



## **PARKS FORWARD COMMISSION**

### **Implementation Assessment**

***November 2015***

This report assesses the implementation to date by the California Department of Parks and Recreation (Department) of the recommendations made by the Parks Forward Commission (Commission) in its February 2015 report, *A New Vision for California State Parks*. The Commission was established under statute by Governor Brown to examine the deterioration of state parks over many years and to make recommendations on how to create a financially sustainable state park system that meets the needs of California's changing population.

The Commission's recommendations called for a fundamental transformation of the Department, rededication to working with park partners, and expansion of park access for all Californians. The Commission developed a two-year implementation plan focused on advancing key tasks necessary for achieving its ambitious 2025 Park Vision for all California parks. Since then, the Department has launched a two-year effort to modernize its systems and structures, and transform how the state cares for its parks and connects those parks with people.

The transformation effort has been supported by California's leading philanthropies through a Memorandum of Understanding among the Natural Resources Agency (Agency), Department, and Resources Legacy Fund, which sets forth the framework for philanthropic contributions and the state's commitments to the effort. The S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, James Irvine Foundation, Marisla Foundation, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and others have provided significant funding for the Parks Forward Initiative as well as for the Department's transformation.

This assessment is being issued ten months into a two-year implementation period. The Department faces a unique opportunity to address the long-standing problems that have crippled parks for so long, but transformation at the level called for in the Commission's recommendations will not be easy. The Commission's goals in issuing this assessment are to reinforce the criticality of the effort, recognize the state's successful work to date, ensure transformation remains on pace and scale, and offer support in achieving success.

The following assessment highlights successes, identifies areas where progress can improve, and reinforces the Commission's priority implementation actions for the remainder of the transformation period. This assessment is structured to parallel the six key tasks identified by the Commission for the state to implement during the two-year period following release of its recommendations.

**1. Create a dedicated transformation team housed in the Department and tasked with modernizing the Department's organizational structure, systems, processes, tools, and technology.**

At the Commission's February 2015 meeting, Natural Resources Secretary John Laird and Department Director Lisa Mangat supported the Commission's recommendations and implementation priorities, and the state took immediate steps to launch a two-year transformation effort. With support from Governor Brown in his 2015 budget, the Department assembled a Transformation Team comprised predominantly of Department employees. The Transformation Team developed a Transformation Action Plan that closely mirrors the Commission's recommendations and commenced work to implement that plan.

Large organizational reform efforts are complicated in structure and delicate to implement so typically struggle to show early progress. The Department's transformation effort is no exception with the Transformation Team taking time early to get organized and focused around a unified vision, goals, and priorities, and to communicate those to stakeholders and the public. The transformation effort has gained momentum with Director Mangat's strong leadership and focus on the highest priority transformation initiatives. The Transformation Team and committees are now working with greater clarity on outcomes, timelines, and deliverables. In addition, Deloitte Consulting is providing valuable expertise and support for key transformation initiatives.

Successful transformation requires change that is sustainable. Director Mangat recognizes that the Department's culture needs adjusting to effect sustainable change and is taking steps to implement that through regular communications with leadership, staff, and partners. Additionally, the Department has begun work to develop and implement a host of systems changes to enable more effective, data-driven decision making and planning, including a new service-based budgeting process. These changes will enable the Department to prioritize and clearly communicate the connection between resources and service levels. Significant effort is focused towards modernizing the Department through streamlining the Department's revenue accounting and piloting revenue collection through smartphones. With establishment of the new superintendent classification discussed below, the Department is rethinking its organizational structure and developing career ladders for advancement from all park disciplines and outside State Parks. These are good and necessary first steps, but sustained focus on these and related priorities is needed to provide the Department with the tools, systems, and processes for success.

