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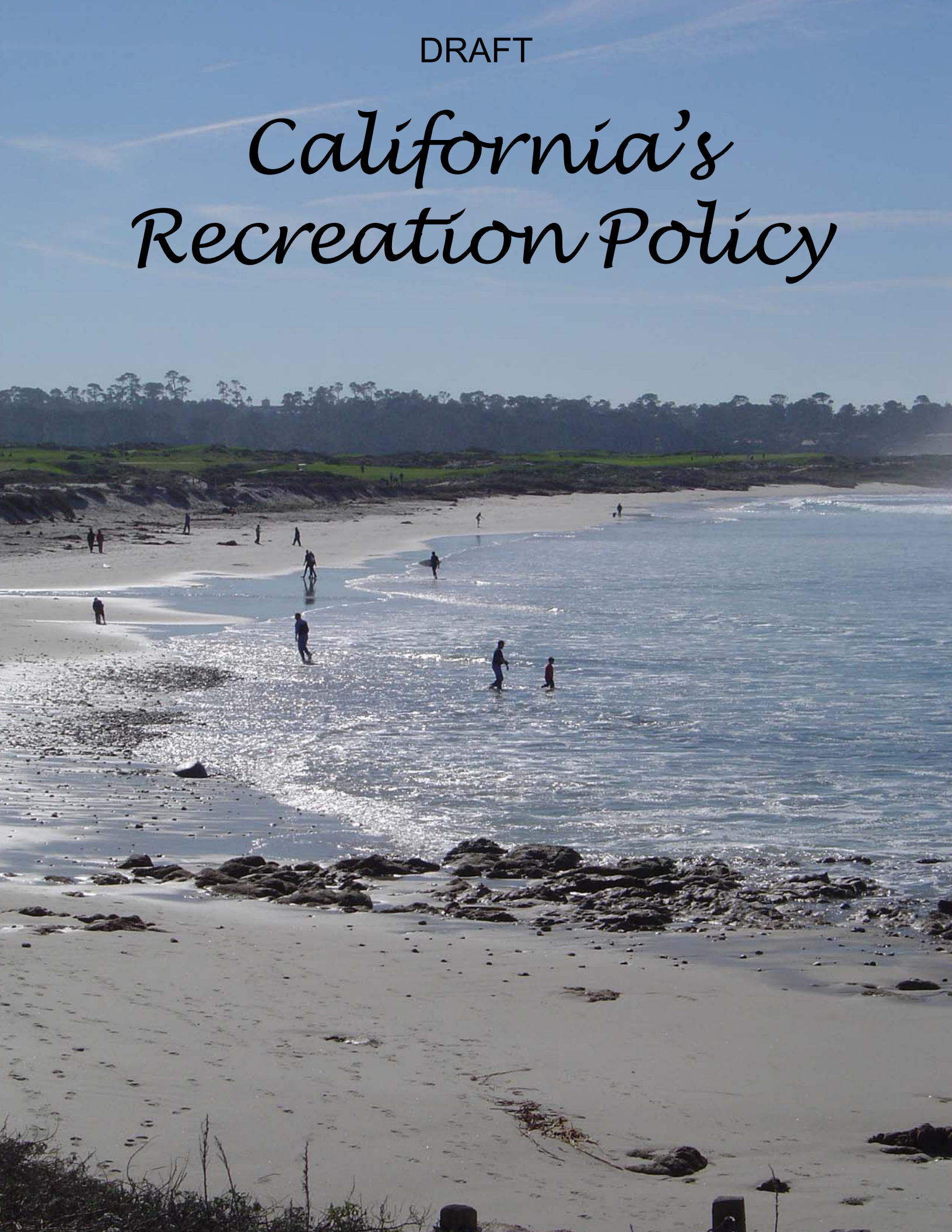
California's Recreation Policy



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California's Recreation Policy 2005

A bold direction for addressing the recreation needs of Californians, encompassing the entire range of recreation and park providers

A multitude of recreational opportunities provide Californians the freedom to fully develop their innate capabilities and creatively use their energies, while enriching their lives and improving their health and sense of well-being. Well-documented research consistently shows that recreation is essential to the physical, emotional, social and spiritual well-being of individuals, neighborhoods and our society as a whole. It is vital that all Californians be provided with an exciting array of opportunities that allow them to pursue their personal recreational interests. In recognition of this far-reaching belief, the State Legislature delegated responsibility for preparing a Recreation Policy for the State of California to the State Park and Recreation Commission. Public Resources Code (Section 540) directs that:

The Commission shall formulate, in cooperation with other state agencies, interested organizations and citizens, and shall recommend to the Director (of the Department of Parks and Recreation) for adoption by him/her, a comprehensive recreational policy for the State of California.

