



STATE PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION

Berkeley, CA
September 21, 2023

STAFF REPORT: California State Parks Foundation Partner Updates

STAFF: Randy Widera, Director of Programs

SUBJECT: Partnering for the success of California State Parks for all

OBJECTIVE

Present California State Parks Foundation's 2024-2027 Strategic plan, our current programs and impacts, and how we partner with California State Parks to achieve our aligned missions.

INTRODUCTION

As Californians, it is our responsibility to experience, steward, and defend our parks so that they can continue to provide these benefits to us and future generations.

Experiencing parks firsthand is crucial for developing a personal connection with the natural environment. When we visit a park, visitors can engage through the sights, sounds, smells, and textures of nature. This sensory experience can help us develop a deeper appreciation for the natural world and its beauty. We can also learn about the history, geology, flora, and fauna of the park, which can enhance our appreciation of its significance.

Spending time in a park can create an emotional connection with the natural world. We may experience feelings of awe, wonder, and gratitude, which can deepen our appreciation of the park and its importance. These experiences can inspire us to take action to protect and preserve the natural world. By experiencing the beauty and diversity of nature firsthand, we may be motivated to make lifestyle changes or advocate for environmental conservation.

Experiencing parks is crucial for people to appreciate their beauty, significance, and value, allowing us to connect with nature in a personal way and develop a sense of stewardship for the environment.

Stewardship involves individual actions and community involvement, such as volunteering, following park rules, advocacy, and financial support. By taking an active role in caring for these valuable resources, Californians can help maintain the beauty and ecological integrity of these areas, while also enjoying the many benefits they provide.

It is important to defend parks by advocating for funding, staff, and protections because parks require adequate resources and staffing to maintain and protect their natural and cultural resources, provide high-quality visitor experiences, and address emerging threats such as climate change, invasive species, and overuse. Without such advocacy, parks may be subject to degradation, closures, or reduced services, which can negatively impact the environment, local economies, and the health and well-being of individuals and communities.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

A LEGACY OF PARK PROTECTION

“Parks need a strong constituency to flourish, one that mirrors the true size and diversity of the population that uses them. As the world becomes more crowded, that constituency will become more important.”

William Penn Mott, Jr., Founder of California State Parks Foundation

California’s state parks comprise the largest and most diverse natural and cultural heritage holdings of any state in the nation. They include beaches, underwater refuges, Indigenous peoples’ cultural preserves, museums, lighthouses, ghost towns, recreation areas, and wilderness areas. State parks’ peaks, deserts, redwoods, and coastlines are some of the most immediately recognizable natural features in the world. For over 50 years, California State Parks Foundation has been the leading statewide voice in advocating for a sustainably funded state park system, access to parks for all, and enduring park protection.

The organization was founded in 1969 by William Penn Mott, Jr., to be a partner to the California State Parks in protecting and preserving the California state park system. As director of California State Parks, William Penn Mott, Jr. rallied a core group of friends and park supporters to form California State Parks Foundation. With Director Mott, this group believed that parks needed an independent nonprofit partner to help engage a broader audience of park supporters, inspire philanthropy, and better serve more diverse communities. They committed to improving the quality of life for all Californians by expanding access to the natural beauty, rich culture and history, and educational and health opportunities offered by California’s state parks.

Early in its history, California State Parks Foundation helped grow the system by acquiring land for the state, thereby preserving these treasures for generations to

come. As California's state parks were in a period of rapid growth, we were a leader and partner in safeguarding our state's natural and historical resources.

As the new millennium approached, the California state park system began to show its age with crumbling infrastructure and mounting deferred maintenance. It was also increasingly apparent that many Californians do not have access to their state parks and all the health and wellness benefits they provide. State parks were suffering at the mercy of the state's boom-and-bust budget cycle and were a target for development threats such as road construction, powerline corridors, trains, racetracks, golf courses, and more. California State Parks Foundation needed to increase its advocacy and presence in Sacramento to defend the state park system in the Capitol.

