

*Parks Forward Staff Note: This is the latest iteration of the staff working draft. It builds on the previous draft report dated March 18, incorporating additional detail, as well as comments received from Commissioners. It draws on the work Parks Forward has done over the past several months. This includes presentations and discussions at the three Commission meetings and the work group meetings; ten public workshops co-hosted by the Park and Recreation Commission last fall and other public comment; a survey and seven focus groups conducted with State Parks staff last fall, as well as additional outreach to Department divisions and staff that is ongoing; consultants' work; review of existing reports and research related to State Parks and other park models; and conversations and interviews with Commissioners, Department staff, park partners, advocates, and businesses.*

*This document will be the primary focus for the April 30 Parks Forward Commission meeting in San Francisco. The report will continue to be developed and refined over the coming months. This will include three public comment meetings throughout the state in May and June, as well as additional Department staff engagement, including four focus groups. A revised draft will be issued in advance of the Commission's August 6 meeting. We will be scheduling an additional Commission meeting for October 2014, and will have a proposed final report prepared in advance of that meeting.*

April 23, 2014

## **PARKS FORWARD INITIATIVE**

### **STAFF WORKING DRAFT**

#### **1. Executive Summary**

*[This section is not yet complete. Over the summer the Commission will provide a summary of the key components of the Plan.]*

#### **2. A History of Innovation**

For 150 years California's state parks have preserved the iconic landscapes and diverse natural and cultural resources that are uniquely emblematic of the state. The first state park protecting Yosemite Valley was created in 1864, predating the first national park by eight years. Since then, Californians have created a vast network of cherished public spaces, stewarding state parks through periods of innovation, modernization, and strategic expansion, while also working through periods of significant challenge. This chapter describes the key periods of innovation and change for state parks and the key attributes of California's parks today, providing the context for our new vision for California parks described in Chapter 4.

## **a. History of Leadership and Innovation**

The history of California State Parks is marked by milestones of adaptation, expansion, and struggle as Californians have been called repeatedly to invent and reinvent parks to be efficient and relevant for the times.

### ***i. The Early Park Movement***

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, development and highway construction threatened California's natural and cultural heritage, and logging nearly decimated the state's old-growth redwoods.<sup>1</sup> Conservation leaders such as Andrew Hill emerged to address these threats, advocating for the preservation of wild, scenic spaces for future generations' physical health and mental well-being. The legislature responded to the cry of this new parks movement by creating California's first official, publicly-funded state park in 1902—Big Basin Redwoods.<sup>2</sup> Buoyed by a staunch commitment to the natural world, this new breed of conservation leaders organized, put forth new ideas, garnered public support, and created lasting nonprofit organizations such as Save the Redwoods League and Sempervirens Fund who continue their efforts today in promoting parks and conservation.

### ***ii. From Parks to a Park System***

State parks grew rapidly through the late 1920s, but without either a long-term vision or systematic method for selecting among the growing list of 325 new park proposals.<sup>3</sup> In response, the legislature created the State Park Commission in 1927 to bring order and design to what had grown into a loose network of individual parks. The Commission called upon Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. to produce an inventory of California's unique landscapes, varied habitats, and historic landmarks and identify long-range goals for building a cohesive state park system.<sup>4</sup> Olmsted was the right man for the job, recognizing the incalculable "magnitude and importance, socially and economically, in California, of the values arising directly and indirectly from the enjoyment of scenery and from related pleasures of non-urban outdoor life."<sup>5</sup>

Californians embraced Olmsted's vision, passing a \$6 million park bond by an overwhelming margin at the onset of the Great Depression. The bond provided funding to purchase additional park lands and required a 50% match of non-state funds for any project financed with bond funds, testing a parks financing tool that would be replicated

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<sup>1</sup> National Park Service, "Redwood National and State Parks: Area History," 2014, <http://www.nps.gov/redw/historyculture/area-history.htm>

<sup>2</sup> KQED, "Timeline: Building California's State Parks," 12 March 2012, <http://www.kqed.com/timeline/entry/28258/Building-Californias-State-Parks/>

<sup>3</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., "Report of the State Parks Survey of California," 1928, introductory letter.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47, 57.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

numerous times in the future.<sup>6</sup> California's park system expanded throughout the Depression under the guidance of Newton Drury, who later led California State Parks and the National Park Service. State parks not only protected California's natural heritage, but also put Californians back to work using the Civilian Conservation Corps to build roads, bridges, and campsites for the new parks. By 1934, the system had grown to 49 parks, covering 300,000 acres, and serving 6,000,000 Californians.

### ***iii. Park Expansion During the 1960s and 1970s***

California parks continued to grow for decades as economic prosperity led to increased leisure time, and the completion of the modern highway system facilitated access to more parks. California's growing population stoked a rise in parks visitation to near 30 million by the early 1960s. Governor Pat Brown identified state parks among one of his three proudest achievements, along with the state water project and the state master plan for higher education.<sup>7</sup> However, by the end of the 1960s state parks faced severe budget cuts. Governor Ronald Reagan's first Parks Director William Penn Mott, Jr. understood that preserving natural and cultural resources was not enough—parks needed to engage a broader audience and better serve urban and other underserved communities.<sup>8</sup> Director Mott stressed interpretation and education, professional training, science-based resource management, and expansion into urban areas.<sup>9</sup>

Continuing this vision, in 1975, Governor Jerry Brown's Parks Director Herbert Rhodes spearheaded acquisitions of urban parks such as Candlestick Point State Recreation Area, expanding diversity of park visitation. Rhodes also made it a priority to hire employees from all backgrounds to build a staff more reflective of California's diverse population.<sup>10</sup>

Parks enjoyed continued public support during this growth period. Between 1964 and 1984, voters approved by large margins a string of five park bond measures, totaling over \$1.3 billion. These were exciting days for the environmental movement in California and nationally, as Congress passed the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Land and Water Conservation Fund, Wilderness Act; the first Earth Day was celebrated; and Californians voted to protect their coastal zone. The public understood that a growing California needed more parks to serve more people and to protect fragile landscapes. By 1980, the system had grown to 250 parks, covering 1,000,000 acres, serving 23.7 million Californians, and visited by 66 million people.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., introductory letter

<sup>7</sup> George Skelton, "Pat Brown Reigns Again in Capitol," *Los Angeles Times* March 3, 1992.

<sup>8</sup> California State Parks, "The History of California State Parks: A Gift from the People to the People," 2013, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Engbeck, 122.

