



Park access a “duty of dignity”

“Yosemite should be held, guarded and managed for the free use of the whole body of the people forever, and ... the care of it, and the hospitality of admitting strangers from all parts of the world ... should be a duty of dignity.”—From the *Preliminary Report on the Yosemite Grant and Mariposa Grove* (1865)

Today, almost 150 years after Yosemite became the first state park, outdoor recreation agencies struggle to provide park use ‘by the whole body of the people.’ Because ‘care of’ parks isn’t free, ‘strangers’ often are admitted only after paying an entrance fee.

This *California Park Planner* focuses on improving public access to parks. How do user fees affect who visits parks? What are other ways to improve access to parks? When too many visitors affect park resources, how should managers respond?

How these issues are addressed will determine how we execute the duty we accepted long ago to ‘guard and manage’ our parks.



Inside

| | |
|---------------------------------|--------|
| Carrying capacity | page 4 |
| Trails and park access | page 6 |
| New FindRecreation website | page 7 |
| NPS effort to attract Americans | page 7 |
| New survey of state park users | page 8 |

Strategies, tips and research findings

Resource guide helps improve access for culturally diverse park visitors

by Deborah Chavez, Acting Program Manager, Urban Ecosystems & Social Dynamics, Pacific Southwest Research Station, USDA Forest Service, Riverside CA

While California’s national forests and other parks are experiencing an increase in new visitors, a continued lack of ethnic diversity of visitors persists. Additionally, the state is experiencing an immense growth in cultural diversity.

Outdoor recreation providers across the state can benefit by awareness of such trends to maximize park access and use by all citizens. A 2009 Forest Service publication, *Serving Culturally Diverse Visitors to Forests in California: A Resource Guide*, offers outdoor recreation providers strategies and options for communication, services and facilities, developing

Resource guide, page 3.

Analysis and field experience combined in scenarios of potential state parks visitation changes

How would a significant change in park entry fees affect visitation at your park? California State Parks (CSP) staff must consider this question as they anticipate the outcome of Proposition 21, the State Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund Act, the November ballot proposition that would add an \$18 surcharge to vehicle registrations and give Californians free day-use access to state parks.

Effects on attendance cannot be known in advance, but prior experience, information from surveys of visitors or community residents, and the judgment of park professionals can all aid in building useful scenarios for park planning.

Visitation, page 2.

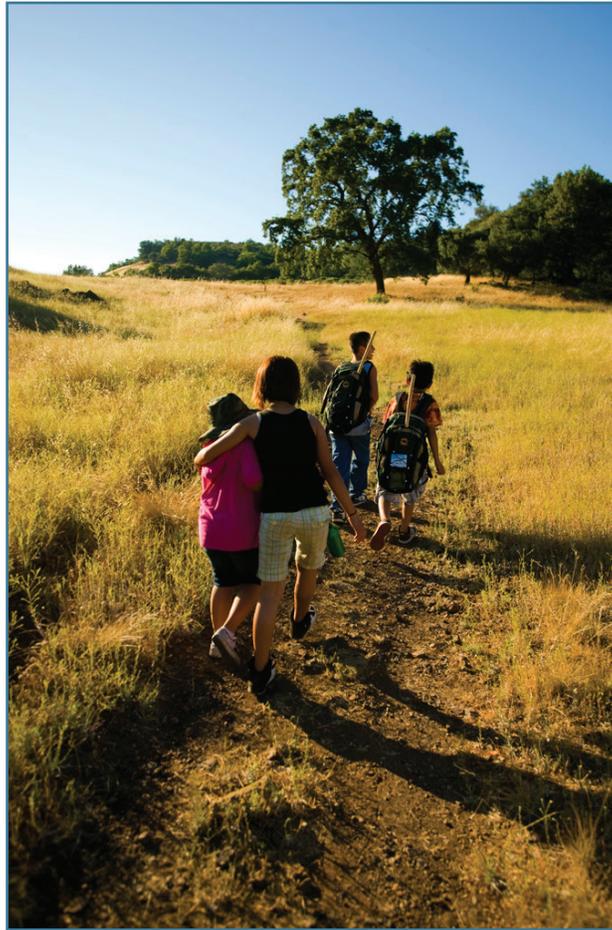
Visitation, from page 1.