Over the course of 50+ years, the organization has built a dedicated movement of over 70,000 members and raised more than \$300 million to benefit state parks. Today, California has the largest and most biologically diverse state park system in the nation, with 280 park units that are vitally important to the well-being of our state's environment, economy, and quality of life. California State Parks Foundation continues to fight for our state parks wherever and whenever they need us.

DESCRIPTION (REPORT / UPDATE)

How California State Parks Foundation Drives Impact

Our Theory of Change

Every nonprofit needs a roadmap for change. A theory of change outlines how to create that change. Developing a theory of change framework is an essential part of a thriving community transformation effort.

Every step of the way, we carry our legacy and foundational values. Our Theory of Change is how we drive impact and change to achieve our mission.

- Learn: To determine the best solutions and practices, we work to develop a deep understanding of significant issues facing parks and to monitor current trends in the environmental, social justice, and parks spaces.
- Educate: The future of parks depends on a diverse and informed constituency of individuals and partners that is engaged and has a voice in the halls of power.
- Activate: California State Parks Foundation activates a base of park supporters to be champions for their parks.
- Influence: We create change by connecting in-the-field learnings and collective wisdom from all constituencies to inform policy solutions in the halls of power, where decisions are made at the highest level.

Our Programs

Climate Resilience: We are using the best available science and research to learn deeply about climate threats and solutions, educate Californians and the Legislature, activate people to take action, and ultimately influence policy and legislation that prioritizes communities most impacted by climate change.

Access and Experiences: While California state parks are public spaces, many people cannot access or experience them. Barriers to park access include lack of transportation, cost of visiting, lack of awareness of parks or the activities they offer, and more. Though we are working to reduce these barriers, this is just the beginning of the effort to ensure that every Californian feels welcome in and can enjoy state parks.

Park Excellence: Sufficient staffing, funding, and effective park policies are critical to ensuring a thriving state park system. We ensure park excellence by fighting for a fully funded California state park system and by creating thriving partnership programs so that state parks can benefit from all the work of nonprofit partners.

Park Stewardship: By expanding park staff's capacity, volunteers help overcome resource constraints and carry out essential tasks such as trail maintenance, habitat restoration, planting, and more. Their involvement fosters community engagement and connection, spreading awareness and inspiring others to appreciate and protect these natural and cultural treasures.

California State Parks Foundation 2024 to 2027 Strategic Plan

We took most of the last year to think deeply about what parks and Californians need from California State Parks Foundation right now. For over 50 years, that has been our commitment — to be there for what parks need.

Over the course of over 50 years, the organization has adapted to the changes in California, the state park system, the people who live here, and visitors from near and far. To think deeply about what parks needed, we followed an intentional process of listening, reflecting and collaborating, and planning for the future.

Our Process

We listened to our community to understand our strengths and challenges through over 20 interviews and additional survey responses from our staff, our board, California State Parks staff, consultants, and park partners throughout California. The feedback was invaluable with many partners grappling with similar challenges, like climate change and park equity, and expressed appreciation for California State Parks Foundation's strengths, contributions, and the opportunity to provide feedback.

Through reflection and collaboration, we identified focus areas for the next three years. Our staff and board came together to discuss the feedback we receive from our community, our unique role, and our priority to move forward. Through this process, we identified five focus areas — three programmatic and two operational — that, taken together, will deepen the impact and capacity of the organization to protect and preserve the California state park system.

These are:

- **Defending parks:** Working with our network of partners to identify looming issues for individual parks and the park system, then crafting effective strategies to defend against threats.
- **Developing solutions:** Pursuing innovative programs and projects that exemplify solutions to issues facing state parks, and then we scale them statewide, through funding, awareness, and advocacy.
- **Building a movement:** Building a diverse, inclusive movement of park champions, enabling Californians to engage with, experience and advocate for their state parks.
- **Strengthening operational excellence:** Improving business planning, processes, staff recruitment, engagement and culture, and the integration of justice, equity, inclusion, and diversity into the fabric of the organization.
- **Enhanced governance:** The Board of Trustees actively supports and promotes our organizational vision, values and programs, has well-defined roles and responsibilities, and is engaged, diverse, and collaborative.

