

Parks in danger

With many state parks threatened by budget cuts, some famous Californians — Alice Waters, Isabel Allende, and others — are speaking up

[More parks](#)



[What you can do](#)

Angel Island State Park, San Francisco Bay

Jonny Moseley, Olympic Gold-Medal Skier

"I like to slip in on the leeward side of the island, where it's calm on even the windiest days. Swim or row ashore and cruise through the old military barracks. Walk over the hill and grab a soft serve where the ferry drops off tourists, then continue on to the windward side of the island for amazing views of the Golden Gate."

Annadel State Park, Santa Rosa

Gina Gallo, third-generation Gallo Family Vineyards winemaker

"I love Annadel State Park. It's right in my backyard — 5,000 acres of beautiful hillsides (and a lake) where you can bike, hike, run, horseback ride, and swim. You can see wild turkeys, rabbits, eagles, and deer. I go at least a couple of days a week to get away."

Tomales Bay State Park, Inverness

Alice Waters, founder of Chez Panisse restaurant, advocate, and author

"I've been going to this park for more than 20 years — it's close to Bolinas and I can take long walks along the coast. I like to visit the oyster farms in Tomales Bay, which to me represent the ancient balance between wilderness and cultivation."



Illustration by Joshua Gorchov

Alice Waters

San Onofre State Beach, San Clemente

Sofie Howard, creative director for the fashion industry and Los Angeles board member of the Natural Resources Defense Council

"I was planning a beach shoot with a group of supermodels, and they started moaning and groaning when I told them we were going down to San Onofre State Beach in San Diego County instead of Malibu. I just said, 'Get in the car.' We finished the shoot around 5, and some guys in a pickup truck were hanging out and grilling, and they began feeding these starving girls chicken and taquitos. So here are these models making \$8,000 a day laughing and high-fiving and talking story with workmen and painters with all of their equipment stacked on their truck. That's how it is at San Onofre. It's completely unspoiled and noncommercial. Just priceless."



Illustration by Joshua Gorchov

Deena Kastor

Malibu Creek State Park, Calabasas
Deena Kastor, Olympic bronze-medal marathoner and one to watch in this summer's Olympics

"I have traveled the world, and Malibu Creek State Park remains one of my favorite places to run in the Santa Monica Mountains. Exploring the trails of this great park, you'll come across waterfalls, Ronald Reagan's old ranch, rusted jeeps left over from filming *MASH*, and a lot of wildlife."

Rio de Los Angeles State Park, Los Angeles
Antonio Villaraigosa, Mayor of Los Angeles

"State parks are green oases planted by Angelenos themselves to bring nature back into the industrial landscape. Our newest state park grew from the persistence of a community coalition that united to reclaim an abandoned, rusted rail yard that had long dominated the skyline of southeast L.A. Once a fenced-in blight, the park today offers lush open space where hundreds of families spend their weekend playing soccer and baseball, and hiking and picnicking."

Mount Tamalpais State Park, Mill Valley
Gavin Newsom, Mayor of San Francisco

"I played high school baseball, and our home field was right in the shadow of Mt. Tamalpais. I've loved Mount Tamalpais State Park since I was a kid because of its panoramic views of the Pacific Ocean and the whole Bay Area, its hiking trails, and its great mountain biking. Muir Woods is there. It's home to some of the oldest sequoias in the world, really incredible."



Illustration by Joshua Gorchov

Gavin Newsom

Samuel P. Taylor State Park, Lagunitas
Isabel Allende, novelist whose latest book, *The Sum of Our Days*, was

released in April

"Nature in California reminds me very much of my country, Chile: the same abrupt coast of the Pacific, similar vegetation, hills, rivers, mountains, and woods. My personal state park — and I feel that I own it, it is really mine — is Samuel P. Taylor in West Marin. When I met Willie Gordon, my husband, 20 years ago, he took me there for a picnic. It was winter, it was raining, and we ate a rather disgusting chicken that was not fully cooked. I fell in lust with Willie and in love with the park. It looked exactly like the cold native forests of the south of Chile.

