

News Release



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California Economy Given Boost By State Parks Attendance Increase

Billions more in Local Spending, From Millions of Added Visitors

SACRAMENTO – State Parks Director Rusty Areias announced today the attendance at California's 266 state parks is now projected to be greater than 93 million total visitors for the fiscal year 2001-2002, the highest state parks attendance in history.

That 93 million represents an increase of more than 21 million visitors since fees were dropped at state parks beginning in July 2000. That 21 million increase in visitors means millions more in visitor spending is being pumped into local communities around state parks.

The latest figures show the total economic impact of state park visitors has jumped from \$5.2 billion before fee drops, to more than \$7.2 billion after, a boost to local economies of \$2 billion. Further, it is estimated that the additional \$2 billion in economic impact created the business demand and the cash available to potentially support more than 31,000 new jobs in those local communities where state park visitors spend money. *(See attached Visitor Attendance and Spending Chart for details)*

"When Governor Davis dropped fees," said State Parks Director Areias, "we began to see a surge in park visitors. That surge turned into a flood, a total of 21 million additional visitors. But then came the economic bonus," said Areias, "the additional spending is astounding and wonderful at a time when California's sagging economy really needs a boost."

The data on spending by state park visitors is derived from an updated version of the October 1995 State Parks Report entitled: The Impact on Local Economies of Spending by Visitors to California State Parks. The study was conducted by the Department's Planning Division using economic multipliers developed by George Goldman of the Agricultural Economics Department at the University of California Berkeley. The calculations reported in the 1995 study were updated this past month to reflect inflation and the change in visitor attendance.

“This tells us the word is spreading,” said Parks Director Areias. “State Parks are becoming more important and in greater demand than ever before. Fee cuts have clearly been a motivator in helping people rediscover state parks as a high quality vacation escape. If there is a worry,” added Areias, “it is that we hope we can sustain the high quality at state parks during this time of economic uncertainty. “

In addition, a national tourism survey done for California and other states indicates people not comfortable with flying in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks would consider driving and vacationing closer to home. That means state parks may see a further increase in attendance.

Officials with some individual state parks in California are already reporting indications of that increase. Monterey Coast parks, for instance, have reported attendance on the rise, with rangers saying visitors have repeatedly expressed the need for such quiet, family experiences. At Anza Borrego Desert State Park, officials say they are experiencing one of the busiest Octobers on record. And state park campgrounds along the Santa Barbara Coast have been full every weekend, and more than half full during the week, which is unusual for this time of year.

Some attendance has dropped however, particularly in those areas that are popular with organized groups. The Asilomar Conference Grounds in Monterey, for instance, has reported a sharp drop in conventions, which has forced the lay-off of some seasonal personnel.