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COUNTY OF MENDOCINO
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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Assembly Member Jared Huffman, Chair
Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee
Assembly Member Roger Dickinson, Chair
Committee on Accountability & Administrative Review

Members of the Committees

P.O. Box 94249
Sacramento, CA 94249-00119

Dear Chair Huffman, Chair Dickinson, and Members of the Committees:

Thank you for taking the time to convene a hearing to consider matters relating to State Park closures. Of the 70 parks originally designated for closure, eight are located in Mendocino County. We are gravely concerned that the severity of these closures will result in a substantial negative effects on the economic well-being of our county and our local businesses. We find it short-sighted that the parameters the Parks Department was required to use when considering which parks to close did not include consideration of the economic effects of such closures on businesses, communities, and counties.

Tourism is arguably the most important driver of the Mendocino County economy. According to a study by Dean Runyan Associates commissioned by the California Tourism Bureau, in 2009 tourism pumped \$297 million into the Mendocino County economy, directly employing 4,800 people. Mendocino County tax revenues attributable to tourism amounted to \$6.7 million. An additional \$12.3 million in tourist-related tax revenue went to the State. According to a 2008 Mendocino County Travel Research Study, 74% of our visitors visit our state parks and they consider the quality of our parks as "high," rating them a 4.6 on a scale of 5.

Each of our parks is unique and valuable, but some are also of vital economic importance to businesses in the community where they are located. Many of our communities are geographically isolated, often at least a 45 minute drive to a neighboring community. One cannot assume that money not spent in one community will be spent in the next. To better understand our concerns, consider each of the following parks, all slated for closure:

- Hendy Woods State Park near Philo in Anderson Valley has 94 individual campsites, the only easily accessible old growth redwood groves of significant size not only in Anderson Valley but in virtually the entire county, and is the only public place in the community where residents and visitors can hike other than along a road or highway. Annual visitor attendance is at least 49,712 persons annually. Without these campsites, middle-income visitors and families will have very few options for overnight accommodations in Anderson Valley. Visitors will be cut off from one of the most iconic features of our region—old growth redwoods.

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- Russian Gulch State Park is located just north of the town of Mendocino. There is a cove that accommodated landings from the sailing ships that used to ply the waters up and down the coast and a huge natural blowhole formed when pounding waves forged an inland tunnel and left a hole 100 feet across and 60 feet deep. The park has 31 individual camp sites that provide reasonably priced accommodations in an area where staying overnight can strain a visitor's budget. Another popular attraction is the magnificent fern canyon trail that leads up to a waterfall in the redwood forest. The most significant cultural resource of Russian Gulch State Park is the Recreation Hall that was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and enjoyed today to host weddings and special events in the park. Federal dollars have been invested in park improvements, which will be left unused if the park is closed.
- Westport-Union Landing State Beach, located north of Ft. Bragg along an isolated stretch of Highway 1 near the village of Westport, has 82 individual campsites, and a total visitor attendance of 221,892 people. It is a unique beachfront campground that is heavily used by RV campers, often favored by retirees and families. Alternate overnight accommodations in the community are extremely limited and there is no other public beach.
- Standish-Hickey State Recreation Area (SRA) is situated along the South Fork Eel River just north of the small, economically depressed community of Leggett. With 163 individual campsites and total visitor attendance of 7,665, it provides easy access to camping and the river. It is the only state park in Mendocino County along the heavily traveled Highway 101 corridor that has any visitor facilities. Unless Standish-Hickey is there to provide a reason to stop and spend some time, many tourists are likely to traverse the entire length of Mendocino County without enjoying our scenic beauties and without spending any money outside of our major towns.

We are highly sympathetic to the need to identify cost savings and balance the state budget. However, closing state parks, particularly those that have great economic importance to their communities and our county, will not result in the desired outcome. Doing so may make the budget in the Parks Department look better, but is highly likely to diminish overall tax revenues to both the county and the state and endanger the economic viability of many small businesses. Our County and our local businesses simply cannot afford to absorb losses associated with closing parks, and ultimately the state budget will suffer if our economic interests are harmed.

We suggest you reconsider whether closing parks is an economically sound way to help balance the state budget. If some parks must be targeted, we strongly urge you to revise the criteria the Parks Department uses to identify closures to include consideration of the economic effects of the proposed closure on both community businesses and the county where the park is located.

Sincerely,



Kendall Smith, Chair
County of Mendocino Board of Supervisors

Cc: Governor Jerry Brown
Senator Noreen Evans
Assemblymember Wesley Chesbro
Ruth Coleman, Director, Department of Parks and Recreation