

California State Parks' Response to Climate Change

Quote from Director Ruth Coleman:

Over the past many months, citizens across the country have become increasingly concerned about global warming. With each passing day, we find more evidence that tells us climate change will have serious impacts on our planet, making it the defining challenge we face in the 21st Century. We at State Parks are one of the pre-eminent resources managers in the world. As such, we must do our part and lead the way for others. With the help of many department staff, I have been seeking ways for State Parks to tackle this challenge and make a positive difference, despite the very real limits on our time and our financial resources. August 3, 2007

Staff research has been performed to see what other parks on state and national levels are doing for carbon offset programs, with emphasis placed on the “Climate Friendly Parks” program of the National Park Service in conjunction with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

State Parks Climate Change Initiative, or “Cool Parks”

Three major categories under consideration:

Getting Our House in Order

- Set a good example; measure parks' carbon footprint; take action to reduce.
- Join the California Climate Action Registry; estimate annual emissions from service vehicles and facility energy use.
- Track progress in reduction efforts such as use of solar power systems, better insulation, and purchase of lower emission vehicles.
- Meet energy efficiency standards in new building construction as established by Governor's Executive Order.
- Emissions reductions via land stewardship and acquisition strategies; acquire formerly logged and planned logged lands adjoining parklands and quantify additional carbon to be removed from the atmosphere as result of State Parks management – use such “credits” to offset own emissions or sell to others who wish to do the same. Such funds can be secured to re-invest in more carbon storage (sequestration).
- Set up organizational structure to track and monitor – staff oversight group **with OHMVR Division staff representation** appointed for implementation.

Adaptation

- Modification of land stewardship priorities to help species adapt to the effects of climate change. Purchasing and protecting of habitat corridors that move up in elevation so species have somewhere to migrate as the temperatures increase.
- Investigate how an increase in sea level could affect properties, in particular, coastal properties. Sea level rise may require relocating coastal infrastructure.

- Research institutions to consider parks as laboratories for climate-change research and monitoring to better understand land and species impacts of climate change and how to best adapt to them.
- Partner with UC Berkeley's California Center for Environmental Law and Policy and the Resources Legacy Fund to sponsor a fall workshop on the above aspect of climate change. Public land managers, non-profits and significant donors to be brought together with scientists, academics and other experts to develop new acquisition priorities and restoration practices.

Education and Interpretation

- Engage the public in a meaningful way to help them understand the issue of climate change and to inspire them to constructive action. Teach visitors about the impacts of climate change on parks and inspire them to adapt to climate change by making positive lifestyle changes. Use parks as models of climate change best practices showcasing both what is at risk and what can be done about it.
- Consider proposal for visitors to purchase a "Cool Parks" sticker for a few dollars. The funds could be collected at each park and used for projects like the installation of solar panels or tiles. Interpretive signs that explain the climate change benefits of the panel and provide recognition that this project would be funded by donations to "Cool Parks". It is hoped that the public will engage financially in efforts to make the parks as carbon neutral as possible, with ultimate possibility of taking parks off of the power grid.

Some of the above tasks will require additional resources to be successful. Philanthropic funding is being sought for those. Other tasks will require use of existing resources — particularly bond funds — in ways that take climate change into account. Not the intent to create a burden of new programs, but rather overlay existing operations with a climate change "filter".

Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division Implementation

The OHMVR Division will take actions consistent with the above general guidance initiatives as they are finalized and may apply. For example, the Emission Retrofit Group has just completed a survey of the Department's truck and heavy vehicle fleet that outlines required work and equipment changes needed to comply with the California Air Resources Board (ARB) new carbon emission standards. The OHMVR Division Maintenance Chief is obtaining blanket authorization from the Department of General Services to retrofit all 15 such vehicles located at the SVRAs by the end of calendar year 2007, four years ahead of the 2011 deadline set by ARB.