Prior experience

Outcomes of prior adjustments in fees can provide insights about the effects of newly proposed changes. For example, total annual day-use attendance at state parks increased by 10 percent in 2001 when user fees were halved and day-use fee collection stopped at many state parks. Two years later, when fees returned to near their 2000 level, total annual day-use fell five percent. Attendance estimates, often based on entry station tallies, parking lot surveys, or other measures, provide insights into park use that repay the effort needed to compile and report visitation.

Visitor surveys

Surveys of park visitors or local residents can also inform scenarios about how fee changes may affect park use. The 2009 *Survey of Public Opinions and Attitudes About Outdoor Recreation in California (SPOA)* revealed that Bay Area and Los Angeles residents favor recreation areas within 20 minutes of their homes, while many residents of the Central Valley, Central Coast, and Inland Empire drive up to an hour to a favorite park. By evaluating census data for areas likely to contribute to park visitation, planners can learn



Visitors stroll along a trail on a sunny day at Sugarloaf Ridge State Park.

about potential visitors who may be affected by a fee change and anticipate their recreation interests. *SPOA* also reports on visitors' willingness to pay for various recreation activities. Among picnickers, for example, about one in four are unwilling to pay a day-use fee, as are about 40 percent of Californians who like hiking. Cost influences visitors' park use less strongly than other factors, such as a limited leisure time, other interests, a lack of companions, or fears about crime, many surveys

confirm. As a result, park use may respond to fee changes less dramatically than some expect. Survey information about factors affecting park use can be combined with information about potential visitors to improve estimates of how a change in fees may affect park attendance.

Field experience

First-hand knowledge of parks' features and users is also important in anticipating how a fee change may affect use. At some state beaches, for example, eliminating day-use fees may change visitation less significantly than altering parking lot operations. Beachgoers who previously parked on local streets or nearby lots and walked to the beach may now choose to use the park's parking lot. At parks that already fill to capacity during peak periods, eliminating fees may mean extra effort spent at the entry kiosk directing visitors to other nearby units without significantly changing the park's annual attendance. In these cases, operating costs could increase more dramatically than visitation. ●

Resource guide, from page 1.

partnerships, and ideas for community engagement and outreach. “Tips Worth Trying” sidebars throughout the guide offer summarized information and links to related information sources.

The guide is intended to be used as a reference for locating information on specific topics, rather than to be read from cover to cover. For example, while designing new interpretive signs, readers can flip to the “Communicating with Diverse Groups” section to learn about visitor preferences and where to find other information.

Here are a few highlights offered in the guide.

Communication

- Provide translated materials in Spanish whenever possible (especially in forests with Latino



A young visitor at Mt. Tamalpais State Park hones his coordination and jumping skills with a hula hoop.



A boy helps pitch a tent at Mt. Tamalpais State Park.

visitor populations). Multilanguage literature may be needed.

- Use international symbols that are easily understood across cultures (such as for restrooms, horse trails, and others).

Facilities and Services

- Research indicates many ethnically diverse groups prefer to recreate in outdoor areas that include developed sites having picnic tables, grills, trash cans, and flush toilets.
- Hire multilingual rangers and individuals with strong cultural competency skills. Provide ongoing training to all staff.

Partnerships

- Maintain long-term, tried and true relationships with various partner organizations but also consider the untapped groups that can fill ethnic and cultural gaps.
- The more ethnically diverse organizations and agencies you partner with, the broader the support for conservation, education, outdoor/natural resource recruitment options

for careers, stewardship and legislation, and public land management overall.

Civic Engagement/Outreach

- Talk with the leadership in churches and other faith-based institutions about how best to connect with locals in your area.
- Consider developing youth/peer/young adult leadership model(s). Explore best practices and successful measures of existing programs that work with ethnically diverse youth across the state and country.

For more information

Download the resource guide from: <http://www.treesearch.fs.fed.us/pubs/33055>. Note: Although a few referenced resources are available only to Forest Service staff, most resources are relevant and available to all providers. ●

Adaptive management matches visitation to park carrying capacity

by Dan Ray, dray@parks.ca.gov

When park visitation increases, or when budgets for park staff and maintenance shrink, outdoor recreation agencies have reason to worry whether visitors will overwhelm their parks' carrying capacity. Today, with many Californians seeking close-to-home, low-cost recreation opportunities, and with park budgets being trimmed throughout the state, park managers may find themselves grappling with both of these influences.