#### ***iv. The Phoenix Committee and Parks Modernization of the Early 1990s***

In 1992, the Department faced renewed budgetary pressure, partially due to the delayed impact of Proposition 13, the initiative approved by California voters in 1978 to limit property taxes. Facing a 20 percent budget cut and potential park closures, Parks Director Donald Murphy chartered the Phoenix Committee, comprised of park employees from a broad spectrum of work classifications. The Phoenix Committee was charged with taking a fresh, top to bottom look at priorities and processes and recommending steps that would create a more nimble and cost-effective organization. The Phoenix Committee recommendations attempted to shift the Department from a headquarters-centered, command-and-control model to a more innovative, entrepreneurial, and field-based model. Implementing the Committee's recommendations, Director Murphy reduced staff, streamlined services, flattened the organizational structure, cut costs, and increased fees. These changes challenged employees to strengthen delivery of core park services by thinking and working differently.<sup>11</sup> While implementation of the Phoenix recommendations yielded short-term improvements in Department culture and practices, new Department leadership and changing priorities limited realization of the more lasting, systemic reform envisioned by the effort.

#### ***v. Renewed Challenges Following Turn of the 21st Century***

The tragedy of September 11, 2001 coupled with the worldwide economic plunge in 2008 created new funding challenges and changed the focus for all public agencies, including State Parks. Even as general fund reductions continued, California voters approved Propositions 12, 13, 40, 50, and 84 between 2000 and 2006 which provided significant funding for land and water conservation, including over \$1 billion for state parks. The capital funding provided by these measures, together with the burgeoning land trust movement and private funder interest in land conservation, fueled a significant expansion of state parks. These measures, however, did not include funding for stewardship and management of these public lands. In recent years, the Department has struggled to manage a parks system with a significant backlog of deferred maintenance now estimated in excess of \$1 billion. In response, Department leadership has reduced positions and increased fees. In 2011, with large state budget shortfalls, there was serious discussion of closing parks to help meet these shortfalls.

#### ***vi. California's World-Class Parks***

Today's California State Parks system boasts 280 parks, covering 1,600,000 acres, serving a California population of 38 million. State parks provide Californians access to 340 miles of coast (representing over one-third of California's coastline),<sup>12</sup> 625 miles of lakeshores

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<sup>11</sup> California State Parks, "The Phoenix Committee Final Report: 1992/93 Budget Revision Project," 1992, p. 33.

<sup>12</sup> California State Parks, "Statistical Report Fiscal Year 2011-2012," 2012.

and riverbanks,<sup>13</sup> 4,500 miles of trails,<sup>14</sup> and 15,000 campsites<sup>15</sup> throughout the state. Those interested in culture and history can experience nearly 3,200 historic buildings, explore 6 million museum objects, or learn about over 11,000 archaeological sites.<sup>16</sup>

State parks draw over 68 million annual visitors<sup>17</sup> from around the world, providing a major economic boost to gateway communities and the state as a whole by generating \$13 of direct economic activity for every one dollar of public investment.<sup>18</sup> This economic activity supports 56,000 private sector jobs, contributing to the revenue of four out of every five California counties.<sup>19</sup>

We have seen how leaders at key points in California’s history have risen to address challenges similar to those facing state parks today, implementing timely changes and innovations to build and sustain the current system. Today it is our turn. As with generations in the past, it is now our responsibility to make the necessary changes to address today’s realities so we can gift to future generations a network of sustainable, world-class parks.

### **3. Challenges, Parks Forward Initiative, and Initial Findings**

Once again, California’s state parks are at a crossroads, facing tough challenges—some old and some new. If California does not chart a bold new course, state parks face the very real prospect of closing parks, the inability to protect or steward natural and cultural resources, and failing to connect with Californians of today and the future.

This chapter summarizes the current crisis, the creation of the Parks Forward Initiative to help address that crisis, and the Parks Forward Commission’s initial findings that lay the foundation for a broad new vision and a focused set of recommendations to attain that vision.

#### **a. State Response to Growing Crisis**

In the summer of 2012, the state’s continuing financial problems nearly led to closure of 70 state parks. While many of the challenges facing state parks were not new, the threatened closures drew added attention. Around that time, several legislative, nonprofit, and other groups each examined the situation and reached the conclusion that California’s park system was in severe crisis. From those reports, there were several

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<sup>13</sup> California State Parks Foundation, “Did You Know?”, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> California State Parks, “Statistical Report Fiscal Year 2011-2012,” 2012.

<sup>18</sup> BBC Research and Consulting, California Outdoor Recreation Economic Study: State Park System Contributions and Benefits.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, California State Parks Foundation, “Did You Know?”, 2013.

findings that provide additional context for the acute situation California’s parks now face and useful foundation for the Parks Forward findings and recommendations:

- **The Park Excellence Project** led by California State Parks Foundation and Save the Redwoods League, both long-time state parks supporters, paved the way for many of the recommendations found in this report and is often quoted as setting forth a thoughtful future vision for state parks. The Parks Excellence Project called on Californians to “reexamine the ways in which our parks are supported, financed, protected, managed, promoted, and maintained.”<sup>20</sup> Only “a new vision for our state parks—a vision for the next 100 years and beyond” will allow the parks to meet “the most challenging [times] the system has ever seen.”<sup>21</sup>
- **The Little Hoover Commission** found the California state parks governance model obsolete, causing parks “to fall into disrepair” due to falling general support, unpredictable revenues, outdated business tools, and a department culture that does not consider outside organizations as equal partners.<sup>22</sup> Addressing these challenges requires an entirely “new operating model”<sup>23</sup> that rebuilds the parks system “around shared management, innovation, greater transparency” and stable and increased revenue sources.<sup>24</sup> This new model redefines the Department as a “leader and coordinator at the center of a new ecosystem of parks management”<sup>25</sup> calling for “a multi-partner system that spreads park management across a wider base of players and budgets.”<sup>26</sup>
- **The Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO)** noted that merely closing state parks in response to funding cuts would not solve the parks’ long-term problems—it would eliminate public access while saving little money. Instead, broader solutions are needed to ensure “the park system is adequately maintained and operated in the future”. The LAO cautioned against the potential trade-offs, if not done smartly, between cost-cutting and revenue-generating strategies, on the one hand, and ensuring broad public access to parks, on the on the other hand.<sup>27</sup>

Wrestling with how to address the challenges and avoid park closures, the California Legislature passed the California State Parks Stewardship Act (AB 1589) and Assembly Bill

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<sup>20</sup> California State Parks Foundation and Save the Redwoods League, “A Vision for Excellence for California’s State Parks,” 2011, [http://my.calparks.org/pep/PEP\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](http://my.calparks.org/pep/PEP_Report_Final.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Little Hoover Commission Report, “Beyond Crisis: Recapturing Excellence in California’s State Park System,” 2013, <http://www.lhc.ca.gov/studies/215/FinalReport215.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, at 31.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Mac Taylor, “The 2012-13 Budget: Strategies to Maintain California’s Park System,” Legislative Analyst’s Office, March 2, 2012, <http://www.lao.ca.gov/analysis/2012/resources/state-parks-030212.pdf>.

1478. The bills called for a multidisciplinary advisory council to recommend improvement to the system's long term financial sustainability in ways that better meet the needs of all Californians and create more meaningful partnerships and collaborative efforts.

