

News Release



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State Parks Raises Fees To Offset Budget Cuts and Keep Parks Open

SACRAMENTO -- California State Parks announced today that in the midst of the state's continuing budget shortfall, fees will be raised beginning July 1, 2004. The purpose of the increase is to offset budget cuts, provide for a minimum level of ongoing maintenance, and most importantly, to keep the parks open and operating for millions of visitors.

The new fee schedule is being announced now because it will begin for campers making reservations as of January 2, 2004, for the month of July 2004, the normal seven-month advance period for making reservations. Reservations made for months prior to July 2004 will be at the existing rates. In some cases, fees will be increased only slightly. In other cases, at the state's most popular campgrounds and at prime locations during high-demand, peak times of the year, parking or camping fees will increase by a greater amount. In order to provide for affordability and access for people of all income levels, the increase is being structured in a way that allows for choices to be made through a sliding range of fees at parks throughout the system. Such a structure will provide a variety of prices for those who visit State Parks.

"After repeated budget reductions, we have reached the point where there is no other choice," said State Parks Director Ruth Coleman. "This is a reasonable solution to help get the State through hard budget times. This plan keeps the system open and operating, while also keeping it as affordable as possible for all Californians."

Since the beginning of the budget deficit problem, virtually all departments of State government have undergone continued budget cuts. State Parks' budget was reduced by \$4.8 million in 2001-2002, another \$15 million in 2002-2003, a total of nearly \$20 million. To meet the requirements of those reductions, State Parks reorganized its middle and upper management and consolidated 23 statewide park districts down to 18, thereby saving rent lease, electricity and other overhead costs. The management reorganization and the ongoing hiring freeze reduced the State Parks' work force by nearly 200.

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As its share for the upcoming 2004-2005 budget, State Parks must reduce its operating budget by an additional \$15 million, a total reduction of \$35 million over four years. Because most of the State Parks' budget goes to wages and benefits, cuts alone would require the layoff of an additional 250 permanent and 800 seasonal employees. Personnel reductions of that magnitude, on top of previous reductions of 200 personnel, would require the closure of more than 100 State Parks because there would not be sufficient personnel to operate those parks.

By raising fees, the \$15 million budget reduction will be offset by the added fee revenue. In addition to recapturing the \$15 million budget reduction, the fee increase will provide for an additional \$3 million, a total of \$18 million. Of the additional \$3 million, \$1 million will be used to hire the seasonal personnel required to staff the kiosks and entrance stations to collect the fees. The added \$2 million is a minimal amount needed to handle the most critical public safety and maintenance issues throughout the system.

The additional \$2 million is being collected because the State Park System has repeatedly deferred maintenance projects because of state budget problems since the 1980's. This ongoing backlog has increased to more than 1,200 deferred maintenance projects worth an estimated \$600 million.

Coleman noted that the new fee structure has a built-in flexibility that allows for an adjustment of camping fees based on location and time of year. The fee structure provides for a sliding scale that allows park visitors to choose less expensive locations or less expensive time periods. A family in need of a more affordable vacation, for instance, has the option of choosing an area where there is less demand and lower fees.

Looking at other states across the nation, at least seven states have raised their state park fees in the past year in response economic and budget problems similar to those in California. Those states include Washington, Florida, Michigan, Texas, Connecticut, Minnesota and Nevada. California's State Park System includes 277 parks with more than 15,000 campsites, 280 miles of coastline and more than 3,000 miles of trails, making it the largest State Park system in the lower 48 states. In addition, it has the highest number of visitors of any State Park system in the entire nation, with more than 85 million visitors yearly, an increase of more than 34 percent in four years.

The high number of visitors directly spend more than \$2.6 billion dollars yearly in communities surrounding State Parks, making the State Park System a significant part of the economy of many locations of the State. Every year, the vast majority of State Park coastal campsites are full all summer, making State Parks one of the most popular vacation destinations in California.

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Examples of the fee structure, present and new, is as follows:

	Present Fee	New Fee, July 1, 2004
Day Use	\$3.00 -- \$5.00	\$4.00 -- \$14.00
Camping, family	\$8.00 -- \$13.00	\$11.00 -- \$25.00
Camping, group	\$12.00 -- \$270.00	\$14.00 -- \$450.00
Premium Sites	\$4.00 add'l. per site	\$10.00 add'l. per site
Hookups for sites	\$3.00 add'l. per site	\$3.00 -- \$9.00 add'l. per site
Boat Launching	\$2.00 -- \$4.00	\$5.00 -- \$8.00
Museums and Historical Sites	\$2.00 -- \$4.00	\$2.00 -- \$8.00
Annual Passes	\$67.00	\$125.00
Annual Boat Pass	\$45.00	\$75.00
Hearst Castle	\$7.00 -- \$12.00	\$8.00 -- \$25.00 (\$30.00 for evening tours)
Disabled, Veterans, Golden Bear and Seniors	No change	No change

The new fee structure is posted on the California State Parks web site, at www.parks.ca.gov, under Reservations and Fees.

Note to editors: This is being released now because even though the fee increase does not take affect until July 1, 2004, reservations can be made seven months in advance. That means the new fees must be posted to the system as of January 1, 2004 in order to become effective for July. Releasing it now may also help park visitors plan ahead for their summer vacations.

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