Our role in making the parks more just, equitable, inclusive, and diverse:

As an organization that seeks to support California’s state park system, we have several essential roles and responsibilities to create a parks system that is equitable and inclusive.

As an advocacy organization, we have a responsibility to influence the California Legislature to push for public funding and policies that provide the building blocks for a park system that reflects the needs and values of Californians, particularly those who are the most marginalized.

As a park support organization, we have a role to play in curating information and communicating about state parks history, and perhaps especially the painful stories in our history, to inspire donors, members, volunteers, and parks users to better understand how parks are sites in which powerful JEID work can happen, be it through programming, parks management, or parks planning.

We have a role to play as a connector, network builder, and funder. As a powerful and visible organization, we have a responsibility to connect with, fund,

and amplify the needs of California Native American Tribal Nations and Indigenous peoples, communities of color, disabled communities, and LGBTQ+ communities to ensure their needs are centered in California state parks.

Finally, we recognize that justice, equity, inclusion, and diversity work is not just about our external work, but also about our internal work. We have an obligation to live the values we are advocating for in our own workplace, meaning that all staff and board members should feel a sense of belonging and be able to thrive in their positions here at California State Parks Foundation.

Recent success

Pathways to Parks

Introduction

State parks belong to all Californians, and it's up to us to break down barriers and build stronger accessibility to parks. The reality is that too many Californians, especially those from disadvantaged communities, are not afforded the opportunity to experience the wonders in their own backyard. We believe that equitable access to the benefits state parks provide is a right for all Californians – especially youth, who should be able to access state parks as incredible playgrounds and places to explore, learn, grow, and improve their overall wellness.

Additionally, the future of our unparalleled state parks system is at risk. We know that our state parks are only as strong as the people who care for them and protect them from real and potential threats. Current state park visitors are incredible champions today, but we must work to ensure that we foster tomorrow's champions by increasing state park access for youth and their families.

In response to these issues, California State Parks Foundation launched Pathways to Parks, a campaign that will introduce and advocate for solutions that increase equitable access to the outdoors.

The Pathways to Parks initiative began by creating opportunities to learn from and listen to Californians, particularly youth, about the barriers they encounter when accessing the outdoors. In the process, we also heard how transformative that access could be. California's First Partner, Jennifer Siebel Newsom, herself a longtime advocate for the health and wellness benefits of nature, joined us as a champion for solutions that would get more youth into state parks.

Pathways to Parks Timeline

SPRING 2018 California State Parks Foundation granted \$130,000, bringing 5,736 youth (57% from low-income households) into state parks, highlighting service gaps in the Central Coast and Central Valley.

FALL 2018 We partnered with UCLA's Institute of the Environment and Sustainability to study state park access, reviewing outdoor benefits for youth, analyzing visitor demographics, and surveying 22 million Californians, including 5 million under 18.

FALL 2018 We funded 27 programs with \$259,500, providing California state park experiences to 2,700+ youth, with over 50% Latinx, 15% Black, 50% aged 15-18, and 30% aged 10-14.

FALL 2019 At our first-of-its-kind Policy Forum, the First Partner announced her partnership on the Pathways to Parks initiative. We presented research results on youth park access, including an interactive map of demographics in our 280 state parks' visitorsheds.

FEBRUARY 2020 We convened a meeting in Los Angeles with the First Partner, California State Parks Foundation, State Parks Department, and stakeholders to discuss increasing outdoor access for underserved youth as a public health solution.

JANUARY-JUNE 2020 With the pandemic impacting California's budget, we mobilized advocates to protect state park funding, successfully restoring \$20 million in youth outdoor equity grants in the final 2020-21 budget.

