



Date: September 3, 2013

To: Diane Colborn, Assembly Water, Parks & Wildlife Committee
Bill Craven, Senate Natural Resources & Water Committee

From: Brian R. Sala, Acting Director,
California Research Bureau

Re: Request for Research Support on California State Parks

This memorandum is in response to the August 26, 2013 letter from Assembly Member Anthony Rendon, chair of the Assembly Committee on Water, Parks & Wildlife, and Senator Fran Pavley, chair of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources & Water, requesting targeted research related to a variety of state parks issues. In this memorandum, we propose an initial scope of work for your review and comment.

We propose that the Research Bureau prepare four Short Subject research pieces on California State Parks. These are single-sheet fact sheets or “explainers.” Some of the information in these Short Subjects will likely lead to other issues or questions into which we could take a more in-depth look if you wish. I have listed the Short Subjects in a proposed order, starting with the quantitative research then moving into the more qualitative policy work.

Our proposed time frame is to produce the first two Short Subjects in September/October 2013. The second two pieces will require more time to obtain the information from other states. I anticipate having these two pieces completed before the end of the year. Please let me know if this meets your needs for initial research. Ms. Jennifer Ruffolo, Senior Policy Analyst, would be the lead researcher on this project.

1. **Budget Overview:** This short subject will compare California’s state park system with other states in terms of total spending on operations, level of general fund support, and rate of spending on a per acre and per capita basis. We will try to find deferred maintenance backlog estimates for other states, though they are not part of the annual data compiled by the National Association of State Parks Directors, which is our primary source of state-to-state comparisons. We will need to request data from the California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) on their estimated deferred maintenance backlog. We will also examine DPR’s operating budget over the last 20 years to identify trends in three key sources of support for DPR: General Fund, Special Funds (including bond funds), and State Park and Recreation Fund (SPRF). We will note the changes in approved positions (PYs) and the increase in the size of the state park system (number of units and acres) over the same time frame.

2. Revenue Overview. This short subject will compare California with 3-5 other top revenue generating park systems, examining total revenue generated in major categories, such as fees, concessions, and special events. We will look at other states' statutory requirements for revenue sharing throughout the system. We will identify which states have explicit policies, mandates, or incentives to generate revenue, and which have made big improvements in revenue. We will identify which states appear to be good models for generating revenue consistent with policy goals and values of their state park system. We will also look at DPR's revenue over time from concessions, SPRF, and other sources such as the State Park Contingent Fund (which includes donations).
3. Organizational Structure. This piece will examine the organizational structure of 3-5 other large state park systems, as well as the National Park System and East Bay Regional Park District. We will look at the number of divisions and management structures, degree of centralization, and the role of law enforcement in park management and the number of safety employees. We will examine DPR's structure, the types of employees, and distribution of employees between the field and headquarters. We would like to compare law enforcement costs with other state entities (e.g., California Highway Patrol) in the areas of training, equipment, and communications systems, if data is available.
4. Partnerships and Operating Agreements. This Short Subject will examine and compare California's policy and statutory authority governing partnerships and operating agreements with the five state park systems with the highest revenue, or those identified in the Revenue Overview Short Subject as the best models for revenue generation. We will examine the best practices and innovative approaches to revenue generation, and examine those states that have explicitly undertaken to reinvent or reorganize their park systems to increase partnerships. We will compare the past performance of several California state parks now subject to operating agreements with their existing visitation, revenue generation, special events, maintenance, resource management, and capital improvements.

We look forward to working closely with you on this project. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns about this proposed scope of work. I'd be happy to discuss options further. I can be reached by email at brian.sala@library.ca.gov or by phone at (916) 651-8793.