### **b. Parks Forward Initiative Design**

Several prominent California philanthropies saw the need and opportunity to support the multidisciplinary effort called for in the California State Parks Stewardship Act and AB 1478. Their goal was to support a robust independent process and implement a new course for California's parks that protects natural and cultural resources, meets the future outdoor recreation needs of the state, and is financially stable.

In June 2013, the California Natural Resources Agency, California Department of Parks and Recreation, and Resources Legacy Fund<sup>28</sup> entered into a Memorandum of Understanding creating the Parks Forward Initiative to address the long-term financial, operational, cultural, and demographic challenges facing state parks. The Parks Forward Initiative is led by an independent Commission comprised of 12 distinguished Californians with broad expertise in business, nonprofit, academia, and public service, and is supported by public agency commitments and charitable funding coordinated through Resources Legacy Fund. The initiative includes the participation of the nonprofit community, public agency staff, members of the public, and other stakeholders.

The Parks Forward Commission is unified in their commitment to a thriving and sustainable California state parks. Appointed by the Secretary of Natural Resources, the Commission is charged with undertaking a thorough evaluation of state parks and the Department and developing recommendations that will lead to the long-term financial sustainability of a system that better meets the needs of all Californians.

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<sup>28</sup> Resources Legacy Fund is a public nonprofit organization that works with philanthropic partners to craft innovative approaches to conserving natural resources and improving environmental sustainability in Western North America as well as in oceans and fisheries worldwide.

## **The Parks Forward Commission**

**Lance Conn, Co-Chair.** Mr. Conn is a Bay Area businessman and conservationist. He serves on the boards of directors for Charter Communications and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and serves on the advisory council for Truckee Donner Land Trust.

**Christine Kehoe, Co-Chair.** Ms. Kehoe is the executive director of the California Plug-in Electric Vehicle Collaborative. From 2000 to 2012, Ms. Kehoe served in the California state legislature as a member of the Assembly and the state Senate.

**Carolyn Finney, PhD.** Dr. Finney is an assistant professor in the Department of Environmental Science, Policy, and Management at the UC Berkeley College of Natural Resources. She chairs the Relevancy Committee on the National Parks Advisory Board.

**Caryl Hart, PhD.** Dr. Hart is the director of Sonoma County Regional Parks. She was a member of the California State Parks Commission, appointed by three successive governors and served from 2000 to 2013, including seven years as chair.

**Stephen Lockhart, MD, PhD.** Dr. Lockhart is regional vice president and chief medical officer for Sutter Health, East Bay Region. He serves as chair of the NatureBridge board of directors and is a director of REI and the National Parks Conservation Association.

**Michael Lynton.** Mr. Lynton is the chief executive officer of Sony Entertainment, Inc. Mr. Lynton is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and serves on the boards of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Rand Corporation.

**Julie Packard.** Ms. Packard is the executive director of the Monterey Bay Aquarium. She serves on the boards of the California Nature Conservancy, the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and others.

**Manuel Pastor, PhD.** Dr. Pastor is a professor of American Studies & Ethnicity at University of Southern California, where he also serves as director of the Program for Environmental and Regional Equity and co-director of the Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration.

**John Reynolds.** Mr. Reynolds served for 39 years in the National Park Service's Pacific West and Mid-Atlantic regions. He was executive vice president of the National Park Foundation from 2005 to 2007 and currently serves on the board of the Presidio Trust.

**Hawk Rosales.** Mr. Rosales is the executive director of the InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council, a nonprofit tribal conservation organization of ten federally recognized Northern California tribes revitalizing traditional tribal stewardship.

**Toby Rosenblatt.** Mr. Rosenblatt is president and general partner of Founders Investments, Ltd. He was founding chair of the Presidio Trust and has served on the board of the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy.

**Michael Woo.** Mr. Woo is dean of the College of Environmental Design at Cal Poly Pomona. He chairs the board of directors of Smart Growth America and Sustainable Economic Enterprises of Los Angeles.



### **c. Parks Forward Initiative Process**

The Parks Forward Initiative was designed as an inclusive and thorough process for developing solutions to the challenges facing state parks.

Since September 2013, the Commission has held four meetings leading to a set of draft recommendations. These recommendations will be further developed and refined, including input from the public and Department employees, and a revised draft will be issued in July 2014 and discussed at the Commission's August 6 meeting. The Commission will hold another meeting in October 2014 to adopt final recommendations. All Commission meetings have been open to the public and have been webcast. The Commission also held numerous work group meetings throughout the state to explore more deeply a range of issues, including finance, partnerships, public health, and parks access. Meeting information and reports developed to inform Commission deliberations have been posted to the Parks Forward website, and the Commission has encouraged and received additional input from the public and stakeholders through its website, social media, and written comments.

Working with Parks Forward staff, the California State Park and Recreation Commission coordinated a series of ten workshops throughout the state to solicit input from park partners and the broader public on issues and potential solutions. Parks Forward also sought input from State Parks staff and leadership throughout the process, with nearly 1,000 employees participating in surveys and focus group meetings. The park system's leadership provided ongoing guidance and gathered broad staff feedback. Finally, the Initiative drew upon top experts to provide research and analysis on a number of issue areas, including finance, public funding, visitor attitudes and awareness, and partnership models.

In all, the Parks Forward Commission has held more than 70 hours of public meetings, surveyed nearly 1,000 parks employees, conducted 35 hours of staff focus groups, and reviewed reports, articles, and documents numbering into the thousands of pages.

### **d. Parks Forward Commission Initial Findings**

Two key findings form the foundation for the remainder of this report. First, California's parks system is debilitated by an outdated organizational structure, underinvestment in technology and business tools, and a culture that has not rewarded excellence, innovation, and leadership. Second, only broad-based, fundamental change will transform the system into one that will transform parks and the parks experience to once again lead the nation and world in meeting the needs of citizens and visitors for decades to come. A huge opportunity exists to enhance protection and stewardship of parks by leveraging the vast talent and resources available among California's business, volunteer, and nonprofit leadership.

***i. An Imperiled Legacy***

State Parks has not been able to keep pace with the times and now faces significant system-wide financial and organizational challenges. These challenges place at risk the system's continued viability, as well as the public's trust and confidence in the Department charged with caring for the state's natural and cultural resources. Current challenges facing state parks include the following:

- Existing state parks do not adequately serve California's current or projected future populations, particularly youth and people of color.
- Lack of staff training and capacity, as well as state and Department processes, severely limit the ability to broaden visitation, expand services, and increase revenues.
- Department structure and organizational culture impede risk-taking, innovation, and entrepreneurship.
- Department technology, tools, systems, and procedures do not produce adequate data on cost, revenue, or visitor use to support operational budgeting and financial planning at the park unit, sector, district, or Department level.
- Funding shortfalls create growing maintenance, operational, and programming obligations; and undependable levels of annual funding make it difficult to make thoughtful funding decisions.
- Significant barriers exist to prevent many talented and motivated staff from attaining leadership positions, including salary compaction, unequal training and benefits, and a management structure favoring promotion among peace officer class.
- State processes and requirements discourage coordinating regional management and stewardship of state parks with other protected lands.
- State parks stewardship and management practices are under-equipped to address current threats such as climate change, invasive species, park fragmentation, and road development, which, left unchecked, will irreparably degrade California's natural and cultural resources and impair California's important aquatic resources.

