armstrong Redwoods State Reserve *813,000 visitors*

This state reserve is home to a grove of majestic redwoods—*sequoia sempervirens*—commonly known as the coast redwood. This grove is one of the few remaining from the timber cutting that occurred here before protections were put into place. The tallest tree in the grove is The Parsons Jones Tree measuring over 310 feet in height. The Colonel Armstrong Tree, the oldest tree in the reserve, is over 1400 years old. This reserve has numerous hikes and equestrian trails.

The park was first established in the 1870's by Colonel James Armstrong who saw the importance of protecting this area. It became a state park in 1936 and became a state reserve in 1964 when a greater understanding of the ecological significance prompted a more protective management of the park.

Sutter's Fort *137,000 visitors*

Sutter's Fort and the other historical parks provide excellent opportunities to learn about California's rich history. Every year kids and adults participate in living history days. These educational events allow you to experience what life was like in the 1860s. In the 2000-2001 fiscal year, California State Parks served over 20,000 school groups. Staff and volunteers logged over 5 million hours of public education, and over 3 million individuals (adults and children) attended the Parks' presented educational programs.



South Carlsbad State Beach 1,582,000 visitors

Approximately 35 miles north of San Diego, this state beach encompasses 14 acres of coastal bluffs, rock and sand beach. Great surfing, swimming, scuba diving and boating draw in locals and tourists alike. Sunset hikes along the beach are part of what make this beach spectacular. The large bluff-top campground is very popular and is booked for months in advance.



Montaña de Oro State Park 986,000 visitors

This park has nearly 8,000 acres and is largely undeveloped. The park features a wide range of wildlife, trees and other unique species. The name of this park comes from the golden poppies that bloom in the spring. This park has rugged cliff beaches to the south and sandy beaches in the northern part of the park. Spooner's Cove is the best known beach in the park. At over 1,500 feet, Valencia Peak is the largest of the hills in the park. From the top you can see almost 1,000 miles of the coastline with Point Sal in the south and Piedras Blancas in the north.



Topanga State Park 455,000 visitors

This park has nearly 9,000 acres and is considered the largest wildland within the boundaries of a major U.S. city. The park is located in the Santa Monica Mountains and offers 36 miles of trails that showcase amazing views of the Pacific Ocean. Numerous geologic formations can be found in the park including earthquake faults, marine fossils, and volcanic intrusions. In addition, the park offers open grasslands and live oaks.