*Key tasks for 2016 to support the Transformation Team's efforts should include:*

- *Develop short- and long-term goals for the transformation effort that align with vision, and regularly report to the public on outcomes and progress toward goals.*
- *Establish service-based budgeting to allow the Department to connect available resources with service levels.*
- *Transition and transform the Department's organizational structure, systems, and processes to provide field leadership with expanded flexibility and authority within defined areas and standards.*
- *Upgrade technology and provide training to ensure staff have the tools and skills to use effectively.*

## **2. Open pathways to leadership for the most qualified employees.**

The Department has accomplished a significant step towards opening a path to leadership for all qualified candidates by creating a new district superintendent classification that does not require peace officer certification. It would be difficult to overemphasize the effort and skill required to achieve this outcome—many have tried before—or how foundational the change is to instilling a new culture at the Department, increasing ethnic diversity of staff, and advancing other transformation goals. Off to an encouraging start, the Department has made its first three placements into this new superintendent classification. To realize the full intended impact of this change, the Department is now focusing on creating new job classifications, aligning its organizational structure, and designing and implementing training and recruitment plans.

*Key tasks for 2016 to implement staffing improvements should include:*

- *Achieve Director Mangat's goal of having 25% of district superintendents serving in new superintendent classification.*
- *Develop leadership training program.*
- *Initiate and implement a diversity recruitment program.*

## **3. Instill a statewide culture that embraces partnerships and create a nonprofit strategic partner to undertake projects in coordination with the Department.**

The Department understands that it must work more effectively with its cadre of existing and devoted partners to advance its mission. This is a key underpinning to the Commission's recommendations as well as the Department's transformation effort.

Following up on the good work of the Transformation Team's partnership committee, the Department soon will complete a plan that will inculcate a new statewide culture of partnership and collaboration with public agencies, California Indian tribes, nonprofit organizations, businesses, volunteers, civic leaders, and other partners. The new partnership plan will set out the purpose, authorities, responsibilities, structure, staffing, training, and funding for a new partnership function at the Department. Reflecting input received from many of the Department's existing partners, the plan is headed in a good direction, with a focus on providing more authority, resources, and incentives at the field level, supported by headquarters' functions designed to support field level partnership work. The Department also is reorganizing its partnership staff to better steward its relationships with partners. Finally, the administration and legislature recently enacted into law two measures that will advance the Department's transformation by making it easier for the Department to work with youth organizations and build partnerships. AB 549 and SB 204 improve the Department's ability to accept donations of funds, services, and projects; enter concession agreements and operating agreements; and pay youth-serving organizations for service-learning and work projects.

Another high priority recommendation of the Commission is the call to create a new support entity to provide operational, financial, and strategic support for state parks in regions and functional areas not provided by existing park partners. The new partnership plan lays the foundation for the Department to commence planning

in the coming year for the new nonprofit support entity, referred to as Parks California in the Commission's report, and move toward implementation of plan recommendations by the end of 2016. Planning should include outreach to partners to design an entity with a mission, structure, financing plan, and project portfolio that is most catalytic, sustainable, and impactful.

*Key tasks for 2016 to support partnerships should include:*

- *Implement organizational changes to support better partnerships.*
- *Implement the new partnership plan.*
- *Complete strategic planning for the new support entity, and commence implementation of plan recommendations.*

#### **4. Prioritize necessary support to protect the system's natural and cultural resources.**

At its core, the Department exists to steward much of California's most important natural and cultural resources. While mindful that the Department's modernization efforts drive towards enhancing this stewardship function, the Commission also recognizes the need to invest time and focus on transformation initiatives that specifically address natural and cultural resource protection. The Department has taken initial steps to develop best practices for natural and cultural resource management at the landscape-scale. Those efforts need to advance at the same pace and urgency as the modernization actions.

