



Promoting Professionalism In California State Parks

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June 26, 2012

Little Hoover Commission
925 L Street, Suite 805
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: June 26th Hearing on California State Parks

To Little Hoover Commission;

A recent article in the Sacramento Bee has called the proposed closing of several units of California's State Parks a "failure of imagination" on the part of Governors Schwarzenegger and Brown. This is also true for the majority of the Legislature. The California State Parks Rangers Association (CSPRA) feels that it is indeed a "failure of imagination" as well as a dangerous precedent. Approximately half of the parks originally slated for closure are parks that represent California's unique cultural heritage. CSPRA, a 48 year old organization of State Park professionals representing numerous classifications, believes that our state parks should never be closed and that a permanent funding solution must be determined.

State Parks are much more than trails and beaches; they are repositories of the human imagination, and as such, serve as hosts to irreplaceable examples of our past. The resources of state parks embody who we are as Californians and Americans. Once lost to looters and criminals, those resources can't be recovered. The destruction of our cultural heritage is already happening, and we cannot afford to sit idly by and watch, as our treasured cultural resources are lost due to neglect. We must staunch the wound now, or face an irretrievable loss; the slow desecration of California's proud and vibrant history.

California has a tremendously rich cultural history spanning 11,000 years. Our State Parks have set aside for the public many of the sites of California's original inhabitants such as Indian Grinding Rock State Historic Park, and Tomo Kahni State Historic Park, sites of early European settlement by Russian and Spanish colonists in such places as Fort Ross State Park, now celebrating its 200-year history, and two of California's venerable Spanish missions. Our previous civic leaders have seen fit to set aside parks honoring California's contributions to world literature, to Chinese settlement and immigration, to the industry and mining which played an important role in national and world economies. From prehistory to the present, our State Parks form a valuable tie with our past. The understanding and appreciation for current and past culture is rooted in humanity's history. Where there are gaps in this history, archeology helps fill in the missing pieces.

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Not only are the treasured sites themselves being threatened, but the material remains of the past represented by the artworks, artifacts, museum displays, and collections representing every aspect of California's exciting and unique past are also in grave danger of deterioration, loss, theft or vandalism. The threat of vandalism is very real, and not a phantom concept. The example of Mitchell Caverns in Providence Mountains State Recreation Area shows very clearly what can and will take place when one of the parks is administratively neglected. The park was mothballed and left unguarded, leaving it open for vandals to incur extensive damage to the 78-year-old rock-and-mortar visitor's center. According to the Los Angeles Times article dated February of this year "intruders cut fences, kicked doors off of hinges and shattered windows and display cases. They stole metal signs and survival gear, including hand-held radios, flashlights and binoculars. They also stole diesel-powered generators and ripped out thousands of feet of electrical wire used to illuminate the only natural limestone caverns in the state park system. Sue Ellen Patrick, 71, granddaughter of Jack and Ida Mitchell, said of the destruction: "My family feels betrayed because the state didn't do what it promised us, which is protect the caves and the heritage."

Vandalism, looting, and destruction is not limited to historic sites or buildings, but has also occurred at fragile prehistoric sites such as the desecration of an archaeological site in December 2008 at Patrick's Point State Park. While plundering these sites, looters not only destroy critical scientific evidence, but also damage places sacred to California's indigenous people. Tragically, they often target burial sites, since graves often contain artifacts that are considered to be some of the most "marketable" items.

We appeal to the Legislature and the Governor to find a permanent funding source. We now stand at an important crossroads of our cultural heritage preservation in the State Parks, where we are tasked with carrying the torch forward for those who come after us as our leaders have done in the past. Will we fail to have the imagination to envision an era of continued cultural resources preservation and protection? Let us not let those who come after us-our children and grandchildren, accuse us of lacking the leadership and vision required to maintain our cultural inheritance.