

PRESS RELEASE

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California State Park Officials Announce Sweeping New “Parks Forward” Initiative
New Commission Created to Transform California’s State Parks System

SACRAMENTO _ California Secretary of Natural Resources John Laird and California State Parks Director Major General Anthony L. Jackson, USMC (Ret.), today unveiled “Parks Forward,” a collaborative initiative to undertake a top-to-bottom evaluation to improve and sustain California's underfunded State Parks System. A distinguished volunteer panel, which will be known as the Parks Forward Commission, will lead the new Parks Forward initiative, designed to implement the directives of the California State parks Stewardship Act of 2012 and to revive and improve California’s State Parks. "Parks Forward is an exciting new initiative designed to bring out the very best in our state's storied parks. This esteemed group will work to improve efficiency, increase accessibility and meet the needs of our growing and changing population," Laird said. "California's State Parks will once again flourish and serve as prized destinations across our cities, mountains, valleys and coastlines."

Currently, there are 280 State Parks covering 1.6 million acres draw some 70 million visitors annually, returning an estimated \$6.5 billion to the California economy and supporting 56,000 California jobs. This system has been the proud result of significant and sustained investment by not only the state and its citizens, but also philanthropic contributors and conservation organizations whose combined efforts built the system we know today. But under the weight of budget cuts, added acreage, rising populations, and outmoded systems, California’s parks system is struggling to meet the needs of its citizens.

“California State Parks are an essential part of Californians’ daily lives. They provide quality recreation and inspiration, and it is our intent to improve it for future generations. The expertise and knowledge of those representing State Parks and the Parks Forward initiative will provide a unique insight and best practices to ensure our parks move forward into the 21st Century and beyond,” said Director Jackson. “We are fully aware the eyes of Californians are on us, and I am committed to making this initiative open and transparent, and one that yields achievable results.”

The California State Parks Stewardship Act of 2012, or AB 1589, was signed into law last year,

and was proposed as a result of the ongoing and serious funding problems discovered within the California Department of Parks and Recreation. The Department had recently faced the threat of park closures, but unreported funding was discovered, leading to audits and investigations. The unreported funding of \$20.5 million was returned to the Department, and half is being used to prevent park closures. So far, more than \$3 Million has been awarded to parks across the state via matching fund agreements. However, this is a short-term fix as the funding will expire in 2014. State General Fund support for parks has dropped by 37 percent in the past five years, and the Department has a deferred maintenance backlog of more than \$1.3 billion.

The Parks Forward Commission, a panel of experts, citizens, and advocates will conduct an assessment of the parks system and recommend substantial improvements. This independent process will address the financial, operational, cultural, and population challenges facing state parks to ensure the system's long-term viability, functionality, and relevance.

The Parks Forward Initiative will be supported by significant charitable funding, public agency commitments, the nonprofit community and other stakeholders.

Secretary Laird will select the Parks Forward Commission members. The Parks Forward Commission is expected to present its final findings and recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature in fall 2014.

Learn more about Parks Forward at www.ParksForward.com and by following us on Twitter at @ParksForward and liking us on Facebook at [Facebook.Com/ParksForward](https://www.facebook.com/ParksForward).

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