

## **California State Park Access Pass** *Providing Free Park Access for Californians*

### **Background**

California's state park system is the largest system in the nation. More 1.5 million acres of land are managed for natural, cultural and historical resource values in the 278-unit park system. California's state park system hosts more than 77 million visitors annually and houses over 3,100 historic buildings and more than 14,000 individual and group campsites.

### **Current Situation**

Given the popularity of the state park system, there is a constant challenge to successfully maintain and operate a system that provides world-class recreation and education opportunities and access to unique natural wonders of the state. Growth in the state's population and need for recreation access, increasing demands to protect open spaces, and a burgeoning backlog of unattended deferred maintenance needs have all created immense pressure on a state park system that has an aging infrastructure. Necessary, critical funding for the regular maintenance and operation of the system as it exists today has been especially lacking. The Department of Parks and Recreation estimates it has an annual shortfall of ongoing maintenance of approximately \$117 million. Foregoing such basic annual maintenance and upkeep has resulted in a more than \$1.2 billion backlog of deferred maintenance. Over the last several years, funding support for the Department of Parks and Recreation has been significantly unpredictable. In FY 1990-91, per capita spending to support the state parks system was \$4.16. In the FY 08-09 budget proposed by the Governor in January, per capita spending was down to \$2.80.

### **Solution**

The State Park Access Pass will provide a dedicated, stable funding source to help support the necessary maintenance and operations activities to keep our state parks maintained and available to the public. Californians will pay a \$10 surcharge on their annual vehicle license fees, which will raise approximately \$282 million annually.

### **Providing Californians Free Access to State Parks**

As a benefit of paying the fee, Californians will receive free day-use access to California's state parks. Given that current day use fees are typically \$6-\$8 per day, this proposal creates significant benefits to Californians in exchange for their annual \$10 support.

### **Creating General Fund Savings**

This proposal recognizes the immediate need to help create savings in the state's General Fund. In the first three years of implementing the State Park Access Pass, the Department of Parks and Recreation will reduce its General Fund allocation and provide that savings for other state budget uses. In the first year of implementing the Park Access Program and collecting fee revenue, the savings to the General Fund will be approximately \$150 million. Savings in year two and three will be up to \$100 million, and \$50 million, respectively. After year four, the General Fund commitment to the state park system will be fully restored, as the goal of the program is to increase funding to address the needs of the state park system, not to supplant existing General Fund support to California's state parks.