



## State Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund Act of 2010 Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is the State Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund Act of 2010?**

The State Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund Act of 2010 is a proposed statewide statutory ballot measure, slated for November 2010, which would create a stable, reliable and adequate source of funding for the state park system, for wildlife conservation and to provide increased and equitable access to those resources for all Californians.

### **How would the State Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund be financed?**

Funding would come from an annual State Park Access Pass surcharge of \$18 per vehicle to keep state parks open and protect parks, river parkways, wildlife refuges, natural lands and ocean conservation areas. The surcharge would apply to most California vehicles, including motorcycles and recreational vehicles, and would be collected by the Department of Motor Vehicles as part of the annual vehicle license fee. It would not apply to larger commercial vehicles (those subject to the Commercial Vehicle Registration Act), mobile homes or permanent trailers.

Vehicles subject to the State Park Access Pass surcharge and all occupants of those vehicles would receive **FREE DAY USE ADMISSION** to all California state parks throughout the year. Out-of-state vehicles would continue to pay full entrance fees at parks. Free day use admission would not include the fees charged for camping, use of swimming pools and boating facilities and other special events, access or tours, such as those offered at Hearst Castle and the Stanford Mansion.

### **Why is a Trust Fund needed to protect state parks and conserve wildlife?**

California state parks and wildlife are priceless public assets and vital legacies for our children and grandchildren. But today, state parks are in peril because they have no reliable source of funding. Twice in the past two years, state parks were on the brink of being shut down because of California's budget cuts. In 2008, 48 parks were proposed for closure, and in 2009, 220 of state's 278 parks (80% of the entire system) were proposed for closure. In each case, a last-minute budget reprieve kept the parks open. But nearly 60 state parks will be shut down part-time or their hours of operation reduced because of this year's budget cuts, and more closure proposals are expected next year because of the state's continuing budget woes.

### **Why is a Trust Fund needed if most of the parks remain open?**

More closure proposals and cutbacks are anticipated because the state expects a \$7 billion to \$8 billion shortfall next year. Moreover, budget cuts have already starved state parks of the reliable funding source needed to ensure these valuable state assets are protected and preserved for future generations. California state parks are severely behind in needed maintenance and repairs with restrooms, visitor centers, trails and other facilities badly deteriorating.

Every year, the state parks live on a budget rollercoaster, never certain of how much funding would be available, and the backlog of delayed maintenance and repairs continues to grow.

### **What impact has the "budget rollercoaster" had on the state parks?**

California's parks, once considered the best in the nation, are falling apart because of chronic underfunding. Less than 4% of the state budget is dedicated to parks and conservation. With so little

money to maintain these vital assets, roofs and sewage systems in state parks leak. Bridges have collapsed, trails are washed out, picnic tables are rotting, campgrounds are shuttered and buildings and structures throughout the system are badly deteriorated.

With no reliable source of funding, the state parks have accumulated a backlog of more than \$1 billion in maintenance and repairs. Thousands of scenic acres are closed to the public because funding cutbacks led to reductions in park rangers, and crime in the parks has more than doubled. Destruction of the parks themselves – ranging from broken windows to illegal tree cutting – has grown fourfold. Beachgoers are often unprotected because of decreases in lifeguards.

California's valuable historic and cultural assets are in danger, and its wildlife and other natural resources are in jeopardy because of the state's failure to invest in them. The parks are in such peril that the National Trust for Historic Preservation has named California state parks one of the 11 most endangered sites in America.

### **How many state parks does California have?**

California leads the nation in the number of state parks with 278 spread across 1.4 million acres. According to the California Department of Parks and Recreation, California parks have more than 280 miles of coastline, 625 miles of lake and river frontage, nearly 15,000 campsites and 3,000 miles of hiking, biking and equestrian trails. The state parks represent the diversity of California, ranging from the last stands of primeval redwood forests to vast expanses of fragile desert; from the lofty Sierra Nevada to the broad sandy beaches of our southern coast, and from the opulence of Hearst Castle to the vestiges of colonial Russia.

