

**STATEMENT OF GEORGE TURNBULL, DEPUTY REGIONAL DIRECTOR, PACIFIC WEST REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE CALIFORNIA ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS AND WILDLIFE JOINT INFORMATIONAL HEARING ON *STRATEGIES FOR PROTECTING OUR STATE PARKS IN CHALLENGING TIMES***

**JUNE 10, 2011**

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Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to address this joint informational hearing on the challenges facing California's State Parks. I appear before you as an employee of the National Park Service with oversight responsibilities for National Parks in the Pacific West Region of the U.S. National Parks in California therefore are under the purview of the Pacific West Region.

Recently, the state of California announced its intention to close 70 state park units due to severe budget deficits. This reflects the difficulty of managing public lands in today's economic climate. How much do we value our parks? Park lands, whether local, state, or federal, play a key role in today's society. In addition to the conservation and preservation of these special lands, parks also serve as places where individuals and families gather to build community, recreate, and find healthy options in times of stress and anxiety. Given this, we're sure developing a state park closure list was difficult. While the National Park Service recognizes the issues the state has to balance in making state park budget decisions, we find it necessary to address two specific resource related concerns – the state's contractual obligation under the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act and the protection of national park resources adjacent to some California state parks.

Let me say at the outset that all of my colleagues in the National Park Service and I have genuine affection and respect for our fellow state park employees. We remain committed to assisting the California Department of Parks and Recreation in identifying alternative courses of action that may preserve the State's eligibility for Land and Water Conservation funds and the public's needed access to the parks.

Following the recent California state park closure announcement, the National Park Service Regional Director communicated with to the Director of the California Department of Parks and Recreation reminding the state of its longstanding agreements through the Land and Water Conservation Fund to keep lands open that have been conveyed through this federal program. The Land and Water Conservation Fund State assistance program provides federal funds to state and local governments for public parkland acquisition and park facility development. Recipients of funds under this program commit to keeping assisted parks in public outdoor recreation use in perpetuity. Each year Congress makes an appropriation to the Fund which is then apportioned to the States based upon population. The state of California has been the recipient of \$287.3m in grants (affecting 85 California State Parks) through the LWCF, including 16 of the parks on the state park closure list. The Secretary of the Interior and the Obama administration fully support this program and have requested that the LWCF be restored to its full funding level of \$900M for federal FY2012. In order to maintain eligibility for future funding under the LWCF program, parks must remain in public outdoor recreation use. Similarly, land conveyed to the State under the Federal Lands to Parks Program (usually at no cost to the State) must be kept in public park and recreation use in perpetuity. Failing that, the land may be reverted to federal ownership – not to come to the National Park Service, but to a federal property disposal agency for re-disposal, and potentially for uses other than public parks.

We feel it is in everyone's interest to protect the public investment through the Land & Water Conservation Fund by keeping these parks open. We have begun conversations with the State Park leadership about what we can do to assist in keeping the state parks accessible during these difficult budget times. The National Park Service (NPS) and CDPR have historically worked closely together and we look forward to continuing to do so. In particular, the NPS and CDPR work collaboratively in four geographic areas where state park units exist within NPS legislative boundaries: Golden Gate National Recreation Area/Point Reyes National Seashore, Redwood National Park, Mojave National Preserve and Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. These units surround 21 state park

units. The operation of these groups of parks is integrated to the point of being inseparable, even more so than two years ago when I last presented to this committee. Park operations, management and even facilities are largely intertwined and cannot be easily separated. It can actually be described as comanagement. The impetus to establishing the close relationships came as a result of a report jointly prepared by NPS and CDPR in March, 1994 entitled "Final Report: California Coordinating Committee on Operational Efficiencies," mandating Cooperative Management Agreements between the state and national parks in these clusters to seamlessly share staff, funding and resources across park boundaries. Federal law to support this action followed, to allow for the transfer of funds.

