

PARK ADVOCACY DAY

OUR PARKS OUR FUTURE

EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY A GUIDE FOR PARKS ADVOCATES

Park Advocacy Day provides participants with a valuable opportunity to visit legislators and share important views and priorities about our state park system. Policy decisions at the state level have a tremendous impact on the entire state park system and have real consequences to our parks. Gaining legislators' support for policy and budgetary changes can only happen when dedicated, committed citizens take an active role in their government.

Below are four top advocacy tips and suggestions for how to make them work for you on Park Advocacy Day. We hope you find these suggestions and tools useful in preparing for Park Advocacy Day and in continuing your advocacy efforts throughout the year!

Know your audience

One of the most important aspects to being an effective advocate is building positive relationships with decision makers. These relationships are not built in a day, but are reinforced by regular district visits, written correspondence, personal meetings and participation in events like Park Advocacy Day. Hopefully you'll have a chance to meet with your own legislators, but you may also be scheduled to meet with legislators from outside your own district.

Some of the key committees that have jurisdiction over parks issues are the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee, Senate Budget Committee, Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee, Assembly Natural Resources Committee and Assembly Budget Committee. When meeting with legislators who sit on those committees, be sure to encourage them to support parks in their role on those committees.

Don't be disappointed if your meeting on Park Advocacy Day is with a staff person. If you meet with a staff person, proceed with your presentation and ask the individual to convey your messages to his/her boss. Often, by developing a rapport with a staff member, you open an important line of communication to that office.

Be a source of reliable information

Working with elected officials is a two-way street – although you're there to ask for their support for parks, you're able to provide information and perspective they may not receive elsewhere. This puts you in a powerful position. As a park supporter, you know how others throughout California feel about parks funding or policies to protect parks from development. By visiting legislators as part of Park Advocacy Day, you are also conveying that you are part of an organized parks movement with many members.

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Be persuasive

While establishing relationships with legislators is an important goal of Park Advocacy Day, remember that the main purpose is to influence legislators to support budgetary and legislative issues affecting state parks. When meeting with legislators, frame your talking points and arguments in your own words. In addition to providing the facts and talking points provided by the California State Parks Foundation (CSPF), use examples from your own experiences that highlight the local consequences of state park decisions that are made by the Legislature.

Don't be surprised if it appears you are more knowledgeable than the individual with whom you are meeting. Remember, you've spent the last few weeks getting ready for Park Advocacy Day – of course you're prepared! However, no one can be expected to address every question or matter of concern regarding an issue. If you don't have the answer to a legislator's or staff person's question, offer to pursue the answer and report back to them. You can always ask staff at the CSPF if they can help find an answer.

Some Park Advocacy Day participants will encounter legislators and staff who are opposed to some of the priorities for park advocates. Be aware of your own biases; project an image of a concerned citizen who can respect different points of view. As much as possible, talk with other park advocates and try to anticipate the opposition's viewpoint prior to a meeting; it's always preferable to understand where opposition may be coming from and answer their arguments positively.

Hold decision makers accountable

One of the biggest impacts of Park Advocacy Day is that it visibly demonstrates the broad statewide support for state parks. Your attendance itself sends a signal to lawmakers that Californians *are* following park issues and the way their elected officials vote on those issues. In your meetings with legislators and their staff, however, don't neglect to take that one step further and make specific, action-oriented requests. Whether it's asking for a particular vote on a bill or support on a park-specific issue, don't hesitate to ask. If the legislator or staff person seems unsure about supporting your issue, ask if there is additional information you can provide or if there are ways you can help resolve any outstanding questions.

Be specific about what you want the legislator to do and follow up if he/she or his/her staff member agrees. While legislators are interested in "doing the right thing," they also respond to incentives such as positive recognition and helpful public relations. When legislators support your position, give them credit. Send them letters of thanks and inform your local newspaper, comment on their support publicly in meetings and call or stop by to visit them personally in district offices. These positive steps help build a productive relationship and reinforce the idea that you're holding your elected official accountable to decisions that matter to you and your community.

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Some DOs and DON'Ts for Advocates

DO

- Address your Senator or Member properly. Senators are addressed as "Senator" (as in "Senator Scott"). Members of the Assembly are addressed as "Assemblyman" or "Assemblywoman," as appropriate (as in "Assemblywoman Goldberg" and "Assemblyman Battin"). Get the pronunciation right and ask CSPF staff if you're unsure.
- Introduce yourself immediately at each contact. Public officials meet too many people to remember everyone.
- Use your own words.
- Be brief and explicit, courteous and reasonable.
- Establish your own credentials or expertise on the subject of legislation under consideration. You can do this by stating what organization you belong to (e.g., CALPA, CSLA, etc.), what park(s) you regularly visit, how long you have used the park, and what support activities you have engaged in on behalf of that park.
- Treat legislative staff courteously. Their cooperation can make or break your chances to reach the legislators themselves.
- Always keep off-the-record comments confidential.
- Keep the door open for further discussion in spite of any apparently negative attitudes.

DON'T

- Don't begin your talking points with, "As a citizen and taxpayer." Your elected representative assumes you are a citizen, and he/she knows we all pay taxes.
- Don't apologize for taking his or her time. If you are brief and to the point he/she will be glad to hear from you.
- Don't be arrogant, condescending or threatening toward legislators or their staff.
- Don't argue or back recalcitrant legislators into a corner where they take a definite position against you.
- Don't make notes of a conversation while talking to a legislator unless you're documenting an action step requested by the legislator. Save making a summary of the meeting until later.