# Assembly Joint Oversight Hearing: Impacts and Status of State Park Closures November 1, 2011



# **CSPRA Testimony on Hidden Costs of Park Closures**

Good morning Chairman Huffman and Chairman Dickenson, honorable members of the Assembly Water Parks and Wildlife and Accountability and Administrative Review Committees.

My name is Nina Gordon and I am President of the California State Park Rangers Association, known as CSPRA. CSPRA was founded in 1964 and is a professional organization representing a wide variety of classifications of state park employees including rangers and lifeguards, maintenance staff, interpreters, historians, archaeologists and administrative staff professionals. We would like to help bring to your attention some of the hidden costs of closing state parks and will address 3 points:

- 1) Rising Crime
- 2) Resource and Facility Degradation
- 3) True cost of developing sustainable partnerships

#### **Rising Crime**

According to Department crime statistics, in 1998 there were approximately 23,000 crimes reported. In 2009 there were over 73,000 crimes reported and over 98,000 other incidents requiring response. State Parks experience the same crimes found in cities and counties. Crimes include everything from murder, child abuse, rape, armed robbery, assault with deadly weapons, domestic violence, drug dealing and cultivation, theft of cultural and natural resources, and vandalism of facilities. If parks are closed, these activities will not stop, rather they will continue to impact the parks along with the neighboring communities. Keeping parks open will help keep them safe by minimizing crime

 $<sup>^{\</sup>rm 1}$  California State Parks Law Enforcement Division – February 2010 courtesy Superintendent of Telecommunications

and minimizing resource and facility/infrastructure damage. Other State and local law enforcement agency budgets and staffing are stretched to the limits. Their ability to incur the additional workload of closed parks may not be possible or desirable. Many of our parks are in very remote areas, making response time by other law enforcement agencies extremely delayed, if at all possible.

### **Resource and Facility Degradation**

Closing a state park will add to the break-down of an already deteriorating infrastructure of roads, buildings, restrooms, waste water treatment plants, historic structures, and other public facilities. This is demolition by neglect. The deferred maintenance backload is over \$1 billion.

For example, shutting down water lines will cause many of the seals located in the lines to dry out and the Department may find itself having to replace miles of pipeline. If the Department's water and sewage treatment permits expire in closed parks, we could be facing huge costs to comply with the required upgrades to renew the permit.

We are already seeing increased vandalism including rampant theft of copper pipes and other metals with money being used from the sale of these metals to support such activities as drug trafficking.

Closing parks will also cause the deterioration of the natural environment such as the spread of non-native species, which in turn requires additional funds to restore the habitat to its original healthy state. Additionally, lack of resource protection poses threats to threatened and endangered species in several of the parks scheduled for closure.

The majority of parks on the closure list are state historic parks. One cannot just close the door and walk away. Vandalism, theft and deterioration will increase. There will likely be looting of archaeological features including Native American sites in unprotected areas.

Another significant hidden cost is the time consuming and labor intensive process of protecting irreplaceable cultural artifacts in our closed parks. This includes inventorying, cataloguing, meticulous preparation for moving and then the parallel process to properly and safely store the collections.

It is critical to have cultural staff on site to handle problems as they occur. These include unstable foundations, leaking roofs and windows, mold and pest damage. If you close a park, these will continue to fester and result in increased future costs. Petaluma Adobe State Historic Park is an example, as adobe structures require consistent protection to prevent water and other environmental damage.

Materials used in protecting adobe bricks must be very carefully prepared and applied by trained staff and repairing and stabilizing adobe structures is costly.

#### Cost of developing sustainable partnerships

As was stated in the Sacramento Bee editorial yesterday, October 31, partnerships are not a panacea. We know that partnerships strengthen CA State Parks, bringing in critical funding and other resources and more park advocates, in addition to building bridges to diverse communities. However, a successful and sustainable partnership requires trained state park staff.

Potential partners must first be screened for economic viability to ensure that all mission critical functions will be provided. In addition, once the non-profit organizations are identified, appropriate professional staff is needed to develop the necessary and appropriate legal agreements (MOUs etc), execute those agreements and then evaluate and monitor the services and funding arrangements to ensure they comply with federal and state regulations and are consistent with the State Park mission.

Potential partnerships also involve the continued costs of state park operation. A number of potential partners seek the revenue generating elements of a park unit operation, leaving the remainder of the operation (usually the maintenance, law enforcement and resource management functions) to be completed by specialized park staff. Much of this work requires specially educated, certificated and experienced staff which most potential partners do not have. All partnership agreements must ensure that federal and state laws such as NEPA and CEQA<sup>2</sup> are followed.

Makakoff Diggins State Historic Park, the site of California's largest hydraulic mine, is an example of all three of the above points. Law enforcement assistance by other agencies is very problematic due to the very remote location. There are already indications that people are trying to remove the historic water cannons. The park contains numerous historic buildings and structures which must be placed in caretaker status or "mothballed" if closed. Any prospective partner wishing to operate the park must have the specialized personnel and resources to comply with the relevant laws, regulations and procedures<sup>3</sup> to preserve the historic resources.

<sup>3</sup> Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> NEPA- National Environmental Policy Act CEOA – California Environmental Quality Act

## Closing

These public-trust-resources are part of the very fabric of California, its people, and our heritage. They must not be exploited or irreversibly damaged in the short-term, so that they may return once-again, intact, for future generations. Parks belong to us, our children, our grandchildren and the next generations to come. The National Trust for Historic Preservation listed the California State Park system as a whole, on their list of *America's Most Endangered Places*. Do not let them become extinct. We have the responsibility to preserve and protect these irreplaceable treasures that are our heritage.

Thank you for this opportunity to address your hearing