***ii. A Need for Fundamental Change***

We need fundamental change—in the vision for all California parks, in the way that vision is achieved, and in the Department itself.

We have a vision for California's parks that focuses not only on protecting our state's natural and cultural resources, but also on ensuring access to parks for all Californians—especially in urban areas—engaging youth, and promoting public health through outdoor park connections.

This vision encompasses all parks in California, not just those that are part of the State Park system. Barriers to coordinated stewardship and programming across the jurisdictional boundaries of adjacent parks and protected lands should be removed. Park visitors generally do not differentiate between different types of parks and operators—they focus on their activities and experiences. So while State Parks are an important part of the statewide park system, the goal should be achieving an overarching vision for all parks and protected lands in California. The vision is achievable only through a broad network of parks accessible to all Californians.

The Department must fundamentally change the way it accomplishes these goals by working with new and old partners throughout the state. Public-private partnerships and the investment of time, talent, and resources have contributed to creating the world class parks that exist in the state. These assets—from business expertise to innovative partnerships—are not being fully realized and have the ability to make much larger contributions. This new, broad-based collaboration is not just about financial efficiencies; it is also about adding value by capitalizing on the expertise, commitment, and resources of partners, and in the process building their connection and commitment to parks. In the course of our public outreach, many of partners came forward—from other public agencies, nonprofits, academic institutions, health care providers, and technology companies. They all share the goal of a vibrant, sustainable system of parks and a commitment to being a part of the future of parks in California. Realizing this vision of collaboration will take the collective action and commitment of a broad network of partners, state leaders and new and broader coalitions of engaged Californians.

The Department itself must also change, fundamentally transforming its operations and management. Its budget and staff must be realigned to the new, broader vision, and it must provide financial accountability and transparency. The Department's leadership must instill a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation, which requires focused training and incentives for advancing new projects and practices. The Department must also be ready to accept a new role of facilitating and enabling effective collaborations. The Department must focus on its unique core responsibilities and strengths, which means some aspects of the Department's work will require external support and in some cases may be better provided by other entities. The Department must also seek out external expertise in effecting this transformation.

## 4. California Parks' Future

Now is the time to set the path for a vital, efficiently managed system of parks that will meet the state's needs for decades to come. Our vision is rooted in the current mission for State Parks—a mission which focuses equally on protecting natural and cultural resources and providing opportunities for Californians to enjoy and benefit from them, as follows:

To provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.

Operationalizing this mission today in a way that addresses California's changing needs requires a broad vision -- one that looks to the vast network of parks and protected lands in our state, that embraces the many partners in the state who share State Parks' goals, and that attracts more Californians to visit and connect with their parks. Key elements of this new vision, together with long-term metrics illustrating the benefits to the state follow.

*[The Commission will develop key metrics of success over the summer to be incorporated into the report.]*

### **a. Natural Resources, Iconic Landscapes, Rich History, and Diverse Culture are Valued and Protected**

Parks play a key role in the protection and stewardship of our state's natural and cultural resources, including the state's response to climate change. They are managed across regions and jurisdictions to ensure their long-term protection and vital role in the lives of Californians. We envision a future where parks create large, connected landscapes across the state, and provide a link to the history and culture that make California unique.

### **b. All Californians Have Access to a Network of Parks**

Parks serve all Californians, regardless of their location or means. Every neighborhood has a quality park close by and improved transportation options for getting there. Parks are integrated into the fabric of all Californians' lives, bringing social, health, and economic benefits to all corners of the state. Parks provide a variety of services and amenities that increase visitation throughout the state. Technology enables more people to enjoy and learn about parks.

### **c. Parks Promote Healthy, Active Lifestyles and Communities**

California's network of parks allows people to experience the outdoors, exercise, and improve their physical and emotional health through a wide range of activities. Everything

from swing sets to soccer fields to hiking trails is available. Parks also provide communities with opportunities to build safe places to come together and venues for special events.

#### **d. Youth are Actively Engaged in Parks**

Parks are outdoor classrooms, and nothing can match them for experiential learning. They promote leadership skills, enrich science programs, and make California's history and cultural heritage come alive. As part of every youth's active lifestyle, parks foster deep connections with nature and enhance physical and emotional health. Active engagement by youth from every community builds new park users, supporters, and professionals to guide parks in the future.

#### **e. The California Department of Parks and Recreation is a Capable and Focused Agency and Partner**

The Department has adopted this vision to guide all of its activities and plays a critical role in bringing this new parks vision to California. The Department is a receptive, flexible partner to other park systems, nonprofits, and others that share this vision. It coordinates joint programs and lends specialized expertise. The Department employs highly effective staff and has state-of-the-art processes, planning, and metrics for success. Park managers have the financial resources and management tools they need to succeed, including stable public funding.

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We believe wholeheartedly that this vision of a re-imagined park system is necessary. While it is a bold vision, it is one that California is uniquely capable of accomplishing. As difficult as the task may be, Californians' dedication to their parks is greater—a unified coalition of public agencies, park professionals, nonprofit organizations, partners, volunteers, businesses, civic leaders, and advocates is up to the task.

The next chapter lays out a roadmap to accomplish this vision. All of our recommendations are designed to be practical and effective in modernizing the Department, growing park use and visitation, and protecting the system's resources. Many can be implemented quickly. In some cases, we have already launched initiatives that hold promise. Other changes will build the strong institutions, managers, and funding sources that will provide the bedrock for longer-term improvements.

## **5. Charting a New Course**

Many aspects of the vision set forth above have been proposed previously, both internally by the Department as far back as the Olmsted report, as well as externally by park supporters in reports such as the Parks Excellence Project. What is most striking, however, is the fact that despite years of well-intentioned external reports and internal

strategic plans, the Department has not yet been able to achieve the magnitude or scope of change needed. In building our recommendations below, we have carefully considered why the changes necessary for this vision have been so difficult to implement, in order to ensure that our recommendations can yield specific, demonstrable action and results. We also recognize that progress on all components of the new vision must happen concurrently, and not sequentially. We do not have the luxury of waiting for a transformed Department to implement this vision, nor do we think such an incremental approach is a reasonable strategy for success, given past efforts and current realities.

With this backdrop, we have framed our recommendations around those elements required for achieving this new vision. These elements include the core functions that will be performed by a fully-functioning and transformed Department. They also include those supportive functions that are more appropriately performed by other parks partners, including an independent entity created to support the Department, to provide key services the Department is not positioned to efficiently provide.

