

Date of Hearing: March 28, 2023

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE

Rebecca Bauer-Kahan, Chair

AB 401 (Mathis) – As Introduced February 2, 2023

**SUBJECT:** State parks: park entrance fees: waivers: 4th grade children

**SUMMARY:** Requires the Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) to waive day use entrance fees for any child in fourth grade with a valid federal pass, as provided, as of July 1, 2024. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires State Parks to waive day use entrance fees to a unit of the state park system for any child in the fourth grade, or the fourth grade equivalent, who holds a valid federally issued “Every Kid Outdoors” pass.
- 2) Specifies that the entrance fee waiver applies to both of the following:
  - a) A per vehicle entrance fee, including all passengers in the vehicle, as long as the vehicle is a single, private, noncommercial vehicle that is used to transport the eligible child to the unit of the state park system; and
  - b) A per person entrance fee, including up to three adults, 16 years of age and above, and all children, 15 years of age and younger, accompanying the eligible child.
- 3) Makes the provisions of this bill operative on July 1, 2024.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Establishes the California state park system and vests State Parks with control of the state park system and responsibility for administering, protecting, developing, and interpreting state parks for the use and enjoyment of the public. Requires State Parks to protect the state park system from damage and to preserve the peace therein [Public Resources Code (PRC) § 5001 *et seq.*].
- 2) Limits attendance at the state park system to within limits established by carrying capacity (PRC § 5001.96 and 5019.5).
- 3) Authorizes State Parks to collect fees, rents, and returns for use of any state park system area with some exceptions including:
  - a) Prohibits State Parks from collecting any fee from any group of pupils in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grades, or their escorts, when on a field trip or school outing at a state park unit, except at Hearst San Simeon State Historic Monument (PRC § 5010.2); and
  - b) Authorizes State Parks to provide discounted passes to certain groups of people including fourth graders, seniors over the age of 62, veterans, and low-income residents, as defined (PRC § 5010.2.5, § 5011, § 5011.5, § 5011.6).

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown. This bill is keyed fiscal.

**COMMENTS:**

- 1) **Purpose of this bill.** This bill would continue and expand the existing California State Park Adventure Pass, which offers free admission for fourth graders at 19 state park locations. The Adventure Pass will sunset on July 1, 2024. This bill requires State Parks to waive day use entrance fees to a unit of the state park system for any child in the fourth grade who holds a valid federally issued “Every Kid Outdoors” pass.

According to the author, “[t]he more we promote access to our state parks, especially within the lives of our children through the Adventure Pass program, the more we can spur an appreciation of the system and the need to maintain it.”

- 2) **Background.** In partnership with the First Partner’s Office and the Natural Resources Agency, the California State Park Adventure Pass provides free entry for fourth graders and their families at 19 state parks throughout the state. This program was enacted through the budget in 2021 (SB 129 and AB 148), with \$5.6 million appropriated for the three-year pilot program. For the 2021 school year, 18,600 Adventure Passes were issued by State Parks. The 2022 school year (starting September 1, 2022) is ongoing and 11,470 Adventure Passes have been issued through March 7, 2023.

The Adventure Pass allows free day use admittance for a fourth grader from California, their family (up to three adults and other children), and friends. This pass is valid for the one-year period during which the child is a fourth grader or fourth grade equivalent, from September 1 to August 31. In order to obtain a pass, the parent or guardian can sign up online through ReserveCalifornia.com or call (800) 444-7275. The parent or guardian is required to provide their name, address, phone number, and email address, and the Adventure Pass is sent to their email. For individuals who do not have access to a smartphone, computer, or printer and/or do not have an email address, they can obtain a pass by visiting a State Parks Pass Sales Office. Once the pass is obtained, it can be printed or displayed on a smartphone.

The California State Park Adventure Pass is accepted at the following 19 state parks:

- Anza-Borrego Desert State Park (Nearest cities – Borrego Springs and Julian)
- Calaveras Big Trees State Park (Arnold)
- California Citrus State Historic Park (Riverside)
- California State Railroad Museum (Sacramento)
- Chino Hills State Park (Chino Hills)
- Clear Lake State Park (Kelseyville)
- Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park (Earlimart)
- Cuyamaca Rancho State Park (Julian)
- Empire Mine State Historic Park (Grass Valley)
- Hendy Woods State Park (nearest city – Philo)
- Hollister Hills State Vehicular Recreation Area (Gabilan Mountains, an hour drive from San Jose)
- Jack London State Historic Park (Glen Ellen)
- Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park (Crescent City)
- Millerton Lake State Recreation Area (Fresno)
- Morro Bay State Park Museum of Natural History (Morro Bay)
- Sue-meg State Park (Trinidad)

- Samuel P. Taylor State Park (Lagunitas)
- Seacliff State Beach (Santa Cruz)
- Silver Strand State Beach (Coronado)

*Every Kid Outdoors pass.* The federal government has an 8-year old program, “Every Kid in a Park” that has since been renamed “Every Kid Outdoors,” that allows fourth graders and their families to visit federally managed lands and waters for free. The concept of the program was to give every child a chance to visit a national park by the time they turn 11 years old. Research shows that participants are more likely to visit parks throughout the rest of their lives if they experience parks with their family or school at age 10.<sup>1</sup>