The department also says the state parks contain “the largest and most diverse natural and cultural heritage holdings of any state agency in the nation. State park units include underwater preserves, reserves, and parks; redwood, rhododendron, and wildlife reserves; state beaches, recreation areas, wilderness areas, and reservoirs; state historic parks, historic homes, Spanish era adobe buildings, including museums, visitor centers, cultural reserves, and preserves; as well as lighthouses, ghost towns, waterslides, conference centers, and off-highway vehicle parks. These parks protect and preserve an unparalleled collection of culturally and environmentally sensitive structures and habitats, threatened plant and animal species, ancient Native American sites, historic structures and artifacts . . . the best of California's natural and cultural history.”

### **Where are California state parks located?**

California parks stretch from the northern border with Oregon to the Southern California border with Mexico. A state park can easily be found within driving distance of almost anywhere in California. To find parks by the region in which they're located, please visit:

[http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=21491](http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=21491)

### **What are the economic benefits of state parks?**

State parks are essential to California's economy. Every year, they attract millions of tourists, who spend \$4.32 billion annually in park-related expenditures in California, [according to a recent study](#). It found state parks visitors spend an average of \$57.63 in surrounding communities per visit. They generate so much economic activity that every dollar spent on state parks creates another \$2.35 for California's treasury.

### **How do state parks improve public health?**

Every year, there are nearly 80 million visits to state parks, where the abundance of outdoor activities entices visitors to exercise, fight obesity and lead healthier lifestyles. Exercise helps maintain healthy bones and muscles. It builds cardiovascular fitness and relieves the psychological and physiological

stress linked to poor health. Parks also contribute to public health by protecting forests and natural areas that are sources of clean air and water and by combating climate change by reducing greenhouse gases.

### **How do state parks protect California's cultural heritage?**

State parks are responsible for the preservation and protection of much of California's history and culture. Of the state's 278 parks, 235 contain significant cultural features, representing the wide diversity of California's population in traditional tribal buildings, historic structures and communities, prehistoric archaeological sites and cultural landscapes. The state parks include missions, forts, ghost towns, cemeteries, churches, temples, lighthouses, gold mines and much more.

The state parks system is responsible for 1 million museum objects, more than 3 million archival documents and 2 million archaeological specimens. Farming equipment, botanical specimens, tapestries, Californian basketry, wagons of all types, stone tools and fine art can all be found in park collections.

### **How do state parks protect California's natural resources?**

More than nine out of every 10 acres of land in the state parks system are managed specifically to protect the natural resources located there. The California Department of Parks and Recreation supports the most diverse assembly of natural resources of any state agency. It protects underwater reserves, beaches, dunes, marshes, lakes, streams, rivers, forests, deserts and much more. The state parks preserve examples of nearly half the rare habitat types in California, including coastal prairie, valley oak woodland and Mendocino pygmy cypress forest. They are second only to the national forests in the number (162) of endangered, rare and threatened species they protect. (The national forests have 14 times more acreage than state parks.)

### **How do state parks contribute to education?**

State parks are the second only to the public education system in the educational opportunities they provide. More than 500,000 schoolchildren participate in interpretive programs in state parks. State parks serve as outdoor classrooms that help bring to life concepts from science, history, math and environmental education. In addition to school-based educational programs, state parks offer opportunities for youth to learn life skills and ways to be stewards of natural resources through programs like Junior Rangers and Junior Lifeguards.

Young and old alike can learn more about California's history, its culture, its natural resources and the environment at the state parks. The California Department of Parks and Recreation reports that 3.15 million visitors enjoyed guided hikes, tours, talks and demonstrations in fiscal 2004; 95,000 attended campfire programs; 5 million visited museums and visitor centers in the parks, and 3.35 million went on self-guided walks or tours.

### **How much new revenue would be generated by the proposed ballot measure each year?**

It would generate approximately \$500 million in annual revenues, based on an estimate of about 28 million vehicles being subject to the State Park Access Pass surcharge in the first year.