AUGUST 2020 Armando Quintero was appointed Director of the California Department of Parks and Recreation on August 19th, 2020.

NOVEMBER 2020 Our second annual Policy Forum brought together park stakeholders, policy experts, legislative staff, and leaders to address youth park access, public health, and climate change. Speakers included the First Partner, California State Parks Director Armando Quintero, and more.

JANUARY-JUNE 2021 In the May 2021-22 state budget revision, substantial investments were made in state parks, including youth access. This comprised \$9 million for youth programs, library partnerships, CalWORKs access, and funds for 6.1 million public school students to visit state parks.

JULY 2021 Governor Newsom signed AB 148 into law, establishing the California State Park Adventure Pass, waiving day-use fees for fourth graders and their families at 19 state parks for a full year. SB 129, signed earlier, allocated \$5.6 million for this program and \$3 million for the State Library Park Pass, enabling library patrons to access state parks for free.

SEPTEMBER 2021 California State Parks launched the State Park Adventure Pass. To date, over 42,000 students have received a pass.

MARCH 2022 California State Parks and the California Department of Social Services made it easier for CalWORKs families to receive a free, annual Golden

Bear Pass. To date, more than 61,000 Golden Bear passes have been distributed to Californians – compared to an annual average of 2,500 passes before this partnership.

APRIL 2022 California State Parks and the California State Library launched the California State Library Parks Pass during National Library Week. Each library branch received at least three California State Library Parks Pass hangtags for patrons to borrow.

FEBRUARY 2023 The library pass program has been so well-received that Governor Newsom allocated an additional \$13.5 million, resulting in 28,000 more passes. To date, a total of 33,000 passes have been placed in more than 1,100 public library branches throughout the state. Libraries report that this is one of the most checked out items.

AUGUST 2023 California State Parks and the California Department of Social Services announced the expansion of the Golden Bear Pass to participants of California's Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program.

Outcomes as of Sep 2023

- Adventure Pass total: State Parks launched the first-ever “Adventure Pass” which allows every 4th grader in California and their family to visit 19 state parks for free all year. To date, over 42,000 students have received a pass.
- Golden Bear Pass total: To date more than 61,000 Golden Bear passes have been distributed to Californians – compared to an annual average of 2,500 passes before this partnership.
- Check out Parks Pass: Through this program, a total of 33,000 passes have been placed in more than 1,100 public library branches throughout the state. Libraries report that this is one of the most checked out items in the library.

California State Parks Foundation continues to partner with California State Parks and State Libraries to promote and evaluate the State Library Park Pass program.

MARKETING & OUTREACH: California State Parks Foundation has funded the printing of collateral to help promote the program. We provided 240,000 bookmarks (200 per branch) to let library visitors know that they can now use their library card to check out a free vehicle day-use pass for 200+ California state parks We also funded the printing of 50,000 half-page sheets to encourage participants to complete a survey about the program.

GEAR & BACKPACKS: CSPF has also been providing items that can add additional value to the passes being checked out. Our friends at REI Co-op generously donated 500 of their Flash 22 Packs to launch a pilot program where

Californians can check out gear backpacks along with their park pass, allowing them to connect more deeply with their parks. These backpacks include binoculars, hand lenses, compasses, wildlife guides, and a postcard about the organization.

SURVEY & EVALUATION: Program participants are encouraged to complete a survey about their experience. Those who submit the survey are eligible to win a California Explorer Vehicle Day-Use Annual Pass. These surveys are providing invaluable data on how participants are using the passes and reducing barriers to state parks. Key insights from the Library Pass surveys (3,638 responses through August 1, 2023):

For many Californians, income is the most significant barrier to visiting state parks. 63% of respondents to a survey completed by State Library Parks Pass patrons indicated cost of day use fees as being the main reason for not having visited state parks previously.

