



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **California Natural Resources Agency, California State Park Officials Announce Sweeping New “Parks Forward” Initiative**

*New Commission Created to Transform California’s State Parks System*

**SACRAMENTO , CA (Mon. June 3, 2013).**--California Secretary of Natural Resources John Laird and California State Parks Director Major General Anthony L. Jackson, USMC (Ret.), today unveiled “Parks Forward,” a collaborative initiative to undertake a top-to-bottom evaluation to improve and sustain California's underfunded State Parks System. A distinguished volunteer panel, known as the Parks Forward Commission, will lead the new Parks Forward initiative, designed to implement the directives of the California State Parks Stewardship Act of 2012 and to revive and improve California’s State Parks.

"Parks Forward is an exciting new initiative designed to bring out the very best in our state's storied parks. This esteemed group will work to improve efficiency, increase accessibility and meet the needs of our growing and changing population," said Secretary Laird. "California's State Parks will once again flourish and serve as prized destinations across our cities, mountains, valleys and coastlines."

Currently, there are 280 State Parks covering 1.6 million acres that draw some 70 million visitors annually, returning an estimated \$6.5 billion to the California economy and supporting 56,000 California jobs. This system has been the proud result of significant and sustained investment by not only the state and its citizens, but also philanthropic contributors and conservation organizations whose combined efforts built the system we know today. But under the weight of budget cuts, added acreage, rising populations, and outmoded systems, California’s parks system is struggling to meet the needs of its citizens.

“California State Parks are an essential part of Californians’ daily lives. They provide quality recreation and inspiration, and it is our intent to improve it for future generations,” said Director Jackson. “The expertise and knowledge of those representing State Parks and the Parks Forward initiative will provide a unique insight and best practices to ensure our parks move forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and beyond. We are fully aware the eyes of Californians are on us, and I am committed to making this initiative open and transparent, and one that yields achievable results.”

Signed into law last year, the California State Parks Stewardship Act of 2012, or AB 1589, seeks to improve management and funding practices at the Department of Parks and Recreation. The Parks Forward Commission, a panel of experts, citizens, and advocates will conduct an assessment of the parks system and recommend substantial improvements. This independent process will address the financial, operational, cultural, and population challenges facing state parks to ensure the system’s long-term viability, functionality, and relevance.

The Parks Forward initiative will be supported by significant charitable funding, public agency commitments, the nonprofit community and other stakeholders.

Secretary Laird will select the Parks Forward Commission members. The Parks Forward Commission is expected to present its final findings and recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature in fall 2014.

Learn more about Parks Forward at [www.ParksForward.com](http://www.ParksForward.com) and by following us on Twitter at @ParksForward and liking us on Facebook at [Facebook.Com/ParksForward](https://www.facebook.com/ParksForward).

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