

The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger
Governor of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 94814



May 29, 2009

Re: Proposal to cut funding to California State Parks

Dear Governor Schwarzenegger,

Marin Conservation League (MCL) is a 75-year-old non-profit organization whose mission is to preserve, protect and enhance the natural resources of Marin County. The League has had a long standing relationship with State Parks. In fact, our organization was instrumental in securing the lands that led to the establishment of Samuel P. Taylor, Tomales Bay and Angel Island State Parks. We played a key role in the expansion of Mt. Tamalpais State Park and share responsibility for establishing Olompali and China Camp State Parks.

The proposal to eliminate state funding for our state park system is a perfect example of the short-sighted, "penny-wise and pound-foolish" budgetary policies that have gotten California into this budgetary fiasco. Consider:

- Over 76.6 million people visited California State Parks in fiscal year 2005/06, when the economy was strong. This year, an even greater number of visitors are anticipated and most campgrounds are already fully reserved through Labor Day. Park closures will affect not only these 80 million people, but will also directly impact the economies of neighboring communities that rely on these visitors. For every dollar that funds the parks, \$2.35 is returned to the state's General Fund through economic activities in the communities surrounding the parks.
- Over half a million schoolchildren attend formal interpretative programs in state parks every year. Further, state parks provide inexpensive family recreational/educational opportunities, many within access of major metropolitan areas. When so many of California's children are suffering from obesity, diabetes, lack of exercise and a general disassociation from nature, the removal of the state parks' services would be a tremendous disservice to our future.
- When a park closes and staff are laid off, trails become overgrown and deteriorate. Structures are not maintained and become targets for vandals. To re-open a park that has not been maintained after even a few years of closure is costly, and these resources that the State has nurtured for generations may never fully recover.
- Lack of regular supervision leads to illegal activities. The State Attorney General's office reports that nearly 2 million illegally planted marijuana plants were removed from public lands, including

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state parks, in 2008. Pesticides, chemicals, poisons, and fuels are generally used in large-scale, outdoor marijuana cultivation, and the growing areas are trashed. Attempts to irrigate the marijuana crops harm the watershed, as growers siphon water from creeks and streams. This proposal is akin to sending an open invitation to the cartels to move all their operations onto California State Parks.

- Fire danger will increase without adequate staff to maintain fire lookouts, control the growth of flammable weeds and monitor illegal campsites. It is naïve to assume that because a park has a “closed” sign at the gate no one will go there, particularly when so many people have lost their homes due to the economy. This is a drought year and Central California has already seen one large (and very expensive) fire this spring. Last year, over 2700 wildfires cost the State more than \$1 billion dollars, killed 31 people and burned 1.4 million acres. Removing supervision from our parklands will increase the risk of a repeat of the ‘08 disasters.
- The State Parks’ funding counts for less than 1/10 of one percent of the State’s budget, so this proposal will do virtually nothing to solve the deficit crisis.

California’s State Parks have provided educational and recreational opportunities for millions of citizens, protected valuable habitat for our native flora and fauna, and carefully preserved the State’s historic and archaeological sites for generations. Marin Conservation League strongly urges you to seek creative solutions to the budget crisis and keep our state parks open and accessible to all Californians. They are an irreplaceable legacy.



Nona Dennis
President

cc: State Senator Mark Leno
Assemblymember Jared Huffman
Danita Rodriguez, Marin District Superintendent, California State Parks
Elizabeth Goldstein, California State Parks Foundation
Marin Independent Journal