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Parks California hires president and chief executive officer

_Experienced collaborator takes helm of new statewide parks support organization_

SACRAMENTO—Parks California—a new statewide nonprofit organization working to improve parks for all visitors—welcomes its inaugural president and CEO, Kindley Walsh Lawlor.

The former vice president of the Gap Inc. Foundation and, before that, vice president of global sustainability at Gap Inc., Lawlor will lead Parks California as it partners with the state Department of Parks and Recreation, philanthropies, corporations, community groups, and other organizations to expand park programs, amenities, and resources. Launched in June with a five-member board of directors, Parks California’s mission is to ensure the protected lands of California remain resilient while meeting the evolving, lifelong needs of visitors. It seeks to raise new resources and expertise in support of state, regional, local, and federal parks.

Lawlor, of San Francisco, led human rights and environmental efforts during her 20-plus year career at Gap Inc. A well-respected collaborator and designer of multi-stakeholder solutions, she has extensive experience navigating complex issues, building teams, and budgeting. At Gap Inc., she most recently led the Personal Advancement Career Enhancement program, one of the Foundation’s signature programs, focused on educating and empowering women globally. The program is expected to reach one million women by the end of 2020.

“Parks California can be the crucial partner that complements, amplifies, and elevates good work for parks across the state,” said Lawlor. “My goal is to bring funding, creativity, and momentum that accelerates efforts to protect our parks and improve them for the next generation.”

Dr. Steven Lockhart, chair of the Parks California Board of Directors and chief medical officer for Sutter Health, welcomed Lawlor and her leadership.

“Kindley brings great skill to Parks California,” said Lockhart. “She’s an innovator with a unique perspective on partnerships and a commitment to the public spaces Californians love and need, from neighborhood playsets to world-renown landscapes. The board and I are happy she’s joined our team and ready to get to work together.”
Rachel Norton, executive director of the California State Parks Foundation, also welcomed the milestone at Parks California. A member-supported nonprofit, the 49-year-old Foundation is dedicated to a vision of a state park system that is accessible, equitable, and excellent.

“Good parks need good partners,” said Norton. “Kindley brings unique experience from a corporate setting to the parks world and our shared goal—resilient, welcoming parks—and we look forward to working with her.”

The creation last summer of Parks California fulfilled the last major recommendation of the Parks Forward Commission. Established at the direction of the governor and Legislature in 2015, the independent Parks Forward Commission recommended creating a new nonprofit parks support organization to bring resources and expertise not otherwise available to support all California parks. In 2016, the Legislature passed and the governor authorized the Department of Parks and Recreation to work with a park support organization to bring expertise and resources, provide services, and advance projects that otherwise are not readily available to parks. Parks California will fill that role.

Parks California was established as a California nonprofit public benefit corporation. Initial seed funding and staff support to launch Parks California was provided by donors including the foundations of S.D. Bechtel, Jr., David and Lucile Packard, and William and Flora Hewlett, and Resources Legacy Fund.

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Parks California is a statewide nonprofit working to ensure our state, regional, and local parks thrive. We work shoulder to shoulder with State Parks and other partners to help our parks better serve every Californian. We bring new resources and expertise and leverage public funding to tackle projects that make parks more welcoming, accessible, and relevant to all visitors. Learn more at parkscalifornia.org.

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