

Executive Summary

Summary Findings from State Parks Employee Survey

This document summarizes findings from the Parks Forward Initiative (PFI) survey sent to California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) staff in July 2013. The purpose of the survey was to better understand the issues most important to staff, their hopes and concerns regarding the PFI, as well as their ideas on how to move State Parks forward. It was also used to help guide the topics discussed in staff focus groups held by PFI in August. The survey was prepared by a team of PFI and State Parks staff, in conjunction with Business Research Lab, an independent consultant. The survey was sent to 2,500 State Park employees, of which 951 responded (nearly 40%). Staff were able to remain anonymous in responding to the survey, though many volunteered biographical information (e.g. tenure, work function). The survey included both open-ended and closed questions, organized into four categories – Overall Views, Visitor Experience, Budgeting and Finances, and Personnel. Key findings are listed below.

Overall Views

- **Staff identified public safety (50%) and recreation (40%) as the functions State Parks performs best, and maintenance/housekeeping (48%) as the function that needs the most improvement.** Staff also identified providing education (29%), natural resource management (24%), and maintenance/housekeeping (21%) as functions that State Parks performs best, and education (16%), adequate staffing levels (12%), public safety (11%), management/leadership (11%), and natural resource management (10%) as areas that need improvement.
- **There was no overall consensus on changes staff would like to see through the PFI process, though many suggestions.** These include improved maintenance and repairs (18%), increased staff (16%), adequate funding (12%), less emphasis on law enforcement (12%), more promotion opportunities for those not in law enforcement (11%), and more vigorous marketing (11%).
- **Of the various aspects of State Parks' mission, 62% rated protecting the state's most valued natural resources as "highest priority".** This was followed by protecting the state's most valued cultural resources (50%), preserving the state's extraordinary biological diversity (46%), and providing for the health, inspiration, and education of the people of California (42%).

Budgeting and Finances

- **Regarding budget issues that Parks Forward should explore, 80% of employees ranked a clearer connection between operational need and allocation of funds as "very important."** Staff found other issues "very important," too, including more transparent reconciliation between headquarter and district budgets (64%), more clarity on the budget process (61%), and more timely systems to track spending (60%).
- **Top opportunities for reducing costs** include reducing upper management (22%), improving budgeting/accounting/money management (17%), and creating overall better procedures and processes within the department (15%).
- **Top opportunities for increasing revenues** include more special events (20%), increased marketing and public relations (18%), adding new attractions, activities, programs, and service (14%), and adding new concessions, stores, and/or rentals (14%).

Personnel

- **Leadership development and training, as well as increased promotional testing, are seen as key to improving opportunity and efficiency in the personnel process.** These changes were identified by 55% and 50% of employees, respectively, as being "very important."

Additional Recommendations

- Though there was little consensus among staff about additional recommendations and feedback, a few ideas garnered at least a 10% response rate. **The top suggestions include improving communication and utilizing staff ideas (12%), adequate funding (11%), and hiring more qualified people (10%).**