"There is a saying that the sins of the fathers are often visited upon their children. It is a sad fact that Californians of today are paying the price for times when not enough was done to protect our land, our air and our water. By devoting ourselves to improving California's environment now, we are ensuring that we do not leave a similar legacy."
—Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger

The 2005 California Recreation Policy is intended to be broad in scope and considers the full range of recreation activities - active, passive, indoors and out-of-doors. This timely policy considers the means by which recreational opportunities are provided—the lands, waters, facilities, programs and support functions—and it recognizes the considerable health, personal, social, economic and environmental benefits served through the many important dimensions of recreation.

This comprehensive policy is directed at recreation providers at all service levels: federal, state, and local agencies and special districts; private suppliers; and quasi-public or nonprofit organizations. It is intended that all suppliers of park facilities and recreation opportunities will be guided by California's Recreation Policy as they work to provide the high quality recreation experiences Californians have come to expect and which they deserve.

To simplify and make the process more meaningful, the policy has been divided into five general areas:

1. Adequacy of recreation opportunities
2. Leadership in recreation management
3. Recreation's role in a healthier California
4. Preservation of natural and cultural resources
5. Accessible recreational experiences

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1. Adequacy of recreation opportunities

The supply of parklands, waters, open space, recreation facilities and services must be adequate to meet future and current demands, particularly in the State's most populated areas.

It is State policy that:

An ample supply of park and recreation areas, along with their associated open space and natural areas, facilities, beaches and waterways, trails and programs should exist throughout California so all people can safely engage in near-home activities as well as opportunities to visit distant locations for extended leisure time or vacation pursuits.

"Open space means many different things. It may be a city park or playground; it may be the beauty of the open road; it may be the challenge of the trackless wilderness. Open space—handsome, meaningful, open space available for enjoyment—is not only a dimension of geography but a dimension of life. The protection of its beauty and the preservation and enhancement of its usefulness are important parts of our total conservation."

—George B. Hartzog, Jr., former Director of the National Park Service

Particular attention should be given to providing access to parklands and natural and developed recreation areas in and near the urban areas where most Californians live. In heavily populated areas, careful attention should be given to the acquisition and protection of natural and cultural resource lands, waters and open space. It is also important to recognize the need for critical recreational facilities in rapidly growing rural areas.

Public service providers closest to the recreation resources, and particularly to the sources of recreation demand, shall have the primary responsibility for providing comprehensive recreation opportunities. In urban, suburban and rural areas, these essential responsibilities shall generally fall to agencies of the cities, counties and special districts. It will be the responsibility of State agencies to take the lead where resources or recreation demands are of regional or far-reaching significance.

Parklands and trails should be promoted for the broad-scale economic and non-economic benefits they provide, whether through providing opportunities for physical activity, increasing jobs, attracting tourists, supporting local communities, drawing in new businesses to park-friendly communities, providing vital concession operations or increasing property values.

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2. *Leadership in recreation management*

Leadership, cooperation and partnership must be demonstrated at all levels to ensure quality recreation resources, opportunities, programs and services are provided.

It is State policy that:

The State of California, through its Department of Parks and Recreation, should encourage and actively stimulate and coordinate active participation of federal, state, and local agencies, as well as the private and nonprofit sectors, in providing park and recreation lands, waters, facilities and programs.

Local public and private decision makers have an important leadership role in ensuring that a full range of stimulating, enjoyable and safe recreation experiences are available to their constituents, regardless of their skills, abilities or income levels. The State, by means of grants and technical assistance, shall creatively aid local service providers in the realization of this vision and the vital delivery of these services.

Federal, state and local decision makers and program administrators should weigh the quality of life outcomes associated with park and recreation services in equal measure with other critical community services when considering the allocation of funding and staffing resources.

California's public and private schools, colleges and universities should support their undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate programs for training professionals in park and recreation management. In addition, they should support efforts related to conducting research (e.g., visitor's surveys, facility inventories and activity studies) on park and recreation related subjects and encourage beneficial internship programs at public agencies and non-profit organizations with the understanding that these worthwhile programs provide the future leadership in the park and recreation movement.

