



## California State Park Access Pass Frequently Asked Questions

### ***What is the California State Park Access Pass?***

The California State Park Access Pass is a proposal to provide critical funding for the state park system, while offering Californians free day-use access to their state parks. It creates a new funding stream for keeping California's state parks open by instituting a \$15 surcharge on vehicle license fees of all non-commercial vehicles in California.

### ***How does the Vehicle Park Pass introduced by the Legislature defer from the State Parks Access Pass?***

On June 15<sup>th</sup>, the Legislature's Budget Conference Committee voted to reduce the budget for state parks by \$70 million and to develop a dedicated funding source to keep California's state parks open. During the brief discussion on this item, committee members referred to this as a "vehicle parks pass." This proposal is very similar to the State Parks Access Pass. However, until the specifics of the Legislature the proposal language is made available, we will be able to judge the proposal fully.

### ***What are the next steps for this proposal?***

It is expected that the actions of the Budget Conference Committee will be put into a Budget Bill, which will be voted on by both houses of the Legislature. At this time, it is unclear when a budget vote will take place. The budget is required to be approved by a 2/3 vote in both houses and signed by the Governor. Because the proposal did not gain Republican support in the Conference Committee vote, its fate as part of the final budget package is far from certain.

### ***Why is this being proposed?***

On May 26, representatives of the Department of Finance indicated that, specifically, the proposal is to take \$70 million of the Department of Parks and Recreation's (DPR) General Fund allocation in the 2009-10 Fiscal Year (which starts July 1, 2009) and the remainder of their General Fund – another \$73 million – in the next budget year, FY 2010-11, for a total removal of \$143 million. As a result, a total of 220 state parks are proposed for closure. Under the Governor's proposal, entire regions of the state will see all of their nearby state parks closed and virtually every kind of park is on the chopping block—from redwood parks on California's north coast, to the deserts in the Inland Empire, coastal beaches on the Central Coast to wooded campgrounds along Lake Tahoe in the Sierra.

Adopting the State Park Access Pass keeps the doors open to state parks for Californians and for the California economy. At a time when the state desperately needs to generate revenues for many other critical state services, it makes sense to keep state parks open and available for the public. A recent report by California State University, Sacramento found that park users, on average, spent \$57.63 per visit. Across the system, this amounts to a more than \$4.2 billion in positive economic impacts – impacts that would be lost if state parks are closed under the Governor's May Revise proposal.

When the Governor proposed to close 220 state parks (80% of the entire system) – only to gain \$143 million in General Fund savings – it revealed the truly precarious fiscal health of California's state parks. Foregoing basic annual maintenance and upkeep has resulted in a \$1.2 billion backlog of deferred maintenance. Additionally, inadequate staffing levels means that many units of the park system have no dedicated full-time staff, decreased visitor support, a lack of regular staffing to collect needed entrance fees, and few or no educational programs available to visitors.

***How will Californians be provided free access to state parks?***

Vehicles with valid California license plates will be provided free daily entrance to California state parks – which in most cases means free parking in day use parking lots in the park. No special paperwork, sticker, or pass will be required.

***How much money will the fee raise?***

The State Park Access Pass program will generate approximately \$363 million in annual revenue, net of lost day-use revenues and implementation costs, for the state park system, based on an estimate of over 28 million vehicles that will be assessed the \$15 annual fee.

***How will funding be used?***

The funding will be used to keep state parks open and address important maintenance and operational needs of the state park system, such as repairing and improving visitor services and facilities in state parks. Funds may also be used to serve the public in a variety of capacities - law enforcement, safety, interpretive and educational programs, and more. It is expected that implementing legislation for the State Park Access Pass will provide the Department of Parks and Recreation with general guidance to improve the operations and maintenance of the system, protect the natural resources within state parks, enhance the park experience for visitors and address the deferred maintenance deficit that currently exists.

***Why is this being proposed now?***

Creating this dedicated revenue stream for the state park system not only addresses a decades-long problem with funding this important state asset, but provides an opportunity for General Fund savings to help other state departments. The new funding will require the Department of Parks and Recreation to engage in statewide planning and reorganization of its current operations.

***Why the vehicle license fee?***

The vehicle license fee has an appropriate nexus – day use fees in state parks are, in essence, parking fees that are paid per vehicle entering state parks. By assessing a surcharge on the vehicle license fee, the State Park Access Pass allows Californians to pay the fee once per year, but have the benefit of accessing and parking in state parks for free.

***Why should all Californians pay this fee?***

All Californians will get a significant benefit from the California State Park Access Pass. Typical day-use entrance fees to state parks are around \$6-\$8 (popular southern California beaches have day-use fees of \$10). When Californians visit state parks just two times per year, they have received a benefit that exceeds the fee paid. More visits means more benefits to Californians. Additionally, the new funding will be used for much-needed improvements and upkeep in our state parks. Without a new source of revenue to address those needs, it is inevitable that state park units will continue to decline and proposals to close state parks will be in front of the public and the Legislature again.

***Will the State Park Access Pass apply to camping and other use of state parks?***

Camping fees will still apply and be collected from campers in California's state parks. Additionally, the State Park Access Pass does not waive fees at museums and historic state parks that charge fees for special tours and access, such as Hearst Castle, the California State Railroad Museum, Stanford Mansion, etc.

***When will free access begin under the State Park Access Pass?***

This proposal must be approved by the Legislature and included in the final Fiscal Year 2009-10 budget. Californians will be provided free day-use access once the Department of Motor Vehicles begins to impose the new fee on annual vehicle registrations.

*The Save Our State Parks (SOS) Campaign is a statewide, grassroots campaign to keep California's magnificent state parks open. In partnership with organizations, businesses, local governments, and individuals around the state, the California State Parks Foundation is leading SOS Campaign activities and generating awareness and action about budget proposals that would result in unacceptable park closures. For more information visit [www.savestateparks.org](http://www.savestateparks.org).*