For some managers, the responsibility to consider an area's carrying capacity is mandated by law, such as the requirement of Public Resources

Code 5019.5 that a land carrying capacity survey be part of each state park general plan. For others, carrying capacity concerns may be more straightforward and involve topics such as whether an area's staffing is adequate to provide the expected level of service, or the impact of increased visitation or decreased park maintenance on park features such as habitats or historic sites, or the ability for visitors to enjoy relaxing outdoors.

One approach to managing carrying capacity is "adaptive management." California State Parks' *Planning Handbook* describes how this approach is incorporated in state park general plans.

Process steps include actions such as surveys of park resources, agreements on desired resource and recreation conditions, proposals of uses and facilities consistent with the desired conditions, and monitoring of resources, visitor use, and facilities after the park is improved.

When monitoring indicates the need for changes related to carrying capacity, park superintendents have a variety of management choices, such as adding staff or park facilities, increasing the education of visitors about resource protection, or discouraging visitor use in areas showing excessive wear and tear.

All these choices require one or more of these elements: money, staff, or facilities.

Here are two examples of how California State Parks staffs manage carrying capacity.

Hungry Valley State Vehicular Recreation Area (SVRA)

Maureen Brack, Public Safety Superintendent, states that this park (located in Gorman, between Los Angeles and Bakersfield off Interstate 5) has plenty of space for its visitors, who come to drive motorcycles, ATVs, and other off highway vehicles on the SVRA's 130 miles of trails. The capacity management challenge is monitoring the condition of the grasslands and sage scrub and oak woodland habitats of the park's hills and valleys,



Hungry Valley SVRA, California's second largest off-road vehicular recreation area, has hills and valleys, grassland, coastal sage scrub and oak woodland, all of which must be monitored for resource impacts.

assessing wear and tear on the trail system and assessing the effect of visitors on soils and other resources.

According to Kim Matthews, Environmental Scientist, the park's environmental scientists monitor vegetation, wildlife and soil erosion, gathering information about overall habitat condition. When these surveys suggest conditions may be falling below desired conditions, the SVRA's staff can select from a range of management solutions, such as encouraging visitors to stay on the designated trails, improving trail design to reduce soil erosion, increasing trail maintenance activities, or educating visitors about the importance of responsible riding practices so that natural resources are protected and the potential for damage to habitats is reduced.

For example, when open group camping resulted in significant vegetation loss in a sensitive area of the park, staff proposed, designed and built a new group camping facility in an environmentally stable and manageable area.

Folsom Lake State Recreation Area (SRA)

The capacity of this popular Sacramento-area park is partly limited by the size of its parking lots, which fill up early on peak summer weekends, when conditions are ideal for boating and other water-related recreation activities.



The popularity of water-related activities can sometimes cause capacity management issues. (Marina at Folsom Lake State Recreation Area)

Jim Micheaels, Senior Park and Recreation Specialist, indicates that techniques to manage capacity include advising potential visitors that parking lots are full before they reach the kiosk by placing electronic signs outside park sub-unit entrances.

Other actions that park staff take when parking lots fill to capacity and they have to close sub-units to additional entry, include placing traffic cones or other barriers to prevent entry, establishing turnarounds, and having extra staff on site to help manage the situation.

Park staff also sometimes send out press releases to media outlets prior to peak holiday weekends reminding the public to arrive early to increase chance for entry, that

some park unit sites may fill to capacity and close, and to expect lines for boat launching. Press releases go out a couple of days prior to the holiday weekends. Sometimes press releases generate interest from TV stations to do a story; often the story focus is on lake levels.

On-the-ground staff experience, knowledge, and best practices, combined with processes such as those in adaptive management, are used in state parks today to manage carrying capacity.

