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**PARKS FORWARD COMMISSION DRAFT PLAN CALLS FOR FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES  
TO CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS SYSTEM**

***Panel's Blueprint Provides Recommendations for Sustainability of State's Parks***

SACRAMENTO, July 30, 2014 -- The Parks Forward Commission, an independent panel of experts charged by the Legislature and Governor to review the future of the state's park system, today issued its draft plan that recommends a series of sweeping changes to ensure the long-term sustainability of California's State Parks.

The 40-page plan, published after more than a year of outreach and study that included public meetings, discussions with State Parks leadership and staff, surveys, and independent analyses conducted for the Commission, provides a detailed blueprint to transform state park management and modernize state park operations to serve California's increasingly diverse population.

"Our recommendations are not designed to merely tinker around the edges and patch the current system," notes the plan. "Instead, we present a plan to transform state park management and modernize state park operations. Our plan will transform how state parks are run, how they protect the state's natural and cultural resources, and how they serve all Californians and other visitors."

"There is nothing more Californian than our parks," says Parks Forward Commission Co-Chair Lance Conn. "We hold these treasures in trust for future generations." The plan further states, "It is our collective responsibility to carefully steward these resources so they can serve visitors for a long time to come. If Californians fail to act now, we face the very real prospect of closed parks, imperiled cultural places, and precious lands and waters left without proper care."

"We appreciate the work put into this draft by the Commission and look forward to the opportunity to collaborate on the final plan," said Natural Resources Secretary John Laird. "With our dedicated Parks' staff already implementing a modernized payment system and other technological advances addressed here, there is no question we will continue to work together to craft a bold, realistic plan for the future."

"We look forward to continuing our work with Parks Forward as they refine their recommendations for the final draft due this fall focusing on our shared mutual goal of bettering the state park system," said Lisa Mangat, Acting Director, California State Parks. "In the meantime, we are continuing our focused efforts to strengthen the department and improve the state parks system by improving internal budgetary processes, and diligently working to implement technological changes to make it easier for park visitors to visit our parks."

Four cornerstones form the foundation of the Commission's recommendations to build long-term sustainability of the California State Parks System, all of which focus on the need to protect and enhance the unique natural and cultural resources of California parks: transforming the Department's operations; enhancing partnerships; rebooting efforts to attract California's diverse population; and developing stable funding sources.

- The Commission is calling for revamping the Department's operations, promotional structure, administrative and financial systems, procedures, and technology. To accomplish this, the Commission recommends a two-year effort that will include a multi-disciplinary team "empowered with the exclusive mission of transforming the Department." The team, staffed by the most qualified personnel with relevant areas of expertise from within the Department, throughout state service, and outside expert, will be charged with developing and implementing a new organizational structure and business model. The Commission also backs an open pathway to leadership for the park system's 2,500 employees so that field management positions no longer require peace officer certification. It also suggests "active recruitment measures to ensure a Department workforce more reflective of California's changing demographics" that should include a professional recruitment and development program for parks to identify, recruit, train, and accelerate promotion of talented new hires at the Department to lead parks into the future.
- Noting that the State Parks cannot succeed without successful partnerships with local, regional, and federal government agencies, nonprofit groups, and private companies, the Commission recommends that the Department "remove hurdles that hinder building productive relationships" with its partners. It also suggests the creation of a new non-profit support entity, the California Parks Conservancy, to provide operational, financial, and strategic support for organizations that manage or operate parks and other protected lands, with its first priority being the state parks. The Conservancy will work closely with the Department and park partners to complement and amplify the work of the Department and add value to the network of existing park support organizations.
- Recognizing that the "best way to get more people to understand the value of parks is to get more people to visit parks," the Commission is recommending expanding access to all Californians, especially underserved communities, urban populations, and younger generations. The plan calls for the development of new amenities, digital tools, programs, and transportation options that serve the needs of a broader base of park visitors. In addition, it is urging the creation of an "integrated network of local, regional, state, and federal park lands for park users."
- The Commission also is supporting the creation of a stable funding structure for parks, including "a more entrepreneurial and robust revenue-generation strategy with increased efficiency and accountability throughout the Department, and a dedicated, reliable source of public funding that will meet ongoing operating needs and continually reduce the backlog of unmet maintenance needed to protect valuable park assets."

"Implementation of our recommendations will not be easy or quick," the plan acknowledges. "It will require a sustained and committed effort from all of us. However, at the end of the day, our success will be marked by a capable and focused Department positioned to lead a park system that values and protects the state's iconic landscapes, natural resources, and cultural heritage; is relevant and accessible to all Californians and welcomes visitors from around the world;

engages and inspires younger generations; and promotes healthy and active lifestyles and communities that are quintessentially Californian."

The Commission's entire draft plan, which includes dozens more specific recommendations for California State Parks -- from serving healthier food to building new types of accommodations to revamping its financial systems -- is available at [www.ParksForward.com](http://www.ParksForward.com).

The Commission's plan is the result of the California State Parks Stewardship Act and AB 1478, signed into law by Governor Brown in 2012. In June 2013, the California Natural Resources Agency, California Department of Parks and Recreation, and Resources Legacy Fund, on behalf of philanthropic organizations, entered into a Memorandum of Understanding to create the Parks Forward Initiative. Secretary of Natural Resources John Laird appointed the independent Parks Forward Commission to undertake an evaluation of state parks and develop recommendations for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the State Parks System to meet the needs of all Californians and park visitors. The 12-member Commission reflects broad expertise in business, nonprofit, education, natural resources, and public service.

A public meeting on the plan will be held in at the downtown San Diego Doubletree Hotel on August 6<sup>th</sup> beginning at 9:30 a.m.

The Commission's final plan will be released in late November 2014.

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