The following recommendations focus on those actions that need to be taken to transform the Department into a modernized and effective agency, and to create a new Support Entity, that together can efficiently perform the essential actions required to achieve the new vision. In parallel, we set forth recommendations for ensuring protection of the system's natural and cultural resources, improving parks access to all Californians, with particular attention paid to serving urban and other traditionally underserved communities, using parks to address vexing public health challenges, and engaging more youth in outdoor and educational activities to improve their well-being and build a cadre of future parks supporters and leaders. Recognizing funding challenges are associated with implementation of all of the recommendations, our final recommendations focus on ensuring appropriate levels of stable funding to support the vision.

#### **a. Build an Effective Department of Parks and Recreation**

Key to achieving the new vision is a Department transformed in both how it works internally and how it relates externally with its partners. Internally, an efficient Department is one with strong leadership that rewards innovation and vests appropriate authority at the field-level, staff skilled in core functions with equitable opportunities for development through training and promotion, and state of the art systems, processes and technology that enable transparent, complete, and accountable budgeting, planning, and project implementation.

Externally, an effective Department is one that seeks and embraces new models and opportunities for working with existing and new partners to advance the vision in new ways. The Department must function as a leader, coordinator, and partner, seeking out innovative, cost efficient, effective means of conducting business. The Department must work closely with public agencies, tribes, nonprofit organizations, businesses, volunteers,

and civic leaders not only within the State Park System, but across the landscape of local, state, and federal parks and protected lands. These relationships must be collaborative and grounded in the Department's mission and Parks Forward recommendations.

In addition, despite best efforts, changing how a public agency functions is not an easy task to initiate or sustain. We have, therefore, recommended specific changes, as well as mechanisms for ensuring change occurs. We believe nothing short of these recommendations will set the Department on the path to leadership that is required.

***i. Align and Modernize Technology and Accounting Systems***

The Department's out of date and ineffective systems and tools significantly limit its ability to manage core functions. Absent better information on actual costs and the ability to measure performance, opportunities for improving efficiency, supporting priority activities and investments, and achieving greater outcomes with available resources will be unreliable and instead reflect old and incomplete assumptions and conditions.

- For Information Technology the Department should:
  - Upgrade its information technology infrastructure at headquarters and in district offices.
  - Include information technology in all facility planning and upgrade projects.
  - Include information technology in all systems management planning from accounting to visitor tracking.
  - Upgrade entrance fee and parking technologies to ensure all fees are collected, tracked, and information on users reported.
- With respect to an Accounting System, the Department should:
  - Seek early implementation of FI\$Cal, the state's new financial management system or implement an interim, off-the-shelf accounting system to meet Department needs for tracking, reporting, and disbursing funds.
  - Train staff to use the new accounting system.
  - Make staff accountable for providing current, accurate data into the accounting system.
  - Connect fee collection directly into the accounting system and ensure that fees are uploaded automatically in real time.
  - Implement use of electronic timecards for all staff.
- The Department should develop tools and processes to revise budgeting and financial planning for all functions including operations, maintenance, and capital

improvement to more accurately assess the costs of managing Department assets and to facilitate measurement of key operating and customer service.

- The Department should work with partners and the Support Entity to accelerate deployment of innovative technology to enhance visitor experience.
- The Department should work with the Administration and Legislature to ensure procurement rules are reasonable, do not impede modernization, and can be undertaken quickly and efficiently, but with sufficient guidance and tracking to ensure accountability.

## ***ii. Align and Modernize Leadership and Staffing***

Like any successful enterprise, the Department must be able to hire talented employees with diverse backgrounds and skills; invest in their ability to manage complex projects and diverse interests; and promote the best and brightest to lead. This requires a diverse team of leaders in Sacramento and the field with skills necessary to advance the Parks Forward vision and recommendations, grounded with the requisite expertise and training necessary to solve complex problems in a creative, multidisciplinary fashion, and understanding of how to develop effective partnerships.

At present, to become a district superintendent and provide leadership in the field, candidates must be peace officers. While the Department has many capable leaders, as a whole, the current structure for training and promoting leaders is seen by many to focus more on the Department's public safety functions, than on other core functions such as administration, resource protection, and facilities maintenance, which are equally important for effective management and leadership. Additionally, the Department's current policies do not provide comparable training opportunities or a clear promotion pathway to leadership for qualified non-peace officer staff.

- The Department should establish a field management structure that provides equitable opportunities for staff of all relevant backgrounds—peace officer and non peace officer alike—to gain mission-related expertise and supervisory experience and to advance into leadership positions. To achieve this, the Department should update its policies, classifications, qualifications, and training protocols to (1) align with the Parks Forward vision and recommendations, including working effectively with partners; (2) enable promotion of field leadership from among all qualified candidates, eliminating peace officer certification as a prerequisite for promotion; (3) enable all field leaders to effectively supervise a broad range of functions and operations, including public safety; and (4) implement a mandated training course for non-peace officer managers and supervisors on how to manage peace officer and law enforcement functions.



- The Department should recruit, retain, and promote diverse and qualified personnel and leadership that reflects California’s demographic makeup within 10 years.
- The Department should encourage broader peace officer participation in all Department core functions including natural and cultural resource stewardship, operations, facilities, visitor enjoyment, and interpretation.
- The Department should consider creating a separate division for law enforcement, as the National Park Service, East Bay Regional Park District, and other state parks have done.
- Across the spectrum of positions, classifications, and functions, the Department should instill a strong culture of collaboration, innovation, and creativity to advance the Parks Forward vision and recommendations. To do this, the Department should provide field leadership with clear responsibility and standards, but also sufficient flexibility, to manage core functions as close to the point of service as feasible, including through collaboration with the Support Entity and partners. The Department should also enable field leaders to hire and promote in alignment with on-the-ground needs.

***iii. Facilitate and Support Effective Partnerships***

While the Department currently works with a variety of partners around the state, more can be done to take advantage of the wealth of expertise, talent, passion, and commitment of organizations and individuals that share and support our new vision. The Department must focus on these opportunities and enable staff to take advantage of them. In many instances the Department’s role must change from direct provider of services to facilitator and collaborator. Rather than asking, “How do we deliver this service ourselves?” the Department should ask, “How do we achieve the best outcome?” In addition, the Department must remain an active, committed, collaborative partner. This means staying engaged with park operators, concessionaires, and others to develop and achieve shared goals that emphasize the protection of park resources, sharing these assets with visitors, and working with partners to find workable solutions when problems arise.

- The Department should reward innovation and partnerships. It should provide flexibility and support for districts developing partnerships, and, where relevant, include working with partnerships as an employee performance goal to incentivize partnership work.
- The Department should provide the resources necessary to facilitate, develop, and manage partnerships, including adequate, experienced staff in both the field and headquarters.

- The Support Entity should work with the Department to create tools and trainings for both Department employees and partners to facilitate effective partnerships.
- The Department should work with the California Legislature to lower barriers to partnerships, including with other public agencies, private companies, nonprofits, and volunteers, and for public works projects and concessions.