*Key tasks for 2016 to protect natural and cultural resources should include:*

- *Identify and implement best practices for natural and cultural resource protection that specifically address threats, including climate change.*
- *Develop on-the-ground projects aimed at leveraging partnerships and testing best stewardship practices that advance natural and cultural resources management.*
- *Advance a pilot project with partners to test regional natural resource management.*

#### **5. Expand park access for underserved communities and engage younger generations.**

As envisioned by the Parks Forward recommendations, the Department is focused on delivering on-the-ground park improvements that will engage local communities and younger generations. The Department is in the planning stages on pilot projects that will expand access to underserved communities. These include pilot cabin projects at Angel Island State Park and several other state parks that will provide low cost overnight accommodations, as well as a community engagement, public health, and transportation demonstration project focused on disadvantaged communities surrounding Los Angeles State Historic Park and Candlestick Point State Recreation Area. The community outreach project is designed to test and refine best practices for engaging underserved communities that can be expanded timely to other state parks. Project planning and implementation needs to be sustained for community-based projects to bring programmatic changes by the end of the transformation effort and lay the foundation for system-wide impacts in the years following. As the transformation effort moves into its second year, demonstrating tangible "early wins" will grow increasingly important to sustain political and public support for the Department and the transformation.

*Key tasks for 2016 to support expanded park access should include:*

- *Launch community engagement, public health, and transportation pilot project at Los Angeles State Historic Park and Candlestick Point State Recreation Area in early 2016, laying the foundation for a longer-term urban agenda.*
- *Complete pending cabin pilot projects, in cooperation with funding collaborators, to test new ways to partner and finance affordable overnight accommodations.*
- *Develop a comprehensive, long-term statewide plan, including innovative financing mechanisms, for expanding affordable park lodging options in parks.*

## **6. Establish a stable funding structure.**

The Commission identified two paths towards a stable funding structure for the Department, which remains a key goal for the Commissioners. First, the Department must continue efforts to become more efficient with existing resources, allocating them to highest priorities, and increasing revenue generation where appropriate. The Department should sustain and enhance its initial modernization efforts, complete and implement service-based budgeting, develop additional technology improvements, and implement its new partnership plan. The Department's implementation of these actions will demonstrate, internally and externally, the Department's efficient use of available resources and build credibility for pursuing new funding sources for the Department.

Second, creation of new dedicated sources of funding for the Department will improve the Department's longer-term financial sustainability and enable it to make progress toward eliminating its park maintenance backlog. Creation of new sources of funding remains a longer-term goal of the Commission that, while not the responsibility of the Department, will require leadership, support, and engagement of supporters, including the Commissioners, the administration, and the legislature, at the right time. The Department's success in increasing efficiencies, professionalizing its budgeting and financial planning, and identifying required service, programming, and operational needs, can help build the case for new funding measures.

## **Conclusion**

The Commission is in full support of the Department's transformation efforts and is cautiously optimistic that the Department's current momentum surrounding those efforts will be maintained.

Time is limited, and much still needs to be accomplished. To stay on course to achieve desired outcomes, the Department needs to maintain focus on priority initiatives and delivering tangible outcomes. The administration, legislature, and Agency also will need to continue their support by providing leadership as well as adequate funding to cover transformation process costs. Communication will continue to be key, both internally and externally. To achieve buy-in within the Department, its leadership must communicate regularly with staff to demonstrate how the transformation effort will support their work. The Department's regular communication with the public on its progress in advancing initiatives and achieving tangible outcomes will also be key to maintaining public and political support for

transformation. Finally, as Director Mangat emphasized during the October Parks Forward Commission meeting, changes instituted during the transformation process need to be sustainable following the formal transformation period. This will require significant attention in 2016 to set culture changes within the Department and ensure necessary knowledge transfer from the Transformation Team and consultants through to staff.

The Commission and the Department both are committed to a system of parks that expertly protects the state's iconic landscapes, natural resources, and cultural heritage; is accessible to all Californians; engages younger generations; and promotes the healthy lifestyles and communities that are uniquely Californian. This is a rare opportunity for the Department to achieve transformational change that has been needed for so many years. The transformation effort has the support of people both inside and outside government, including a broad coalition of the state's prominent philanthropies that has supported Parks Forward and the Department. The Commission stands ready to support the Department in any way it can to achieve these important outcomes. Given the personal time and commitment each Commissioner has already made to this effort and the critical point the Department and its partners have reached in the transformation process, the Commissioners look forward to continuing their engagement, support, and monitoring the Department's transformation efforts and reporting through 2016 on the progress made.