### **What impact would the State Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund Act of 2010 have on the state budget?**

With a new dedicated and reliable funding stream, state parks no longer would need to receive a portion of their funding from the state's General Fund, freeing up approximately \$130 million to prevent cuts to other vital services – like schools, health care and transportation.

### **How would the State Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund be distributed?**

The California Legislature would annually appropriate Trust Fund revenues. Under law, the Trust Fund would be invested as follows:

- 85% to the California Department of Parks and Recreation to repair, operate, manage, maintain and develop state parks. Out of the department's funding, approximately \$20 million a year (by law, 4% of the Trust Fund) would be used for grants to public agencies for the operation, management and restoration of urban river parkways, with priority placed on the most underserved urban communities
- 7% to the California Department of Fish and Game to manage and operate wildlife refuges, ecological reserves and other lands it owns or manages
- 4% to the Ocean Protection Council for marine wildlife conservation and the protection of coastal waters
- 2% to state conservancies for park and wildlife habitat
- 2% to the Wildlife Conservation Board for grants to local public agencies for wildlife conservation

### **How can Californians be certain the Trust Fund is invested responsibly?**

The proposed ballot measure has tough fiscal and accountability safeguards to protect the voters' investment in parks and natural resources, and the Legislature could not reallocate the Trust Fund for other uses.

The Trust Fund would be subject to an independent audit by the State Auditor every year. The findings would be released to the public, placed on the California Department of Parks and Recreation's website and submitted to the state Legislature for review as part of the state budget.

A Citizens' Oversight Committee would be created to ensure funds from this measure are spent appropriately. Also, audit, oversight and administrative costs of this measure would be limited to just 1% of the annual revenues.

### **Why use a surcharge on California vehicles to protect parks and conserve wildlife?**

A State Park Access Pass surcharge on vehicles is appropriate because day use fees in state parks are, in essence, parking surcharges that are paid for each vehicle entering the park. By assessing a surcharge on California vehicles – except larger commercial vehicles, mobile homes and permanent trailers – the State Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund Act of 2010 would allow Californians to pay the surcharge annually and have the benefit of accessing and parking in state parks for FREE year-round.

The surcharge would be significant savings over the \$125 currently charged for an annual parks pass which works only at selected parks. Compared to the current average \$10 cost of park visits – and the \$14-15 fees at some popular southern California beaches – Californians would essentially get their money back after two visits.

### **Why should all Californians pay this surcharge?**

All occupants of California vehicles subject to the State Park Access Pass surcharge would benefit from FREE DAY USE ADMISSION to state parks throughout the year. Also, all Californians would benefit from the creation of a stable, reliable and adequate source of funding for state parks and wildlife conservation that would ensure these priceless public assets are protected and that the parks are open and available for all Californians today and in the future.

**Why not use an “opt-in” program to fund the parks – like other states have?**

Limiting the State Park Access Pass surcharge to only those Californians who choose to pay it – through an “opt-in” program – would continue the rollercoaster of state parks and wildlife conservation funding that has caused the more than \$1 billion backlog of critical repairs to state parks and left the parks vulnerable to closure. By placing a surcharge on all California licensed vehicles, the State Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund Act of 2010 would assure state parks, wildlife, natural lands and other natural resources are protected and accessible for future generations to enjoy as Californians and visitors do today.

**When would the program go into effect?**

The proposed ballot measure has been submitted to the California Attorney General’s office for official ballot title and summary. An exploratory committee, Californians for State Parks and Wildlife Conservation, has been created to consider the feasibility of this initiative for the November 2010 statewide ballot. Early supporters include The Nature Conservancy, California State Parks Foundation and Save the Redwoods League.

If the committee decides to go forward with this statutory measure, it would need to gather enough signatures from registered voters to qualify the initiative for the ballot. If California voters then approve the measure in November 2010, the act would go into effect Jan. 1, 2011, with the imposition of the \$18 surcharge for the State Park Access Pass and the beginning of year-round FREE DAY USE ADMISSION to all state parks for vehicles subject to the surcharge and all occupants of those vehicles.

**To learn more about the State Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund Act of 2010, please call 818.760.2121.**