***iv. Align and Modernize Governance***

We recommend that as part of the Department transition described above, the Department and its transition team assess how to more efficiently manage the multiple commissions within the Department. At present, in addition to the Director and his team, the Department supports four specialized Commissions: (1) State Historical Resources Commission; (2) California Park and Recreation Commission; (3) California Boating and Waterways Commission; and (4) California Off Highway Vehicle Commission. While the State Historical Resources Commission addresses unique Department functions and ensures adherence to and receives funding from the federal government, the other three commissions overlap to some degree in that they address differing forms of recreation among their other duties. At the very least, clarifying how these commissions work with one another and the Department, and ensuring their functions reflect the current and future needs of the state must be addressed as part of a department-wide transition.

***v. Ensure Successful Implementation by Investing in Expertise and Providing Authority to Achieve Alignment and Modernization***

To ensure implementation of these recommendations, we recommend establishing with the Department an office of operational effectiveness charged with driving internal transformation to achieve the Parks Forward vision and recommendations. This team will report directly to the Director, but also work closely with California Natural Resources Agency leadership and the Governor’s office to ensure timely action. The team will include current Department employees including field staff, as well as externally recruited experts who have deep experience and expertise helping lead public sector organizations through periods of significant change, modernization, and transition.

The Administration and California Legislature must empower the team with streamlined decision-making authority over key organizational changes. The team will adhere to a defined set of goals and a timeline for meeting those goals. Following achievement of the goals, the team functions will transition to park staff trained in operations and finance. We encourage philanthropy to partner with the state in helping make this transition happen.

**b. Create New Organization to Support Parks**

In addition to the changes to the Department described above, we believe a new nonprofit entity is needed to support the Department, work with existing nonprofit

partners, and provide key services for parks. This new Support Entity can provide operational, financial, and strategic support for the Department including facilitating partnerships, coordination among all entities with stewardship and management responsibilities for protected lands, statewide park planning, expanding access, promoting health and recreation, engaging youth, and ensuring protection of natural and cultural resources. In addition, we see the Support Entity working in partnership with the many existing, successful organizations that support parks, building collaboration and increasing efficiency and support.

As a result, we recommend creating a nonprofit corporation whose mission would be to support the California State Parks System by leading, funding, and facilitating a variety of activities integral to implementing these recommendations:

***i. Strategic Planning and Coordination***

We recommend the Support Entity identify opportunities for increased coordination in management, stewardship, and interpretation of parks and protected lands and facilitate opportunities to advance collaborative activities and cooperative management of Department properties with other parks and protected lands. In addition, the Department should collaborate with the Support Entity to ensure additional focus on providing parks, services, and amenities in underserved, especially urban communities. This work should supplement what the Department can undertake on its own, help coordinate priorities among a wide array of park entities, and spend time the Department staff do not have to develop, expand, and maintain constructive partnerships.

***ii. Enterprise Functions***

We recommend the Support Entity work with the Department to increase revenue generation by providing the funding, design, support, and coordination to ensure state-of-the-art revenue collection machines are deployed at Department properties where fees are charged. Additionally, the Support Entity should work with the Department to collect, assess, and report data on park users and services. The Support Entity should also seek ways to increase business development including working with the Department and partners to advance use of parks for special events and developing community and preservation partnerships for appropriate historic sites. Increasing the use of parks by existing park users as well as meeting the needs and increasing use by new park users and supporters is a vital support role to achieving the recommendations for future parks needs.

***iii. Fundraising and Financing Solutions***

We recommend the Support Entity provide financial support for parks through private and philanthropic fundraising, seeking new partnerships and collaborations, and through new, creative approaches including crowd funding, low-interest philanthropic loans, and commercial equity/debt raises, among other approaches.

#### ***iv. Communications, Marketing, and Digital Information and Tools***

The Support Entity should work with the Department and its partners to develop digital tools in Spanish and English, to promote and facilitate park use. This includes developing user-friendly digital information for users including trails, bike routes, picnic sites, overnight accommodations, parking, recreational opportunities, amenities, and events to help new users access parks and existing users make more extensive use. Additionally, the Support Entity should work with the Department and partners to advance “Google Trekker” digital images of all regional, state, and federal park trails, campsites, and amenities to enable potential users to assess the quality, difficulty, and accessibility of trails and other amenities. The Support Entity should work with the Department and other park providers to outline high impact marketing and digital information to build a broader, more diverse constituency of park users and supporters.

#### ***v. Land Acquisition***

We recommend that the Support Entity work with the Department, local, regional, and federal park managers, and partners to identify how land acquisition advances strategic state-wide park planning including meeting the needs of urban and underserved communities, adapting to climate change, and connecting protected lands to one another and to communities to provide a seamless network of protected lands. The Support Entity should seek acquisition financing or funding from private sources and public funding to maximize the resources available for priority acquisitions. In addition to identifying acquisition priorities and seeking funding to support acquisition, the Support Entity may be the appropriate entity to undertake the acquisition or may provide funding and support to other nonprofit organizations or public agencies to do so. The Support Entity should also assess how additions to California’s network of protected lands will be managed, monitored, and stewarded, as well as how to publicize, support, and provide access to these properties once acquired.

#### ***vi. Organizational Capacity and Effectiveness***

The Support Entity should work to support existing successful park support organizations including by providing training, access to expertise, and funding to increase existing organizations effectiveness, capacity, and ability to support the recommendations contained herein.

To ensure the efficacy and coordination needed for California to meet the current and future needs of the state, we recommend that the California Legislature recognize the import, mission, and role of the Support Entity in providing vital support to the State Parks System and identify the conditions under which this organization can receive direct appropriations and funding from the state.

### **c. Protect Natural and Cultural Resources**

As a stewardship agency, the Department of Parks and Recreation plays a central role in protecting and managing California’s natural and cultural heritage. This was a fundamental impetus for the creation of the State Park System, and remains at the core of the State Parks mission.

State Parks’ 1.5 million acre system protects some of California’s most valued natural resources and is integral to national, statewide, and regional networks of conserved land. Managing and restoring ecosystems, such as healthy forests, native grasslands, functioning marshes, meadows, and dune systems, improves habitat for wildlife and has significance far beyond park boundaries. This role can only grow in importance with the increasing impacts of climate change. In addition, the Department oversees some of the state’s most sensitive archaeological and sacred sites, ethnographic properties, prehistoric structures and buildings, historic structures, cultural landscapes, and museum collections—including thousands of objects, artwork, photographs and documents.

Currently, an insufficient allocation of resources is jeopardizing the long-term protection of State Parks’ assets. These challenges are addressed in the recommendations related to building an effective Department and securing stable public funding.

At the same time, the Department must make full use of partnerships with other public agencies, tribes, academic institutions, private companies, nonprofits, and volunteers. While the Department works with partners in some of this work, more can be done. As one example, regional collaborative natural resource management with other public agencies and stakeholders is already being undertaken in some districts, and this should be replicated in other regions. In addition, creating partnerships to restore historic buildings and adapt them for new uses presents another promising opportunity.

