

Supporters Launch Volunteer Signature-Gathering Campaign For Ballot Measure to Protect California State Parks and Conserve Wildlife

Voter Approval of New Access Fee Would Grant Californians Free, Year-Round State Parks Admission

SACRAMENTO - Supporters today officially launched the volunteer signature-gathering campaign for the "California State Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund Act of 2010," a statewide ballot measure to create a stable, reliable and adequate source of funding to protect state parks, conserve wildlife and increase public access to these valuable natural resources. The initiative will give California vehicles free admission to state parks in exchange for a new \$18 vehicle license fee, which will be specifically dedicated to state parks and wildlife conservation.

Volunteers from the California State Parks Foundation, Sierra Club California, Audubon California and many other organizations and groups will join paid staff in gathering more than 477,000 valid signatures by mid-April to qualify the measure for the Nov. 2 statewide ballot. To join the volunteer signature-gathering campaign, please visit www.calparks.org.

"With persistent underfunding placing our state parks in peril, we are thrilled to see so many volunteers willing to devote their time and energy to gathering the signatures needed to place a measure on the ballot that would create a dedicated source of funding to protect our parks and wildlife," said Elizabeth Goldstein, President, California State Parks Foundation. "The outpouring of public support for the ballot measure demonstrates Californians' commitment to protecting our parks and wildlife for generations to come."

California's 278 state parks attract about 80 million visits a year and include vast stretches of sandy beaches, much-needed recreational areas in bustling urban areas and an abundance of the Golden State's history and culture. In recent years, budget cuts have starved the state's parks, causing them to accumulate a backlog of more than \$1 billion in needed maintenance and repairs and leading to partial closures and reductions in operating hours at nearly 60 state parks.

"California's state parks were among the best in the nation, and now they rank among America's most endangered sites," said Graham Chisholm, Executive Director, Audubon California. "The state parks have fallen so far behind in maintenance and repairs that many have leaking roofs and sewage systems, collapsed bridges, washed-out trails, restrooms that aren't cleaned regularly, badly deteriorated structures and shuttered campgrounds and visitor centers."

The ballot measure would create a Trust Fund for parks and wildlife conservation with funding from an \$18 annual State Park Access Pass surcharge on most California vehicles, including motorcycles and recreational vehicles. Larger commercial vehicles, mobile homes and permanent trailers would be exempt.

Vehicles subject to the surcharge would receive free, year-round admission to all state parks. Californians would no longer have to pay day-use fees at any state parks - fees that can be as much as \$125 for an annual pass or \$10-\$15 per day. Out-of-state vehicles would continue to pay full entrance fees at parks.

Crime has more than doubled and thousands of scenic acres are closed to the public because of reductions in park rangers. Destruction and vandalism of the parks themselves has grown fourfold, and beachgoers are often unprotected because of decreases in lifeguards.

Because of the state's budgetary woes, state parks were on the brink of closure twice in the past two years. Only last-minute budget reprieves kept them open. But current budget cuts have forced partial closures or reduced hours of operation at nearly 60 state parks, and more park closure proposals and budget cuts are expected this year.

With a new dedicated stream of revenue, state General Fund dollars - that have historically provided a portion of overall state parks funding - would be available for other vital needs, like schools, health care, social services and public safety.

Among the ballot measure's many supporters are Audubon California, California State Lifeguard Association, California State Parks Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, California State Park Rangers Association, Save the Redwoods League, The Trust for Public Land, Ocean Conservancy, Sierra Club California, Surfrider Foundation, State Park Peace Officers Association of California, and National Trust for Historic Preservation. The current list of supporters is available at www.yesforstateparks.com.

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The California State Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund Act of 2010 was developed by a statewide coalition committed to protecting state parks and natural resources. California's 278 state parks are priceless public assets, important economic engines and a vital legacy for our children and grandchildren. However, persistent budget cuts are starving state parks, causing them to fall severely behind in needed maintenance and repairs. The measure would establish a dedicated and reliable funding stream for state parks and natural resources to ensure they can be enjoyed for generations to come. For more information, please visit www.yesforstateparks.com.

Paid for by Californians for State Parks and Wildlife Conservation, sponsored by conservation and state parks organizations

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