The Every Kid Outdoors pass can be obtained by visiting <https://everykidoutdoors.gov/>. No registration is required, and the only information collected is the zip code of the person obtaining the pass. The pass must be printed, and each pass has a unique code so it cannot be shared. The pass admits all children under 16 and up to three adults for free at sites that charge entrance fees per person. For locations with a vehicle entrance fee, the pass admits all children under 16 and all adults in up to one passenger vehicle. A variety of federal agencies participate in the pass program, including National Park Service (NPS), U.S. Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Some state park systems such as New York, Maryland, Indiana, and Wyoming allow a fourth grader to utilize this federal park pass for the same or similar benefits at state parks within their respective state park system.

*Other free passes and free admission days.* The State Parks Golden Bear Pass is free and valid for one year and provides vehicle day-use access to many state parks for CalWORKs recipients, SSI recipients, and those whose incomes fall under a certain threshold.

In collaboration with the California State Library, State Parks has placed approximately 33,000 park passes at local libraries throughout the state through the Parks Library Pass program.<sup>2</sup> Any library card holder can check out a park pass for free for the allotted number of days allowed by the local library.

In recent years, there have been some "free admission" days at state parks, including free admission to veterans on Memorial Day and Veterans Day and a Green Friday Program in 2015 and 2016, an alternative to Black Friday shopping.

NPS allows free admission to more than 400 national parks on five different days and weekends in 2023.<sup>3</sup> According to NPS, national parks are always economical, with entrance fees typically from \$5 to \$35.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Colleen Dilenschneider, (2019, September 4), School Groups vs. Family Visitors: Which Kids Come Back As Adults? (DATA). Impacts Experiences. <https://www.colleendilen.com/2019/09/04/school-group-vs-family-visitors-which-kids-come-back-as-adults-data/>.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.parks.ca.gov/30806> for more information.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.nps.gov/planyourvisit/fee-free-parks.htm> for more information.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/entrance-fee-prices.htm> for more information.

*Outdoors for All.* The California Outdoors for All initiative is focused on equitably expanding outdoor access to all Californians through focused investments in open space infrastructure, outdoor programming, and improvements to state systems. These efforts seek to undo deeply ingrained inequities, and preserve the cherished natural, cultural, and tribal resources as the fight against climate change intensifies. Additionally, the Outdoors for All initiative further advances two other state priorities, Nature Based Solutions and 30x30, by investing in California's public lands and natural resources. A draft strategy is planned for release in Spring 2023.

- 3) **Policy considerations.** State Parks has already established procedures for obtaining the Adventure Pass. This bill requires fourth graders to be holders of a valid federally issued "Every Kid Outdoors" pass. While it makes sense to encourage fourth graders to obtain both passes, it may not be prudent to tie the provisions of this bill to a federal program that expires in 2026. The author may want to consider clarifying this provision of the bill.
- 4) **Arguments in support.** Several organizations write in support, with some stating that "[t]his bill capitalizes and expands on the successes of both EKO [Every Kid Outdoors] and the adventure pass by removing the adventure pass' sunset date of July 1st, 2024, and expanding the adventure pass to include every California state park: an improvement that is in the spirit of the program, mirrors President Obama's EKO, and makes the adventure pass accessible to all of California's children."
- 5) **Related legislation.** AB 2128 (Cooley), 2021-22 Session, would have required State Parks to grant 50 percent discounted admission to the general public to each unit of the state park system operated by State Parks every year on September 9th, California Admissions Day. AB 2128 died in Senate Appropriations Committee.

SB 129 (Skinner), Chapter 69, Statutes of 2021, and AB 148 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 115, Statutes of 2021, established the Adventure Pass and appropriated funding for a three-year pilot program.

AB 542 (Mathis), 2021-22 Session, was substantially similar to this bill. AB 542 died in Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 1358 (Cooley), 2017-18 Session, would have provided 50 percent discounted admission to California State Parks on California Admission Day. AB 1358 was vetoed by Governor Brown. The veto message stated: "While this bill is well-intentioned, the department already has the authority to offer discounted or free park admissions to the public. Furthermore, for the past few years the department has worked closely with the Parks Forward Commission to develop initiatives to expand visitations, increase access, and ensure the system's long-term sustainability. The public and our state parks are better served by allowing the department the flexibility to manage its operations without mandates that may harm its fiscal stability."

AB 150 (Olsen), Chapter 688, Statutes of 2013, authorizes State Parks to offer veterans and active duty or reserve military personnel of the U.S. Armed Forces or the National Guard, free day use access, or reduced fee access, to California state parks on Memorial Day and Veterans Day.

**REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

**Support**

Bolsa Chica Land Trust  
California Outdoor Recreation Partnership  
Latino Outdoors  
River Otter Ecology Project, The  
Sierra Club California  
Visalia Unified School District

**Opposition**

None on file

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