



CALIFORNIA STATE PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING STAFF REPORT COVER PAGE

Loma Linda
December 17, 2025

AGENDA ITEM: 5. Inland Empire District Update

STAFF: Kelly Elliott, Inland Empire District Superintendent

SUBJECT: Inland Empire District Update

I. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

For information only.

II. BACKGROUND/SUMMARY

Inland Empire District Superintendent Kelly Elliott will present a report that provides an overview of the Inland Empire District and its ongoing projects.

III. ATTACHMENTS

- Staff Report
- Map of IED
- [Inland Empire Website link](#)



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STAFF REPORT: Inland Empire District Update

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SUBJECT: Inland Empire District Update

OBJECTIVE

Staff will provide a brief introduction to the Inland Empire District (IED or District) followed by informational updates of ongoing projects in the District.

INTRODUCTION

The Inland Empire District manages eight park units across Southern California, encompassing one State Historic Park (SHP), three State Recreation Areas (SRAs), two State Parks (SP), and two Unclassified Park Properties (PP). These units feature more than 100 miles of trails, two lakes, caverns, mountain peaks, an industrial citrus grove, a Regional Indian Museum, and one of the state's largest developed campgrounds.

DESCRIPTION

Inland Empire District Updates

The Inland Empire District operates under a hybrid model, the District integrates four sectors—Chino, Perris, Silverwood, and Mt. San Jacinto SP—spanning over 48,000 acres of parkland across Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino counties. It serves a regional population of 4.2 million, with all parks within a one-hour drive of major urban centers, including Los Angeles, Palm Springs, and San Diego. The District welcomes more than 2.7 million visitors annually, with 500–600 vessels operating on its lakes during summer weekends.

The District offers extensive recreational opportunities, including hiking, biking, boating, hunting, rock climbing, fishing, horseback riding, kayaking, camping, and caving. The Inland Empire District is home to the tallest summit in the California



State Park system soaring at 10,834 feet (Mt. San Jacinto). Equally captivating below ground, the renowned Mitchell Caverns at Providence Mountains offer a rare glimpse into the region's geological wonders. The Inland Empire District Interpretive Team delivers more than 50 educational programs annually, engaging over 35,000 participants. Operationally, the District serves as the base and support system for the Southern Communication Center (SURCOM) and the Aquatic Lake Lifeguard Program. It also maintains a robust Junior Lifeguard Program focused on youth training in water safety and leadership.

The District collaborates with the Winter Park Authority on operations of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway. The Friends of California Citrus Park (Non-Profit Management Corp.) serves as the official partner of the California Citrus State Historic Park. Additional grassroots support comes from groups including Supporters of Wildwood Park and Lake Perris, Chino Hills State Park Interpretive Association (CHSPIA), Mojave River Natural History Association (MRNHA), and Mount San Jacinto Natural History Association (NHA) these groups work to enhance educational and interpretive experiences at all of the Inland Empire District parks.

Currently, the District is operating with 94 of its 118 authorized permanent and permanent-intermediate positions filled, supplemented by 138 seasonal employees.

Ongoing Projects

California Citrus State Historic Park Capital Outlay Project

California Citrus State Historic Park has been allocated \$30 million in state funding, secured through the efforts of Assembly Member Sabrina Cervantes and Senator Richard Roth (both D-Riverside), in partnership with the City of Riverside and Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson. This investment supports the park's ongoing mission to preserve and interpret the diverse labor history and economic significance of the citrus industry, which propelled Riverside to become the nation's wealthiest per-capita city in the late 19th century.

Key improvements include a large open-turf concourse for public events, a grower's residence designed for educational programs and conferences, a workers' camp bunkhouse, and a wooden trestle bridge spanning an arroyo to connect park attractions.

The project will expand interpretive exhibits at the visitor center, highlighting the contributions of Chinese, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Mexican, and Indigenous workers, as well as the industry's evolution—from Eliza Tibbets' introduction of the navel orange in 1873, through technological and industrial advancements, to its decline amid urbanization and current challenges from pests such as citrus greening disease.



Project Status: The design consultant contract has been executed. Encumbrance of funds and issuance of the Notice to Proceed are anticipated in the coming weeks. Initial activities include document review and geotechnical/topographic surveys. A project kickoff meeting is scheduled for January 2026. The project archaeologist is finalizing the cultural resources survey.

Ya'i Heki' Lake Perris Museum Upgrade Project

The Ya'i Heki' Regional Indian Museum (RIM) at Lake Perris, California, traces its origins to the 1960s statewide initiative for a centralized State Indian Museum. Following input from a Native American Advisory Council in the 1970s, the concept evolved into a network of regional museums aligned with traditional California Indian land divisions. Budget constraints reduced the original plan of 12 new facilities to the adaptive reuse of four existing structures in the 1980s. The former California Department of Water Resources Visitor Center (constructed 1975–1976) was selected to represent the Mojave Desert tribes—Cahuilla, Serrano, Luiseño, Cupeño, and Chemehuevi—and was renamed Ya'i Heki' ("Home of the Wind") by Cahuilla elder Katherine Siva Saubel of the Morongo Band of Mission Indians.

Dedicated to the history, culture, and contemporary achievements of Inland Empire Native nations, the museum is undergoing a comprehensive exhibit renewal managed by the Southern Service Center (SSC) of California State Parks. The project, guided by an Interpretive Project Plan authored by tribal members and planner Jimmy Grant, incorporates direction from more than a dozen regional tribes. Contractor Formations, Inc., supported by Exhibits Dept and designer Maggie Schmidt, has completed three rounds of concept design, with tribal and departmental feedback now being incorporated in November 2025.

Upon approval, the project will advance to Final Design Development (target completion mid-2026), followed by demolition of existing displays and fabrication of new exhibits, new audiovisual and Virtual Adventurer programming, and concurrent hazardous-materials, taxidermy, and mural assessments. Full reopening as a revitalized centerpiece of the California RIM system is anticipated in mid-2027 to early-2028.

Lake Perris State Recreation General Plan

The Inland Empire District, the Strategic Planning and Recreation Services Division, and State Parks' consultant, Ascent, are collaborating with the public, tribes, and other stakeholders to develop a General Plan for Lake Perris State Recreation Area. Opened in 1973 as a State Recreation Area, Lake Perris encompasses 8,800 acres of recreational opportunities and is located approximately 65 miles southeast of Los Angeles.

The park welcomes about 1.2 million visitors annually. For over 50 years, Lake Perris has served the public using its original infrastructure, which is now aging and



in critical need of replacement to preserve resources and ensure high-quality recreational experiences.

Recent funding from the Waterway Connections Initiative (WCI) has enabled the project to proceed, with planning efforts commencing in May 2025. Although currently in the early stages, the classification and General Plan process is anticipated to be completed in 2028.

NEXT STEPS

N/A

RECOMMENDATION

Informational only

COMMISSION ACTION(S)

No action required.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Inland Empire District](#)

