

## State park advocates rally in Sacramento against park closures

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On Monday, the "Save Our State Parks" (SOS) Campaign hosted a rally on the West Steps of the Capitol in protest of the proposed cuts to state parks.

More than 300 participants — including Lake County residents — decried Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's position to close 48 California state parks and reduce lifeguard staffing on 16 state beaches.

"Never before have California's state parks been under such assault," said Elizabeth Goldstein, president of the California State Parks Foundation. "From plans to build a six lane toll road through San Onofre State Beach to a proposal to add transmission lines through protected desert wilderness, to this latest proposal to shut down 48 of California's magnificent state parks, the attack on state parks has been unprecedented."

Goldstein said the gathering demonstrated that state parks are essential to Californians' quality of life and government can't ignore the will of the people.

With picket signs and banners, legislators, mayors, environmentalists, teachers and park users unified to send the Legislature and the governor a message that closing even one state park is unacceptable.

These proposed cuts impact nearly every Californian. More than 77 million people visited California state parks last year and this year, 9,000 camping reservations for opening day in May have been logged, an increase of more than 20 percent over last year. Meanwhile, millions of teachers and students continue to utilize state parks for affordable educational activities.

"Throughout the state, hundreds of volunteers work to improve our state parks and raise greater awareness about all the benefits our state parks have to offer to Californians," said Randy Widera, president of the California League of Park Associations. "We will continue fighting to keep all of our state parks open as they are essential to our communities and should be preserved as a lasting legacy for future generations."

These cuts along with a reduction in lifeguard staffing, results in a little more than \$13 million in savings to the state, or one-thirteenth of 1 percent of the state budget. However, those savings are negated when factoring in the loss of tourism dollars to local economies.

"Our history is an immutable part of our state's culture. These parks generate millions of dollars of revenues for our state and local economies and their closure will do very little to assuage the debt we are facing," said Sen. Abel Maldonado (R-Santa Maria). "What we stand to lose if we close these parks and historical monuments is far greater than any monetary benefit we gain from their closure."

"Access to our state parks is among the investments we hold most dear in California. Today's budget crisis represents the greatest threat to our parks in a generation," said Assembly Budget Committee Chair John Laird (D-Santa Cruz). "The solution is not to shut down state parks, eliminate lifeguards at our state beaches, or pave new roadways through our parks. Our state parks are a legacy for the future. We should spend the next several weeks talking with the people of California about what kind of California we want to have, how we're going to save our parks and how we should fund them."

The governor's proposal calls for the closure of 18 state parks, 16 state historic parks and museums, three state beaches, nine state recreation areas and two state reserves.

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