STATE PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING
Virtual
March 12, 2021

STAFF REPORT: Reexamining Our Past Initiative

STAFF: Leslie Hartzell and Alex Stehl

SUBJECT: Introduction to the Reexamining Our Past Initiative

Summary

Staff report provides an introduction to the department’s Reexamining Our Past initiative. Presentation will include roles and responsibilities for decision-making, in particular, the SPRC role in reviewing and recommending approval of requests for consideration of name changes for park units as well as memorial groves and trails, and the role of Resource Agency’s advisory geographic names committee.

Discussion

Secretary Crowfoot challenges us to Listen, Commit and Act to truly make California for All. This generational moment calls for California State Parks (State Parks) to take stock of and critically reexamine our past, looking specifically at contested place names, monuments, and interpretation in our State Parks.

A brief internal survey conducted by State Parks this past summer made clear that we must act to further identify and remove residual derogatory place names; inappropriate honorifics associated with the historical legacy of some of its monuments, statues and plaques; and address inadequate interpretive programs or exhibits that fall short in fully contextualizing California’s history in our parks. The initiative is called Reexamining Our Past. We are closely coordinating with Governor Newsom’s administration and California Natural Resources Agency Secretary Crowfoot on this effort. The Reexamining Our Past page on the State Parks website provides information for the public on these efforts and a link to sign up for the mailing list at planning@parks.ca.gov.
To truly make Parks for All, new audiences must see their history more fully represented and celebrated. Building on Transformation’s Relevancy and History Program, it is essential that we embed contemporary scholarship and community engagement in all interpretive programming. Working with community partners and universities is foundational to ensure State Parks’ educational programs and exhibits support State educational standards and are grounded in contemporary research methodology and scholarship.

The overall effort must be adequately resourced and programmatically supported with robust tribal consultations and meaningful community engagement. Leading the effort must be a diverse cadre of State Park professionals that reflect the diversity of all Californians. In these ways we demonstrate State Parks’ commitment and ability to making California for All.

Commission Policy on Place Names, and Naming Memorial Groves and Trails

California Public Resources Code - PRC § 5019.59 provides authority to the California State Park and Recreation Commission (Commission) to name historical units “appropriately and individually.” Specifically, it states that “Historical units shall be named to perpetuate the primary historical theme of the individual units.” Classification and naming of units, features, groves, and trails of the State Parks System fall under the jurisdiction of the Commission, as described in the State Parks’ policy below.

In most cases, a unit should bear the name to which it has been accustomed due to location, association, history, natural features, or general usage….A unit may be named by the Commission in honor of a person living or deceased, or a group, organization, or other entity which has rendered services of statewide significance to the State Park System (http://parks.ca.gov/pages/843/files/CommissionPolicies9-23-05.pdf; pp 22-23).

The Commission’s policy “reserves the privilege of approving the selection and names given to memorial” groves and trails. These names will be approved only to honor individuals or organizations who have donated a minimum dollar amount and will be recognized via memorial plaques.

Note that the Commission’s policy recognizes that the State Parks Director has authority to name features within a unit, including “recognition of deserving individuals or groups, organizations or other entities.” Moreover, “Names so selected may be altered or changed by the Director as conditions warrant.” This policy would apply to administrative names, separate from those governed by the BGN as noted above.

The process by which a park name is adopted or changed is defined by the California Public Resources Code (PRC), California Park and Recreation
Commission (Commission) Policy, and Department policy. Naming options are researched by staff and recommendations that conform with the PRC and relevant policies are forwarded to the director for consideration. The director is then authorized to select a preferred name to forward to the Commission for final approval.

The Strategic Planning and Recreation Services Division will lead and coordinate the redress of place names. There are several types of place names that require redress including the names of park units, subunits, park features (such as roads and trails), and geographical features (such as rivers and beaches within a park unit). New names will be approved and adopted by the appropriate authority as outlined below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Feature</th>
<th>Required Approval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Park Unit and Subunit Names</td>
<td>State Park and Recreation Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographic Feature</td>
<td>California Advisory Committee on Geographic Names and the US Board on Geographic Names</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other park feature including roads and trails (except memorial trails)</td>
<td>State Parks Director or their Designee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Commission Action**

For information only with Q&A

**Attachments**

Power Point presentation