

Parks Forward Staff Note: This document summarizes the last of three formal focus group engagements of Department staff before the Parks Forward Commission finalizes its recommendations in November 2014. This summary, prepared by professional consultants Kearns & West, is a reflection of nearly 40 senior staff members' individual comments on August 7, 2014. As such, it does not necessarily reflect the position of the Department as a whole.

Executive Summary

Summary of August 7, 2014 California State Parks Senior Staff Focus Group Meeting

This document summarizes findings from the August 7th focus group meeting conducted with California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) senior staff. The meeting was convened by the Parks Forward Initiative. The primary purpose of this meeting was to solicit input on draft recommendations in the [July 30, 2014 Parks Forward Commission Draft](#) plan.

Focus group participants generally found the July 30th Draft to be an improvement over the *April 23, 2014 Staff Working Draft* in terms of structure and clarity. They were generally supportive of the recommendations included in the plan, although they felt it lacked sufficient detail, rationale, and focus on implementation in certain areas. Acting Director Lisa Mangat joined the session as an active participant, providing staff with leadership insight on both the draft and the Parks Forward process. In general, the tone of the session was collaborative, with the shared goal of creating effective and implementable recommendations.

Key overarching themes that emerged during the focus group meeting are as follows:

- **Successful implementation requires commitment of resources and funding.** Recommended changes to the Department need to be fully funded and resourced. This includes funding State Parks staff to implement required changes. Participants noted that current staffing levels are insufficient to implement change.
- **Pay close attention to the specific text of the plan.** Exact wording in the plan is very important, as this will be a long-term planning guide that needs to stand the test of time. Participants added that steps should be taken to ensure that statements in the plan will not be taken out of context.
- **More cost information is needed.** The Parks Forward Initiative effort needs to be informed by good information about the cost of running the California State Parks system; the transformation team could help collect this information. Additionally, for the Implementation Table in Appendix C to be useful, the draft plan should include cost information for the individual action items.
- **Clarity around role of State Parks.** While the July 30th Draft does a good job of showing the linkages and relationships between State Parks and other local, regional, and federal park systems, the document would benefit from added clarity around how State Parks is different and the unique role that State Parks should play.
- **Build appropriately on past State Parks decisions and policies.** Key decisions were made in the past regarding many of the proposed recommendations in the plan. Current recommendations should build off of past work, accomplishments, and lessons learned.
- **Change will take time and commitment.** Many of the proposed recommendations address complex issues and will take time and sustained commitment by Department staff to resolve. Participants recommended a strategy consisting of both short-term and long-term fixes.
- **Appropriate role of partnerships.** Partnerships are important and should be structured to support the mission of State Parks. State Parks and its partners – including the anticipated Parks Conservancy – need to establish systems of accountability.