Our recommendations for improving the protection of natural and cultural resources, together with key action items for each recommendation, follow:

#### ***i. Develop Partnerships to Improve Natural Resource Management and Address Climate Change Impacts***

- The Department should partner with relevant public agencies and other stakeholders to collaboratively manage natural resources, including:
  - Developing and participating in additional regional collaborative natural resource management programs, including the state’s Marine Protected Areas, 39 of which are connected to State Park lands;
  - Identifying and acquiring (either by the Department or others) additions to the state’s protected lands, consistent with state recommendations for adapting to climate change and with an emphasis on increasing connectivity and resource linkages.

- Working with the Support Entity to determine how best to encourage collaborative planning and management, including specific partnership projects with relevant federal, state, and local agencies, tribes, universities, and the nonprofit community. This collaboration may take the form of creating a natural resource management advisory panel, or some other means of ensuring effective collaboration.
- The Department should emphasize and address climate change adaptation in its natural resource management work, including research, active management, and participating in California’s climate change adaptation strategy and planning.
- The Department should develop appropriate management-oriented research through improving connections to academic researchers (including through the University of California Natural Reserve System) and make use of emerging ‘citizen science’ applications and programs.

**ii. *Implement Preservation and Community Partnerships to Protect and Restore Cultural Sites and Encourage Adaptive Reuse Where Appropriate***

- The Department should identify historic buildings that are in need of extensive renovation, restoration, or ongoing maintenance and are appropriate for adaptive reuse and community preservation partnerships.
- The Department should execute at least three pilot adaptive reuse and community preservation partnership projects in the next year.
- The Department should work with the Support Entity to facilitate such projects, including the ability to raise and coordinate public and private funding, actively seek private or nonprofit partners, create the mechanisms and processes to ensure prompt review and approval of arrangements that ensure protection of cultural resources, encourage additional public access, and reduce the Department’s costs.

**d. Improve Access for All Californians**

The best way to get more Californians to understand the value of parks is to get more Californians to visit parks. For so many reasons, it is critical for the long-term success of the state parks system and for the state that all Californians have safe and easy access to parks. Increased visitation at state parks, if done right, will contribute to the long-term sustainability of state parks by building a stronger and more diverse coalition of Californians in support of parks, creating a more diverse pool of Californians ready to lead and work in parks, and generating increased revenues from higher levels of use.

From the very beginning and throughout the Parks Forward effort, we have been mindful of the state's rapidly changing demographics, particularly as relates to age, ethnicity, and urbanism and their impacts on parks issues and uses. For example California's Latino population is projected to grow from 38% in 2010 to 52% in 2040. At 90 million nationally, and constituting 29% of the California population in 2010, "Millennials" (the segment of the population born between 1980 and 2000) represents the single largest generation in human history and will decide the next six presidential elections. Finally, in 2010, 61% of Californians were clustered in three urban areas; by 2050, 76% of Californians are projected to cluster in those three urban areas. This evolution has been foundational to our discussions and deliberations, particularly those relating to ideas for improving parks access and visitation.

Recent analysis confirms that parks are generally not located where populations reside, particularly in urbanized areas. Generally, low income areas are park poor, while park rich areas are located far from population centers. Improving park access to underserved communities and urban areas requires different types of parks—safe parks that meet the needs of communities they serve. In many communities, this means areas for active recreation like soccer fields, larger picnic areas for multi-generational family get-togethers, and accessible overnight lodging alternatives. Design and management of urban parks requires a parks workforce, partners, and vendors that reflect the cultural diversity of California to ensure programming and services offered are relevant to local communities, together with plans for long-term sustainability that benefit from continued community engagement. Practical transportation options, both from urban centers to remote parks and within urban neighborhoods to local parks, are essential for Californians to easily and affordably use parks.

Our recommendations for improving park visitation and ensuring access to all Californians, together with key action items for each recommendation, follow:

***i. Expand Access to Parks in Underserved and Urban Areas***

- The Department should prioritize urban parks as a key component of its mission.
- The Department should adopt, and work aggressively to meet, the goal of having park visitation track California's demographic makeup within 10 years.
- The Department and its partners should develop a Park Equity Report Card which identifies locational and demographic attributes of parks users and parks visited and is updated bi-annually to show progress against goals of increasing numbers and diversity of parks visitation.

- The Department should partner with local and regional park providers, vendors, and the Support Entity to identify future park projects, involving both new and existing parks, that will increase visitation, particularly among underserved communities in park poor areas, providing opportunities for active recreation, multi-generational picnic and gathering places, and other culturally relevant amenities.
- The Department should partner with local and regional parks providers and the Support Entity to develop in the next [2/3] years [3/5] new pilot urban park projects in park poor areas, whether in existing parks or newly-created parks, that test new models of park planning, design, development, and operation to ensure parks are designed to meet the needs of communities, including engagement of local communities and local park agencies in the planning process to ensure facilities, amenities, design, and programming align with local needs, and sustainable operating plans.
- The Department, its partners, and the Support Entity should work together to identify current legal, planning, and policy barriers for prompt implementation of urban park strategies and develop appropriate legislative and policy strategies for removing barriers.
- The Department and its partners should assess how previous public funding (particularly state land and water conservation bonds) has been invested throughout the state, and work to ensure that new public funding sources allocate substantial resources to urban park needs.

***ii. Remove Transportation Obstacles Impeding Broader Access to Parks***

- The Department and the Support Entity should develop digital “trip planner” technology that provides automobile and transit options to parks, comparable to trip planner features currently available on many transit, tourism and leisure websites such as the Bay Area Open Space Council’s “Transit & Trails” or Portland Oregon’s “Tri-met Transit to Trails.”
- In the next two years, the Department should work with local and regional park agencies, transit operators, and nonprofit organizations on pilot projects that test new approaches for improving transportation access to parks in both urban and non-urban areas. Example pilot projects include travel passes, discounted rates with car sharing operators such as Zipcar, weekend use of carpooling/ridesharing vans, bicycle-sharing options at transit stations, and expanding in-park mobility systems to connect transit stations with parks.



***iii. Support an Integrated Network of Local, Regional, State, and Federal Park Lands for Park Users***

- The Department should work with local, regional, and national parks, nonprofit organizations, appropriate business interests, and the Support Entity to increase visitation and improve the visitor experience through coordinated parks operations, programming, interpretation, and facilities.

***iv. Create Digital Tools, in Spanish and English, to Promote and Facilitate Parks Use***

- The Support Entity should coordinate with the Department and develop user-friendly digital information that identifies important park information for users including trails, bike routes, picnic sites, overnight accommodations, parking, recreational amenities, and events will help new users access parks.
- To facilitate access to information and the ability for park visitors to interact, the Department should ensure wireless internet access in all state parks.
- The Support Entity should coordinate with the Department and advance “Google Trekker” in California parks, which provides images of trails, campsites, and amenities to enable potential users to assess the quality, difficulty, and accessibility of trails and other park amenities.

