

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 supporting California's state parks by instituting a \$10 surcharge on vehicle license fees of all non-commercial vehicles in California and some light commercial vehicles.

Why is this being proposed?

California's state park system is in a state of decline and disrepair. This year has illustrated very starkly how underfunded the system is. When the Governor proposed to close 48 state parks (17% of the entire system) and reduce lifeguard staffing on 16 of the state's most popular beaches – only to gain \$13.3 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 \$282 million in annual revenue for the state park system, based on an estimate of over 28 million vehicles that will be assessed the \$10 annual fee.

How will funding be used?

The funding will be used by the Department of Parks and Recreation (Department) to 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. Implementing legislation for the State Park Access Pass will provide the Department 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 temporary 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. This need to ramp up provides the state with a key short term opportunity to aid other state departments and agencies facing budget difficulties. The Department will actually

return its General Fund allocation to the state, providing almost \$150 million in General Fund resources to be used for other state budget priorities. In the second year of implementing the fee, the Department may return \$100 million to the state budget, and in the third year, \$50 million. By the fourth year, however, the Department will be receiving the full stream of State Park Access Pass revenue, in addition to its full General Fund allocation. The goal of the program is to increase funding to address the needs of the state park system, not to supplant existing General Fund commitments to California's state parks.

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?

Current 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 2008-09 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 exact date when free access begins will depend on when the Fiscal Year 2008-09 budget is signed, but it is estimated that free access may begin as early as January 2009.