For more information

See California State Parks' *Planning Handbook* at http://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/795/files/PLANNING_HANDBOOK_4-29-10.pdf ●

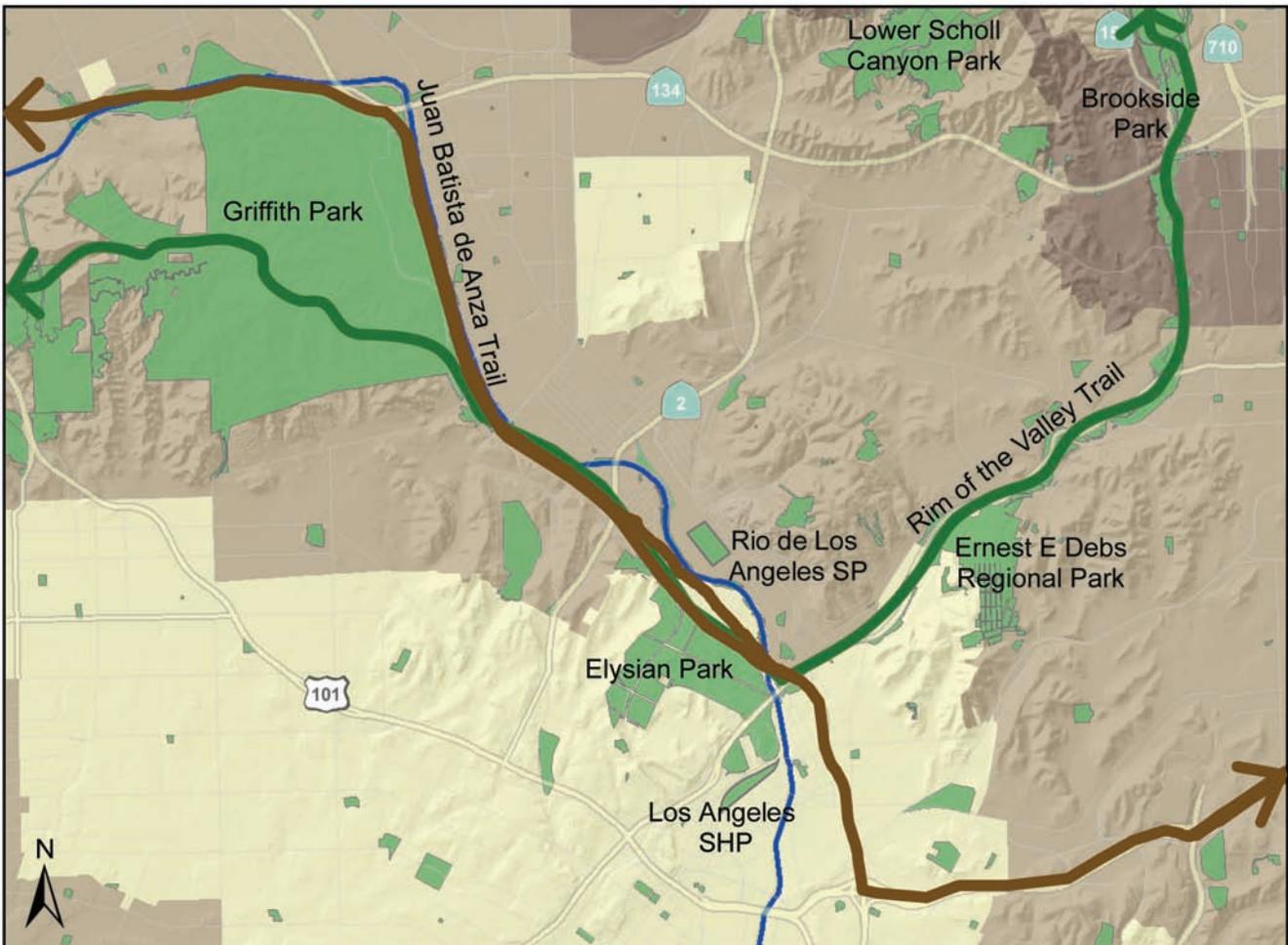
State’s recreational trails can boost park access for all Californians

The trails of the State Recreational Trails System not only offer residents the chance to hike or ride along a trail, but also provide access to nearby recreation areas. For example, the Rim of the Valley Trail and the Juan Bautista de Anza Trail, both shown on the map below, connect diverse Los Angeles-area neighborhoods with a wide variety of terrain types and recreation areas. (Portions of trails are still under development.)