It is NPS position that closure or partial closure of any one of the state park units within NPS' legislative boundaries (and I emphasize within NPS' legislative boundaries) represents an increased risk to visitors and NPS employees and has the high potential to result in resource damage within the NPS units, placing an unacceptable burden on current NPS capacity. This might lead to increased use of NPS resources and facility degradation while diminishing the quality of NPS visitor's experiences and NPS' incident response capability. As an example, Tomales Bay State Park is completely surrounded by Point Reyes National Seashore and you must pass through the seashore to get there. At Redwood State and National Parks, we share a state of the art joint park maintenance facility with the state that allows us to share staff, material and resources across the comanaged three state parks and the national park. Park managers there share the same office building and sit next to each other. One of the parks on the proposed closure list, Del Norte Redwoods State Park is part of this mosaic of interlinked habitat and scenery. There are many miles of porous boundary, so it would be difficult to close, never mind responding to emergencies.

Just as we believe in the importance of a robust national park system, we believe in the strength of state park systems and NPS has benefitted across the country from this strength. It is not NPS' role to supplant the state park systems.

We hope we are a long way from this. The California State Park System has always been the envy of the nation. We regard our operations in National Parks as symbiotic with the state parks. We share common values, common borders, human and natural and cultural resources, and a deep regard for what future generations will learn from the protection of these rare places. Given these circumstances and our inability to provide funding support, we will be in detailed discussions with State Park leadership to determine if there are actions we can take, efficiencies we might attain to help keep these parks open and protect assets and resources. It is our understanding that the California Department of Parks and Recreation is exploring partnerships with nonprofits to allow them to keep state parks open at least part-time. At the National Park level, we benefit from a relationship with the National Park Foundation whose mission is to strengthen the connection between the American people and their National Parks by raising private funds, making strategic grants, creating innovative partnerships and increasing public awareness. NPS also benefits from relationships with local cooperating associations. These groups are private nonprofit corporations that support the educational, scientific, historical, and interpretive activities of the National Park Service (Service) in a variety of ways, under the provisions of formal agreements with the Service. For many years, Associations have been among the Service's most effective supporters. In the national park areas intertwined with state parks, we have the Golden Gate Conservancy, Point Reyes NS Association and Santa Monica Mountains Fund that provide support to the national parks and may be willing to further assist with state park support. In fact, Redwood State and National Parks have merged their cooperating associations into one – the Redwood Parks Association.

NPS has become increasingly careful in its dealings with corporate donations to avoid concern about commercialization of parks. The bar is particularly high in relation to corporate campaigns with advertising and marketing. The campaigns may not imply an endorsement of products by NPS and may not use the NPS Arrowhead or uniform in advertising. Typically these arrangements involve higher level Washington DC and legal review. Most donor recognition occurs outside NPS boundaries (letters, awards) and only very rarely within parks. With

our nonprofit partners, where major capital campaigns are contemplated, detailed fundraising agreements are required to avoid unrealistic fundraising targets and potential lobbying of congress.

The National Park budget, seen in context with the federal budget, is one-fourteenth of one percent (.07%). The amount saved from reducing or closing state parks also is a very small (.086%) and should be weighed in factors other than money. State parks make it possible for children to engage in nature. They reach diverse audiences. They provide teachable moments as part of the state education system. They positively affect the economies of surrounding communities to parks. They protect resources, intrinsic and real.

The NPS Pacific West Regional Office anticipates working closely with CDPR and the state as you consider budget cuts and park closures. Often, measures exist short of park closures which will allow a State to remain in LWCF and FLP program compliance. We are willing to explore these options with you. Early coordination and the identification of mutually acceptable cost reduction measures keeping LWCF-assisted and FLP-conveyed sites at least partially open for public access will ensure the successful continuation of our long-standing partnership and, more importantly, assure the continued availability to the recreating public of quality outdoor recreation facilities and resources. Again, we value our relationship with the California Department of Parks and Recreation and difficult times such as this only strengthen our relationship.

This concludes my statement. I will be pleased to answer any questions from you, Mr. Chairman, or the members.