

November 1, 2011

Joint Legislative Informational Hearing

Testimony of Elizabeth Goldstein

Thank you Assemblymember Huffman and Assemblymember Dickinson, for holding this important hearing today. I'm Elizabeth Goldstein, President of the California State Parks Foundation, an independent, nonprofit organization with more than 120,000 members. Our mission is to protect, enhance, and advocate for California's state parks, a mission that has been important in our 42 year history and seems perhaps most critical today.

We wholeheartedly agree with the premise of this hearing. Closing parks is bad for California and will end up costing the state in ways that have not been analyzed, understood, or factored into the budget-making process. In fact, just this morning we launched our "Closing Parks is Bad for Business" Campaign, to highlight local businesses that will be impacted by park closures.

The \$22 million cut to the Department's budget clearly strikes a blow to the California state parks system. No one should expect that our park system can continue to exist as it does today, let alone strive for improvements or excellence, if the state continues to defund the agency responsible for core maintenance, resource protection, and operations in our parks.

But California's state park system belongs to the people of California, and is bigger than, and supported by many more partners than simply

the Department of Parks and Recreation. In this moment, we are currently focusing our efforts in those directions, particularly in identifying even more ways we can provide support and assistance to local partners that will operate parks on behalf of all Californians.

You're about to hear from a variety of groups, many of whom we have been working with since the closure list came out in May. They are striving to put smart, thoughtful proposals before the state. However, just about every one of them will also articulate the immense challenges they face in doing so.

I want to leave you with CSPF's thoughts about what the Legislature should be doing to help save our state parks.

First, do no more harm. The state park system cannot afford additional budget cuts. Further cuts or threats of cuts to the Department will only exacerbate the barriers that exist right now to enacting partnerships for the crisis at hand. Navigating the often incomplete and sometimes contradictory information about what it takes and costs to operate a park on the closure list, minimum standards that will be required to be met in closed parks, services the state may continue to provide, and more, is, itself, an incredibly frustrating barrier facing many potential partners today, and would be worse if additional cuts were enacted.

Second, do not let good deeds get punished. There are already aggressive efforts underway to bring additional philanthropic funding and contributions to the state park system. However, if the philanthropic community sees the Legislature is looking for a way to substitute private money for key public responsibilities, or that their contributions are expected to be open ended, that philanthropic support will evaporate.

Further reduction of General Fund allocation to the state park system, *or* a failure to add more public funding for parks when the economy rebounds, will be perceived as a punishment for good deeds. That must be avoided at all cost.

Third, support and be part of credible local efforts to keep parks open.

I'm optimistic that passage of AB 42 and the broad, bi-partisan support it received reflect an acceptance of this suggestion. But I've operated state and local park systems myself and I know that moving toward new models for operating parks becomes more challenging when the 'rubber hits the road'. CSPF is actively working to develop programs to support organizations that are stepping up the challenges of keeping parks open. We're looking to provide matching or challenge grants for operational needs as well as expertise through a library of consultants to organizations. But your active help and the resources of your legislative office and community connections will also be needed to bring your community together to make a local solution really work.

Finally, support efforts to identify appropriate, mission-centric ways to increase or establish revenues in parks. This is not a call for turning our parks into something they are not. We at CSPF oppose efforts that would sell park lands, give naming rights for parks, or exploit our parks and park visitors for inappropriate commercial goals. On behalf of our members, we will fight efforts that move in that wrong direction. But there is a right direction that must be explored. That direction could contemplate new amenities in state parks, new services, new features that might bring in new park visitors and entice current visitors to pay something extra.

We're collectively tackling the biggest challenges that have faced California's state parks in their 100 year history. I have no doubt we can overcome these challenges but only if we all see ourselves as vital partners in this effort. We all have particular roles to play, and I do hope the Legislature works to fulfill the role I've outlined today. For we are the generation that has a greater burden than any before us to leave this state parks system better than we found it, for the opposite is too awful to contemplate.

Thank you for your time and attention today.