



Sam Hodder Testimony
Senate Natural Resources and Water & Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee
Oversight Hearing: California State Park Reforms
February 24, 2015

Introduction:

Sam Hodder, President and CEO of Save the Redwoods League. The League enthusiastically supports the Parks Forward Report, a great step in ensuring a strong future for the California State Park system.

Having partnered with State Parks for much of our 97-year history, the League is deeply invested in the future of the Parks Department. From our role in the creation and expansion of parks through land acquisition, to advancing research on climate change, to building bridges and trails, and designing and printing State Park brochures, the League takes great pride in the nearly \$140 million that our supporters have donated to our park support activities over the years.

Today, I will address three topics: the implementation of the Parks Forward recommendations, the League's partnership with the Department, and the role of the redwoods in the state parks system.

Implementation of the Parks Forward Recommendations

We strongly support the recommendations outlined in the Parks Forward Commission's final report and are thrilled to see the Parks Department and the Natural Resources Agency embracing a commitment to fundamental change with the creation of the Transformation Team.

We support the Transformation Team's efforts to improve operating systems, budgeting, contracting and engagement of partners; and we share the Commission's commitment to increasing outdoor education for young people, investing in natural resource management and climate research in the parks, and expanding park access for California's underserved and urban communities.

As stated in the report, all of these transformative opportunities will be dependent on ensuring stable resources and public funding. As the Legislature considers implementation of the Commission's recommendations and investments to improve the state parks system, we urge you to consider a two-pronged approach. Investments in administrative reforms such as structural improvements, expedited contracting and transparent budgeting are critical, but alone they do not address the full range of needs. Structural changes must be coupled with steady investments in more visible improvements that can re-inspire the visiting public, like the proposed investment in the LA Historic Park and Donner Lake Visitor Center and redwood park projects like those at Portola Redwoods, Pfeiffer Big Sur and Hendy Woods.

Partnership with the Department

Save the Redwoods League is exploring how to do even more to improve California's redwood parks, and many of the recommendations in this report will facilitate that deeper engagement. Through partnering on forest restoration and natural resource management, upgrading park infrastructure, and enhancing education and interpretation programming, our members are eager to support the League's parks support work.

With the adoption of the recommendations in this report, we will stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our State Parks partner and will be prepared to increase our investment in our redwood parks and increase our level of collaboration and partnership with the Department.

Role of Redwoods

Today, California's state parks shelter 60 percent of the world's remaining old-growth redwood forests. And through the League's research programs in the redwood parks, we are learning more every day about the value of these forests. In 2013, Save the Redwoods League, in partnership with Humboldt State University, discovered that the ancient coast redwood parks of Northern California contain more carbon above ground than any other forest on Earth, and are a vital carbon sink, storing up to 5,000 metric tons per hectare. The more we learn about the redwoods and our parks, the more we understand how critical they are for the well-being of our planet and its inhabitants.

California's state parks are the envy of the world. The parks are a key economic engine of our tourist economy. They keep our children healthy and active. They help clean our air and water. They tell the story of our diverse history and cultures. This is true of the full range of parks, from the inner city to the remote wilderness, from beaches to historic sites; and the implementation of the Parks Forward recommendations will help ensure that future generations of Californians can enjoy the benefits of our state parks.

The redwoods occupy a special place in the Department's legacy. California's redwood forests inspired the creation of our state parks and continue to be California's calling card to the world, and it is the redwoods that will inspire a love of the outdoors in the next generation of park visitors. Any investment in the future of our state parks must include investing in the diligent stewardship of our redwood forests and improvements to the visitor experience in our redwood parks. The League stands ready to help enhance the visitor experience in redwood parks and to reintroduce the redwood forests to the people of California and beyond.

Conclusion

With the implementation of the Parks Forward recommendations, we have an opportunity to secure a stronger future for the state parks system, and make smart investments to protect our greatest and shared legacy for future generations. Save the Redwoods League has the skills and expertise to help the State make these investments, and we encourage the Legislature and Parks Department to consider us as a partner and resource.