- 45.2% of respondents during the reporting period indicated an income level of \$60,000. With 24.6% reported an income level of \$30,000 or less.
- 63.5% of respondents during the reporting period indicated that they were BIPOC2.
- 90.1% of respondents plan to visit State Parks again 7+ times a year thanks to the Parks Pass.
- 48.2% of respondents plan to visit 7+ times per year.
- 30.8% of respondents plan to visit 3-6 time per year.
- 81% of respondents are more likely to use other library resources and services after using the California State Library Parks Pass.

“It was very easy to use, and the 2 weeks is plenty of time to enjoy it. The savings are amazing as well. We go to different state parks all the time and it adds up, especially if you are a family of five with one income. Thank you for this amazing program!”

“Thank you so much for offering this free pass for us to use. We get so busy working and living our lives that we forget that nature, the fresh air, the beaches, give us a sense of peace and relaxation. It's wonderful for our mental health. Very good use of Taxpayers money. :). I hope this pilot project becomes a regular annual thing that we CA residents can enjoy and take advantage of.”

Candlestick Point State Recreation Area.

Summary

The Yosemite Slough Restoration Project is a historic \$30+ million wetlands restoration and park development project taking place in Candlestick Point State Recreation Area in southeastern San Francisco, one of the most park-poor and underserved areas of the city. The project provides a rare opportunity for San

Francisco to realize the full environmental, recreational and economic potential of its historically industrialized southeastern waterfront and open Candlestick's northern Yosemite Slough waterfront area to the public for the first time in the park's history. This landmark project will complete a pivotal link in the major revitalization effort underway for San Francisco's waterfront, expand public waterfront access, protect vital wildlife and habitat, enrich environmental education for Bay Area youth and park visitors, and improve the quality of life for the Bayview Hunters Point community.

Phase 1 of the restoration, a \$12.2 million site clean-up and creation of 7 acres of tidal wetlands, was completed in 2012, along with a portion of the Bay Trail. Phase 2 is being broken down into sub-phases that address access and visitor usage. Phase 2A, completed in September 2021, involved construction of the core infrastructure needed to maintain and operate this section of the park and native planting.

Accomplishments

Phase 1 of the Yosemite Slough wetlands restoration, along the north shoreline of Yosemite Slough, was completed in 2012. Key project elements included:

- Removal of existing structures on the north side of the Yosemite Slough canal along with debris and contaminated soils.
- Reduction in the amount of polluted runoff as a result of the creation of 7 acres of restored seasonal wetlands catching and filtering water.
- Re-vegetation with native plants to increase local biodiversity.
- Creation of a nesting island for shorebirds, isolated by a tidal channel to protect nesters from feral animals and human disturbance.
- Completion of a segment of the Bay Trail, along the north shoreline of Yosemite Slough (October 2012).

Phase 2A of the Yosemite Slough Restoration, the addition of capital improvements to the project site, was put out for public bid by the California Department of Parks & Recreation (DPR) in March 2019 and completed in August 2021. The key project elements included:

- Construction of the core infrastructure needed to maintain and operate the Yosemite Slough section of the park including all of the utility connections.
- Potable water, fire protection, sanitary sewer, irrigation, telecommunications, electricity, and outdoor lighting.
- Connection of the park entrance to the intersection of Griffith and Thomas Street, vehicular access control and security.
- A parking lot with storm water drainage and treatment system.
- ADA pedestrian and cyclist connection to the San Francisco Bay Trail, safe access for pedestrians from the intersection of Griffith and Thomas to the park entrance and, completion of the SF Bay Trail and signage.
- Completion of the tidal marsh restoration and planting.

California State Parks Foundation continues to work with California State Park on ongoing stewardship and community engagement work for Candlestick Point State Recreation Area.

ATTACHMENTS

- California State Parks Foundation, 2024 – 2027 Strategic Plan

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Justice, Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity](#)
- [How to build climate resilient parks: What we learned from our 2022 Building Climate Resilient Parks grantees](#)
- [Partnerships: An Essential Part of a Thriving State Park System](#)