Several years later, I scattered some of my daughter's ashes there. Paula loved a particular spot where the trees form a dome over a pond. It's a green cathedral. I go to Samuel P. Taylor to converse with my daughter's spirit, to meditate, to walk my dog, to stroll hand in hand with Willie. The trees are tall sentinels, alive, alert. They witness my life. They have seen me crying, laughing, playing, kissing, and remembering. I don't hug them, but I talk to them. I say: Thank you, many times, many thanks."

ENLARGE IMAGE



photo by David Fenton

Samuel P. Taylor State Park

MORE PARKS

When *Sunset* learned that budget cuts could lead to the closure of 48 California state parks, we decided to check in with a wide range of notables — leading chefs, novelists, Olympic athletes, and politicians among them.

We wanted to get a sense of the role that state parks play in the lives of Californians. Perhaps not surprisingly, we got reactions that ranged from shock and surprise to passionate testimonials about just how much the parks mean to people. Sometimes all from one person.

"Holy, Toledo! I can't believe that our governor would consider closing state parks at all — much less [WILL ROGERS?](#)" chef Mary Sue Milliken of Los Angeles' Border Grill and Ciudad

wrote in an email. "There is a fantastic co-ed soccer game there on the polo fields every Sunday afternoon ... If this venue closes we will all miss an incredibly important place for the community to come together and do something rigorous, healthful, and mentally freeing for ourselves. Where will we go to rejuvenate and bond over a game that needs open spaces and fresh air?"

We also spoke with environmental professionals, including Julie Packard,

executive director of the Monterey Bay Aquarium. She said that no matter where she's lived in California, there's been a nearby state park that became a big part of her life.

And beyond her personal attachment to such spots as [Big Basin Redwoods State Park](#), Packard said that state parks and beaches help deepen the connection with and commitment to nature that the aquarium hopes to inspire in its visitors. The parks, she believes, are central to the experience of living in California.

"State parks are unbelievably important to a positive quality of life," Packard said. "There's such an array of remarkable ecosystems, and with almost 38 million people living here and most of those people living urban lifestyles, it's more important than ever to give them places to go and connect with the natural systems that sustain us."

That connection — or the lack thereof — is a major social issue, said Richard Louv, author of the landmark study *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*. While Louv believes that state parks are essential to keeping people connected to nature — one of his personal favorites is [Cuyamaca Rancho State Park](#) — their proximity to cities and the mere presence of open space is not always enough to combat the public's fear of wild places and crime.

Part of what state parks can do, he said, is to offer programs that draw families. Those events can then help people discover what the parks offer, and paradoxically these structured activities can open people up to the richness of unstructured activities, whether family hikes or fishing at a mountain pond.

Louv is a big advocate of "nearby nature" and the role it can play for children. "A ravine behind someone's house to a child is like a whole universe," he said. "That can be a child's first immersion in nature. All they have to do is roll over a rock and they'll find out that we're not alone."

WHAT YOU CAN DO

For a list of parks slated for closure and more information, contact the [California State Parks Foundation](#): 415/258-9975. For more info on the state government's park policies, call 916/442-2119. Click [here](#) for a complete list of state parks and details on how to get out and visit them, or call 800/777-0369.

In the new edition of *Last Child in the Woods* (Algonquin Books, \$15; 2008), Richard Louv offers 100 actions that families and communities can take to encourage a stronger connection to nature. Here are five of Louv's tips:



Richard Louv

- View nature as an antidote to stress. All the health benefits that come to a child come to the adult who takes that child into nature.
- Encourage your kids to go camping in the backyard. Buy them a tent or help them make a canvass tipi, and leave it up all summer.
- Make the "green hour" a new family tradition. The National Wildlife Federation recommends that parents give their kids a daily [green hour](#), a time for unstructured play and interaction with the natural world.
- Take a family vacation at a state or national park; go tent camping or rent a cabin.
- Go harvesting. In past decades, most children had family connections to farming — grandparents who still farmed, for instance. That connection can be echoed today by picking berries and other fruit or vegetables on commercial farms or in U-pick orchards.

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