

## Re-examining our Past Initiative

State Parks' [Reexamining Our Past Initiative](#) is part of a larger project within state government to address historic inequities that continue to affect many ethnic, Tribal and other communities in California. One approach within this initiative has been to identify and redress discriminatory names of features attached to the state parks and transportation systems and to address inappropriate honorifics associated with the historical legacy of some of our monuments, statues and plaques. It builds upon Governor Gavin Newsom's work to support equity, inclusion, and accountability throughout the State to better reflect our values. On October 29, 2019, State Parks received a letter from the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band asking the Department to reconsider the name of *Fremont Peak* State Park due to John C. Fremont's documented brutality against Native Americans in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and to restore the traditional place name *tooyohtak*. The name *tooyohtak* translates to "bee place/at the bees" in the Mutsun language and has been the place name of the mountain since time immemorial. It is the oldest name that humans have for the peak.

State Park names are determined by the California State Park and Recreation Commission. In preparation for this proposal going to the Commission, State Parks is gathering public comment to include in a report presented to the Commission. State Parks is also reaching out to stakeholders and community groups, and consulting with California Native American tribes on this proposal. This name change is for the name of the park unit. Geographic feature names are not under the jurisdiction of State Parks. A request to change the feature name may be submitted if the Commission decides to accept the proposal to restore the peak's Mutsun name as the name of the park unit.

## History of *Fremont Peak* State Park

The famous landscape architect, Charles Law Olmstead, Jr. commissioned by the state in 1934, completed a state-wide survey of all available and desirable park areas. The State Park Commission used this guide to purchase additional park lands for the state. They were interested in purchasing lands with historical significance or those possessing exceptional natural beauty. *Gabilan Peak* (changed to *Fremont Peak* in 1960) was identified in Olmstead's survey for its historical significance relating to California history. The State began acquiring the land in 1929. The park was opened in 1936 and was named *Fremont Peak* State Park "to honor John C. Fremont, known as an American explorer and mapmaker. He led several expeditions across the American West and planted an American flag atop Fremont Peak in 1846 in a series of events that sparked the Bear Flag Revolt."

## History of Names for *tooyohtak*

- Mutsun people have used the name *tooyohtak*, *bee place/at the bees*, for the mountain since time immemorial.
- Spanish and Mexican settlers used the name *Gabilan* (or *Gavilan*), *Sparrow Hawk*, for the peak.
- The name *Fremont Peak* was used locally, starting in the late 1890s, and was associated with John Fremont having planted a flag on a peak in the region.
- The US Board of Geographic Names adopted *Gabilan Peak* in 1904 on federal maps for the mountain.

- U.S. Board of Geographical Names in April 1960 changed the name to Fremont Peak because of local usage and its historical association.

### **Background for changing the name of the Park Unit**

- Restoration of traditional California Native American place names is a part of ongoing work from the Governor's Office, the California Natural Resources agency, and the State Parks Reexamining Our Past Initiative to examine and address historic wrongs and to expand representation of California Native American history and culture in the State.
- The Reexamining Our Past Initiative includes the removal of inappropriate honorifics from State Parks. During Fremont's westward expedition of 1846, he commanded a force that committed mass murder known as the Sacramento River Massacre that killed 1,000 Wintun. (Madley, 2016, p 45-48). Fremont also commanded forces that were responsible the mass murder of Klamath people, known as the Klamath Lake Massacre (Madley, 2016, p 45-48).
- There is not agreement between historians about whether tooyohtak is the peak where Fremont planted the flag. In 1959, retired U.S. Army Colonel Fred Rogers submitted a letter to the California Division of Beaches and Parks, now State Parks, claiming that Fremont Peak State Park was not the location where Fremont plants a flag, but that peak was located 7 miles to the north. Colonel Rogers used Fremont's memoirs and other first-person accounts of men with Fremont's party to support his assertion (Crawford, 2002, p.13). He asserted the correct peak was Yates Mountain or Hill 2146, approximately 4 miles south of San Juan Bautista. As a result of his actions in California, Fremont was court-martialed for mutiny, disobedience and conduct prejudicial to military discipline. He was sentenced to dismissal although President James K. Polk, set aside his penalty.

### **Other considerations**

- Fremont is commemorated by many other features. There are seven mountains named after Fremont. Three in California alone and the City of Fremont was named in his honor. There are also many other features such as Fremont Street, in downtown Los Vegas, NV.

## **References**

Crawford, K. (2002). *A Brief History of the Fremont Peak State Park: San Benito County, California*. California State Parks .

Madley, B. (2016). *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873*. Yale University Press.