Providers in the private, quasi-public and nonprofit sectors are essential partners in the provision of recreation services. They should be encouraged to develop and operate a wide range of recreation resources, and to provide a considerable range of recreation opportunities on both private lands and public lands where appropriate.

Californians should have the opportunity to, and are encouraged to, actively participate as volunteers in support of recreation facilities and programs.

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3. Recreation's role in a healthier California

Meaningful recreation activities, facilities, programs and increased opportunities for physical activity are vital to improving the health and well-being of Californians.

It is State policy that:

Park and recreation lands, facilities and programs should be recognized as a positive force for individuals, families, communities and society, fostering extensive community pride, increasing productivity, significantly reducing crime and healthcare costs, and play a vital role in preventing significant health ailments through physical activity.

Recreation programs should be available for all Californians, particularly for children and youth, to encourage inventive play and support lifelong physical activity and emotional well-being.

Park and recreation professionals should also promote and support increased physical activity among Californians, which is critical to combating the obesity epidemic and preventing serious, chronic conditions like heart disease and diabetes. Park and recreation professionals should also actively take forward the unified and clear message that abundant parks, sports activities and recreation programs provide youth the opportunity to be involved in positive, supervised activities, and that recreation services play a critical role in reducing truancy, teen pregnancy, gang involvement and juvenile delinquency while building self-esteem and improving school performance.

> *"In today's challenging environment (socially, environmentally, physically, and mentally), I know of no greater cost effective antidote than providing parks and recreation programs and services to the citizens of California. It is vitally important that the mission of parks and recreation be communicated and understood. Our mission is to: protect environmental resources; foster human development; strengthen safety and security; promote health and wellness; facilitate community problem solving; increase cultural unity; support economic development; and provide recreational experiences."*
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> —Jane Adams, Executive Director, California Park and Recreation Society

Recreation providers should evaluate the availability and adequacy of facilities and programs to serve California's growing number of seniors associated with an aging population and make necessary adjustments to serve this increasingly important population. Senior programs should actively promote healthy lifestyles, physical activity, continued learning, and community engagement, including intergenerational activities.

Park and recreation providers at all levels should seek opportunities to collaborate with other critical social service programs in such fields as education, health care, housing, juvenile justice and social welfare.

Park and recreation professionals should understand and be able to convey the importance of providing quality passive recreation opportunities that assist the user in enjoying the quiet and solitude of a passive experience.

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4. Preservation of natural and cultural resources

Educating Californians about their state's invaluable resources is a critical part of ensuring these resources continue to be available for the enjoyment of current and future generations.

It is State policy that:

A comprehensive environmental ethic should be fostered among all Californians, particularly its children and youth, to encourage wise use of the state's finite natural and cultural resources.

Californians should be made aware of California's unique and important environmental, ecological, scenic, historical and educational resources and opportunities contained within parks, recreation areas, open space and resource lands.

Inspiring educational materials should be available that have consistent core messages designed to conserve, protect and respect resource values and raise individual awareness to potential concerns.

Attention should be given to the conservation of critical habitat for special status plant species and wildlife, and the restoration of important natural areas such as wildlife corridors and wetlands. The preservation of and education about cultural and historic resources such as archaeological sites, historic trails or notable buildings should receive similar noteworthy attention.

To ensure resource lands, waterways and habitat will continue to be available for future generations, consideration should be given to protecting working farms and ranch lands with important natural and cultural resources through voluntary land protection agreements.

Recreation areas should be planned and carefully managed to provide optimum recreation opportunities without damaging significant natural or cultural resources. Management actions should strive to correct problems that have the potential to damage sensitive areas and degrade resources.

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5. *Accessibility to all Californians*

All citizens have the right to enjoy California's park and recreation legacy.

It is State policy that:

Physical barriers and administrative obstacles whenever possible should be eliminated so California's park and recreation lands, waters, facilities, activities and programs are accessible to all who want to enjoy them.

Through careful planning and farsighted parkland acquisition in California's urban areas, Californians should have safe access to a park or other recreation area within walking distance of where they live.

Low income communities and communities embodying California's great diversity should be provided the same access to healthful outdoor settings, well-maintained facilities, and professionally competent programs as are enjoyed by all other Californians.

Employees of park and recreation service providers at all levels should reflect the diversity of California's people in order to better understand the needs and preferences of California's changing population.

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