



July 3, 2012

The Honorable Jerry Brown
Governor
State Capitol Building
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Brown:

On behalf of Sierra Club California and its members and supporters, thank you for signing a 2012-13 budget that includes funding shifts to help keep open--for now--69 of the 70 state parks slated for closing as a result of last year's budget cuts. As you know, we have opposed those original cuts.

Sierra Club members around the state have actively and successfully participated in efforts to negotiate agreements for nonprofits and other entities to take on various responsibilities to keep the state parks open. Our members and staff have also testified at hearings and other events, urging that California's world-renowned parks system remains whole and accessible. We have worked over many years to find and support long-term funding for the parks system.

Through all of this, we have been disappointed by the lack of positive, solutions-oriented leadership on this issue coming from the governor's office--first from Governor Schwarzenegger and then from you. This is one reason we are so encouraged by and appreciate your recent budget action. We hope this is a sign that you are prepared now to take the much-needed overt leadership on developing a pathway for the long-term health of the state parks system.

On other issues that you have identified as priorities, we have observed that you do at least two things. You ensure that the department head is given the appropriate level of authority. You also assign a trusted, experienced advisor to focus on that issue. On occasion, the department head and the trusted inner-circle advisor are one and the same.

In the case of the parks system, you have left the current Department of Parks and Recreation director in a state of limbo, neither re-appointing her nor appointing someone else. This limbo essentially degrades the director's authority and highlights your administration's lack of attention to parks. We urge you to either formally reappoint the current director or appoint someone new. Don't continue the management uncertainty.

We also urge you to assign a member of your trusted inner circle to provide guidance and focus to address several elements that must be resolved to overcome 30 years of decline in park system funding. These elements are:

1. Sustainable funding options. What funding sources or revenue-generating tactics are available and/or need to be developed to make the parks system whole and fully functioning? This includes funding for the billion dollar backlog in maintenance and repairs.
2. Department structure and staffing. What is the best structure and staffing to support the mission of the parks system? Does requiring every superintendent to be a badged law enforcement officer help or hinder the mission?
3. Demand for services. The state's population has grown in the last 30 years, even as park funding has suffered. With that population growth, demand for park services--from camping sites to interpretive services--has also grown. What will be required to bring the level of access and service up to the demand?
4. Biological resources management. The system has more than a million acres of ecologically important natural areas that provide habitat and environmental services. These are critical public trust lands, our inheritance. They are the legacy the state is obligated by law and certain moral obligation to care for and preserve intact for future generations. What must the parks system do to make sure it is managing the natural areas and wildlife within its holdings in ways that ensure ecological health?
5. Equitable access. The state parks belong to all Californians and need to be priced to let them in. How can the parks system avoid pricing park amenities--like entrance fees and camping spots--so high that they become outside the reach of working people?

Governor Brown, you are a lifelong Californian, the offspring of generations of Californians. You are also a student of history. We know you understand the value California's parks have to this state, from their recreational and educational value to the ecosystem services they provide to the tourism they draw. We hope the recent concerted effort by Californians around the state to keep the parks open has demonstrated to you that Californians value the parks system and want to preserve it.

We urge you to end your near-silence on the parks issue. We urge you to take the actions we have recommended in this letter and to help reinvigorate the park system. We offer our support and look forward to working with you and your staff and appointees in this endeavor.

Sincerely,



Kathryn Phillips
Director