

# Governor proposes closing Clear Lake, Anderson Marsh State Parks

Contributed by Elizabeth Larson  
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THIS ARTICLE HAS BEEN UPDATED WITH NEW INFORMATION ON THE LOCAL PARKS' ANNUAL VISITS AND REVENUE.

LAKE COUNTY &ndash; Lake County's only two state parks face closure as part of the governor's stringent budget plan for the coming fiscal year. {sidebar id=50}

Anderson Marsh State Park in Lower Lake and Clear Lake State Park in Kelseyville are among the 48 state parks slated for closure in Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's 2008-09 draft budget, which he sent to the state Legislature on Thursday.

Schwarzenegger had warned during his State of the State Address Tuesday that he planned a &ldquo;difficult&rdquo; budget to meet the state's \$14.5 billion deficit.

The budget document he produced this week contains 10-percent, across-the-board reductions in state departments in order to begin closing the budget gap. Some of the cuts, according to budget documents, go into effect as early as the fourth quarter of the 2007-08 budget.

Schwarzenegger proposes to cut the state Department of Parks and Recreation's budget by \$1 million in the last quarter of 2007-08 and another \$13.3 million in the 2008-09 fiscal year, according to a budget summary.

In all, the parks system would lose 129.2 positions, close 48 of 278 state parks and reduce seasonal lifeguards by a minimum 50 percent at state beaches in Orange, San Diego and Santa Cruz counties, the budget summary reports.

Besides Anderson Marsh and Clear Lake State Park, other North Coast parks proposed for closure are Del Norte Redwoods in Del Norte County; Manchester State Beach in Mendocino County; Grizzly Creek Redwoods in Humboldt County; and Austin Creek State Recreation Area and Armstrong Redwoods State Reserve in Sonoma County. The

California State Parks Foundation reports that Clear Lake State Park has 100,166 visitors annually, with revenue of \$332,782. Anderson Marsh is visited by 43,499 people each year, generating \$2,060 in revenue.

All seven of the parks listed above are located within Assemblywoman Patty Berg's First Assembly District. In total, their closures would mean the loss of more than 1.3 million visits annually, with revenue losses totaling approximately \$742,274. All seven of the parks listed above are located within Assemblywoman Patty Berg's First Assembly District.

Maria Aliferis-Gjerde, a spokesperson for Berg's office, said Friday that only Assemblyman Sam Blakeslee's 33rd Assembly District &ndash; which includes parts of San Luis Obispo and Santa Cruz counties &ndash; is facing so many closures.

Berg joined other state and local leaders in decrying the severity of the cuts.

&ldquo;It is a sad and pessimistic view of the future that says we need to give up our parks,&rdquo; Berg said in a statement issued to Lake County News Friday. &ldquo;It&rsquo;s short-sighted and wrong and people won&rsquo;t go for it.&rdquo;

Berg said Schwarzenegger's plans will damage everything from parks and schools to college and public safety. &ldquo;Republicans always say &lsquo;cut, cut, cut,&rsquo; and this is just one example of how that mindset damages our California lifestyle,&rdquo; she said. &ldquo;Closing parks is not a good solution to solving our long-term budget problems. Californians deserve better from their governor. We need creativity and vision to solve this budget.&rdquo;

State Senator Pat Wiggins said Schwarzenegger's proposal would erode the state's quality of life.

&ldquo;The governor said that he had an open mind when it came to fixing the budget, but shutting down beaches and parks, which draw millions of visitors and millions of tourists&rsquo; dollars each year, and cutting game wardens is both short-sighted and irresponsible,&rdquo; Wiggins said in a Friday statement.

She added, &ldquo;A commitment to reduced spending for schools, for kids, for our parks and for our natural resources is a commitment to mediocrity.&rdquo;

Lake County News could not reach state or local Department of Parks and Recreation officials on Friday for comment on the fiscal impact of closing the local parks.

Supervisor Ed Robey said that many officials were in Sacramento on Friday to attend meetings to learn more about the fiscal crisis.

Among them was County Administrative Officer Kelly Cox. Robey said he expected Cox to return with a clearer sense of what impacts Lake County could expect, which extend well beyond the parks issue to include possible delays in gas tax payments and other much-needed state funding.

Robey said small rural counties like Lake stand to be hurt the most by cutbacks in services and funding. He challenged the notion that closing the small local state parks would save much money.