***v. Increase the Number and Variety of Overnight Accommodations***

- The Department, its partners, and the Support Entity should install a significant number of newly-designed, environmentally-sustainable, reasonably-priced rustic cabins in key parks.
- The Department, its partners, and the Support Entity should identify other potential near-term lodging opportunities in state parks.
- The Department should work with the Support Entity and other partners to develop and implement a comprehensive, long-term strategy for lodging across the state parks system, coordinated with other local, regional, and national park agencies.

**e. Promote Healthy Lifestyles and Communities**

Healthcare providers are increasingly cognizant of the significant role parks play in improving human health and stemming healthcare costs. Many chronic illnesses that are currently on the rise and cost considerable amounts to treat, such as obesity, heart disease, stroke, allergies, asthma, attention deficit disorder, and diabetes, can be traced to an indoor, sedentary lifestyle. In contrast, unstructured outdoor play by kids is proven to reduce injuries, improve concentration and language skills, and build stronger, better balanced, and more agile bodies.

With over 8 million newly insured enrolled under the Affordable Care Act, and healthcare costs projected to continue increase as a percentage of gross domestic product in the years ahead (projected by some to reach 50% by 2082), the incentives for healthcare providers to work with park providers on innovative solutions to vexing public health issues has never been higher. A refocusing of effort on the 99% of time that patients are left on their own to make health decisions, as opposed to the overwhelming investment of effort and resources currently on the 1% of the time that patients are under direct medical care, could yield tremendous benefits. By better integrating park programming, facilities, and services to address critical health issues, parks managers can forge more effective partnerships with healthcare providers, building broader support for parks.

Our recommendations for promoting healthy lifestyles and communities through parks, together with key action items for each recommendation, follow:

***i. Develop and Refine Planning and Measuring Tools***

- The Department and the Support Entity should collaborate with healthcare providers using census and GIS data to identify the best locations for pilot health-related park projects.
- The Department and the Support Entity should work with healthcare providers and academic research institutions to develop more sophisticated tools and metrics for measuring how park uses reduce healthcare costs and improve public health as relates to both pilot projects and park use more broadly.

***ii. Create Partnerships with Healthcare Providers to Support Projects that Encourage Healthy Behaviors***

- The Department should work with healthcare providers, partners, and the Support Entity to develop tools, programs, and projects for communicating health benefits associated with parks and outdoor recreation, and experiment with providing incentives for healthy behavior, including “park prescriptions” which are directives from health professionals to patients to engage in outdoor recreation activities to improve health conditions.

***iii. Collaborate with Local, Regional, and National Parks to Address Health Conditions, Public Health Issues, and Health Disparities***

- The Department and the Support Entity should collaborate with public park providers to create a mosaic of resources that connect public health departments and healthcare systems with parks, and create materials and means to communicate the health benefits of outdoor activities.
- The Department should work with park providers, partners, and the Support Entity to expand health-related special events in parks including performing arts, sporting, and healthy food events, and to develop business plans that identify

facilities, operating costs, projected revenue generation, capital needs, and pricing for such special events.

***iv. Expand Healthy Food Options in Parks***

- The Department should create and adopt standards, guidelines, tools, and resources to ensure healthy food options in parks. The Department should consider replicating a system like the National Park System’s recent “Healthy and Sustainable Food Program.”

**f. Engage Youth**

Deep experiences with nature at young ages build confidence, increase academic performance, and help youth become leaders. However, far too few kids are spending time outdoors. Research identifies a number of social, cultural, and financial reasons for this, including parental attitudes, safety concerns, time availability outside of structured sports and school-work, general lack of awareness, paucity of age-appropriate programs and activities, and lack of ethnically diverse park employees to serve as role models and mentors. Market research conducted for Parks Forward found that many young people simply believe that "people like me" don't go to parks.

Parks are also a tremendous educational asset. From science to California history and culture, parks offer opportunities for hands-on programs that bring these subjects alive. Yet today, we are failing to fully take advantage of this opportunity.

We need to reverse these trends so youth can enjoy the life-long benefits of the outdoors. This also opens the door to a future where “park professional” is on the list of coveted professions for youth of every ethnicity, and the Department’s workforce better reflects the demographics of a changing California.

Our recommendations for engaging more youth in parks, together with key action items for each recommendation, follow:

***i. Increase Outdoor Education and Recreation Opportunities***

- The Department should work with schools and community-based groups to expand and strengthen educational, interpretive, and outdoor recreational park programming for K-12 youth.
- The Department should work with outside organizations and the Support Entity to define specific, aggressive goals, strategies to achieve them, and metrics for measuring results of youth programs that assess the number and diversity of children served as well as the effectiveness and sustainability of programs.

***ii. Recruit and Train Youth as Park Volunteers and Professionals***

- The Department should target recruitment of volunteers, interns, and staff from within traditionally under-represented communities.

- The Department should work with the Support Entity, and partners, such as the University and State College systems, California Conservation Corps and local corps, and the Student Conservation Association, to expand intern and temporary work programs that will provide a path through training and skills development for more young adults to enter park-related careers.

### **g. Secure Predictable, Stable Sources of Public Funding for Local, Regional, and State Parks**

Parks contribute to the economy of many communities and the state. Parks also provide important opportunities for recreation, protect unique habitats and cultural resources, reflect unique and iconic landscapes, provide a connection to the state's rich history, and contribute to healthy communities. California's State Park System is a treasure to be supported by its citizens and those who visit from across the nation and around the world.

California's State Park System needs to improve its fiscal management to be more cost efficient as well as increase its revenue generation. However, even with increases in efficiency and revenue generation as recommended, California's State Park System requires dependable levels of public funding to maintain its assets and meet current and future needs of the state. The State's General Fund contribution to the State Park System is volatile, reflecting changes in state revenue. Special fund contributions to the State Park System, such as bond funds, have provided important funding to state, regional, and local parks. However, existing bond funds will be expended within the decade.

Providing a dedicated source of public funding for parks is essential to achieving the vision of the Parks Forward Commission and meeting the needs of the state. We call upon the Legislature, Administration, and citizens of the state to enact a dedicated source of public funding to support a network of parks to serve all Californians, with funding targeted to meet the needs of those traditionally park poor communities. Additionally, we encourage the state to explore opportunities for using special fund contributions and climate mitigation funds. As individual Commissioners, we pledge to work to support these new sources for parks including dedicated public funding.

Until a new source can be enacted, we call upon the Administration and Legislature to provide sufficient funding to meet ongoing park operating needs and begin to chip away at the backlog of unmet maintenance needs to protect these valuable assets. We encourage looking to all available sources to prevent park closures or damage to natural and cultural assets.

## **6. Implementation**

*[This section is not yet complete. Over the summer the Commission will set forth the changes to processes, funding, laws, structures, governance, and policy to support the recommendations. Because there are both near and long term tasks, implementation will proceed in phases. And, in some cases, substantial work remains to be done to create detailed implementation plans.]*

## **7. Conclusion**

*[This section is not yet complete. Over the summer the Commission will summarize the key themes, highlight critical next steps, emphasize the need to act now, and call state leaders, the department, stakeholders, and the public to action.]*

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