

Executive Summary

Summary Findings from Parks Forward Initiative Public Workshops

This document summarizes the overarching findings from ten public workshops conducted throughout California in September and October 2013. The workshops were convened by the California State Park and Recreation Commission on behalf of the Parks Forward Initiative (PFI). The primary purpose of the public workshops was for members of the public to share their perspectives and ideas around the future of the California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks). Over 400 members of the public participated in the public workshops, representing a wide variety of interests and perspectives. Public comments were invited on three broad themes: meeting the needs of all Californians, financial sustainability, and effective partnerships.

The following represents common views and ideas expressed across all of the workshops:

- **Financial sustainability requires a diverse mix of funding sources with dedicated state funding.** State Parks needs to draw from a suite of funding sources; no one source such as the General Fund will be sufficient. Given the statewide benefits of state parks, the state should be responsible for funding core state park functions such as safety, natural resource protection, and interpretation.
- **Partnerships are key to State Parks' success.** Effective partnerships can play a major role in helping State Parks become financially sustainable and meet the needs of all Californians. Partnerships can help reduce costs and bring in revenues, supplement State Parks staff capacity, bring in knowledge, expertise, and creativity, and increase connection to local communities. Successful partnerships are those where there is a shared vision and goals, where each partner is empowered and has equal benefits, where coordination is consistent and communication is a "two-way street," where partners support each other and everyone's interests are achieved, where all partners feel a strong sense of ownership, and where accountability and transparency are built into the partnering relationship.
- **Long-term success requires meeting the needs of California's evolving populations.** If State Parks is to be successful moving forward, it needs to be relevant to the citizens it is serving, who will be more urban and non-white in the future. Key challenges facing State Parks include: ensuring parks are affordable to lower income groups, effectively reaching out to youth, providing sufficient access to state parks, addressing cultural and language barriers, and making visitors feel safe.
- **Opportunities exist in better meeting the needs of diverse user groups.** State Parks could increase visitation by better accommodating the needs of diverse user groups who are currently restricted in their use of state parks. User group conflicts would have to be addressed.
- **No "one-size-fits-all" solutions.** There are no "silver bullet" or "one-size-fits-all" solutions to achieving financial sustainability and effective partnerships. Individual parks need to have their own appropriate mix of funding, and partnerships need to be designed on a case-by-case basis.
- **Importance of relationships with local communities.** Partnering with local organizations is key to meeting the needs of local communities and will help build local pride and ownership in state parks. There is a strong connection between successful state parks, healthy local economies and vibrant communities. Personal relationships are especially important to cultivate.
- **Need for improved marketing and outreach.** Many Californians don't know very much about their state parks and the significant benefits that parks provide to all Californians, especially with regard to public health, natural resource protection, and support for local economies. State Parks needs to improve its marketing and outreach efforts to increase awareness.
- **Rebuilding public trust through improved planning and management.** The public has lost trust in State Parks due to recent budget issues and perceptions of mismanagement. State Parks needs to take the necessary steps to improve the quality, accountability, and transparency of its financial management structures and processes. It also needs to improve its planning processes as a critical and necessary step toward achieving its long-term goals and mission.