Local groups watch, wait for news

For the local organizations who support the county's two state parks, the news was shocking.

"Parks are for people," said Clearlake Oaks resident Leona Butts, a director of the Clear Lake State Park Interpretive Association. "Where do they go for safe, outdoor experiences?"

Clear Lake State Park doesn't just offer great opportunities to enjoy the outdoors; Butts said it also has an economic impact locally, thanks in part to its 147 camp sites.

Madelene Lyon, Clear Lake State Park Interpretive Association president, said the group found out about the possible park closures at a Thursday board meeting.

Such severe measures have been threatened in the past, said Lyon, who added that she's afraid they might actually occur now. Lyon added, however, that the group doesn't know what might happen.

The interpretive association has been working hard on a plan to build a new education pavilion at the site, said Lyon. Regarding that plan, she said, "We are in sort of a limbo right at the moment."

Similarly, members of the Anderson Marsh Interpretive Association also found out about the proposed cuts Thursday, and were just as worried.

Roberta Lyons, president of the Anderson Marsh Interpretive Association, said the threat of the park's closure comes at a time when Anderson Marsh is the focus of increased community interest and support.

"A lot of people are starting to get really excited about Anderson Marsh, and now they're saying they're going to close it," said Lyons.

She added, "We can't live with closing the park."

Robert Riggs, another Anderson Marsh Interpretive Association member, said the park is undergoing a revitalization with the help of businesses, schools and local cultural contributors. The progress has been manifested in the Old Time Bluegrass Festival which has been extremely popular and successful the last two years, he said.

The group has generated seed money from the festival to begin work on park improvements, said Riggs. Those plans include a discovery center, said Anna McAtee, the park association's treasurer.

"While we understand that the state is facing a severe budget shortage which has resulted in a proposal to close many parks, not just Anderson Marsh, the Anderson Marsh State Historical Park is an extremely cost effective facility that operates with low overhead," said Riggs.

Riggs said the interpretive association's board considers the threatened closure a grave issue. At the group's Thursday meeting they resolved to work with the state parks department to find a way to keep the park open.

McAtee said Anderson Marsh already has struggled with reduced funding and resources over the last several years.

That includes a reduction down to part-time staff and no permanent ranger, which has resulted in the park only being open Tuesday through Saturday. Tours of the ranch itself also haven't taken place in some time due to staffing, McAtee added.

Tom Nixon had worked as a ranger at the park, said McAtee, as well as Clear Lake State Park, but Nixon and wife Val, also a park staffer, recently retired.

If the park closed, McAtee said, "The gates will be closed, the public won't be allowed to go into the park."

She added, though, that the group is in a "wait and see" mode. "What happens, really and truly, is anyone's guess."

What seems certain is that if the two parks closed, the events that they host each year would be lost as well, or at the very least forced to find new venues.

In the case of Clear Lake State Park, it hosts the annual Heron Festival and Wildflower Brunch, as well as regular bird and nature hikes, said Butts.

Anderson Marsh's Old Time Bluegrass Festival — now in its third year has supported a local history program for third graders in the Konocti Unified School District and a science camp for the Children's Museum of Arts and Science, which is a partner in the discovery center project, said McAtee.

She surmised that the bluegrass festival, the annual Christmas at Anderson Marsh, and trail hikes and birding could all be lost if the park closed.

Butts also pointed out that both parks offer environmental education opportunities for schools and school children, with summer Junior Ranger programs available to both visitors and residents.

Robey, who this year will mark 28 years in public service, said he's "never seen anything like this," when it comes to proposed state budget cuts.

He suggested that state government got into its current situation for a variety of reasons. For one, when times were good and the economy was strong, the state expanded programs which continued to grow when tougher times arrived.

The state also has continued to use bonds and other methods of trying to deal with their debt issues, said Robey. "They've used up all of their other methods. That's what I think is going on. They're desperate."

That, said Robey, leaves them with one solution — to cut back. But the bailout is likely to come at the expense of local governments, "where the rubber hits the road."

One avenue of cutbacks Robey pointed to isn't being taken. He noted that there is no suggestion that legislators should cut their salaries after giving themselves a raise last year.

In May the actual budget should begin to solidify, said Robey. "Right now, it's all just talk. But it's going to have major impacts on us."

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