Parks along these routes include Rio de Los Angeles State Park, California State Parks’ new urban recreation area, where restoration of the park’s natural river wetlands allows visitors the opportunity to enjoy hiking trails while being surrounded by native plants and viewing returning wildlife. Los Angeles State Historic

Park’s 32 acres of open space are directly adjacent to Chinatown. Visitors can wander pathways and enjoy a view of downtown and discover the area’s natural and cultural heritage. Other parks along the routes: Griffith Park, an urban wildland area that includes a 53-mile network of trails; Elysian Park, Los Angeles’ oldest park, with a number of historic buildings; Ernest E. Debs Regional Park, a mostly natural, approximately 300-acre park; and 61-acre Brookside Park, near the Rose Bowl Stadium.

Find out more about California’s Recreational Trails System at http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=25680.



Legend

- Los Angeles River
- Rim of the Valley Trail
- Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail
- Parks

Median Household Income 2008 by ZIP code

- \$0 - \$35,000
- \$35,001 - \$75,000
- > \$75,001

FindRecreation site connects visitors with recreation opportunity

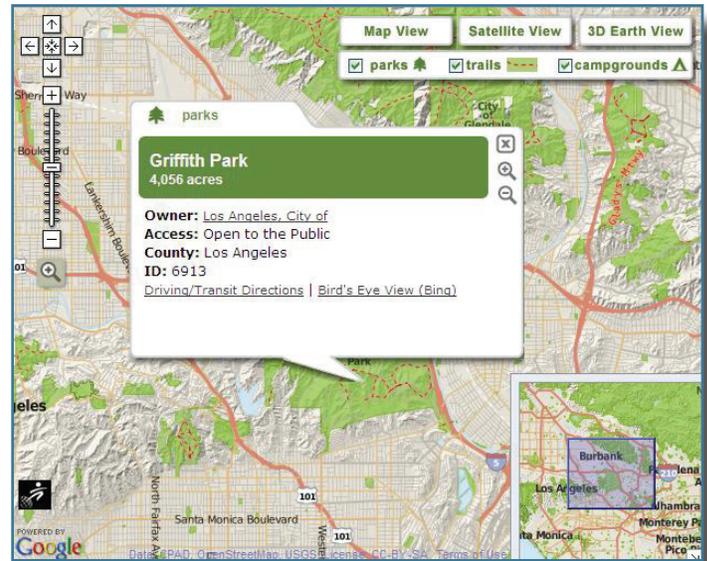
by Philomene Smith, psmit@parks.ca.gov

A new web portal by California State Parks and GreenInfo Network makes it easy to access all of California's outdoor park and open space recreation opportunities. FindRecreation has information on everything from federal wilderness areas to neighborhood tot lots, and includes interactive maps and searching capabilities.

"We designed FindRecreation to enable people to find parks near home," said Ruth Coleman, director of California State Parks.

To use the site, go to <http://www.FindRecreation.parks.ca.gov> and click on the magnifying glass icon. Enter a home address, city or ZIP code and click "Go" for a detailed street map or aerial image of area recreation opportunities. Then click on a recreation site for more information. (See image.)

Depending on available funding, future versions of FindRecreation may let users search for additional recreational facilities such as ball courts and swimming pools.



On the FindRecreation website, a popup with more information and links displays after clicking on a recreation site.

For more information

Go to the site, <http://www.FindRecreation.parks.ca.gov> and click on the magnifying glass icon. ●

NPS works to attract more Americans to national parks

by Ray Murray, *Partnerships Program Chief, Pacific West Region, National Park Service*

Despite almost 300 million visits annually to national parks, only 50 percent of Americans have ever been to a national park. National Park Service (NPS) Director Jon Jarvis has set forth "relevancy" as one of his four primary NPS priorities. Making the park experience relevant for visitors is the critical first stage for cultivating individual commitment to park stewardship.

As part of its efforts to reach out and engage Americans, NPS is working closely with the Obama Administration's America's Great Outdoors (AGO) Initiative, established to support community-driven conservation efforts. Public input was gathered

at listening sessions across the country and online. Initiative findings and recommendations are scheduled to be released on November 15. Emerging AGO themes include: full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, expanded close-to-home urban recreation opportunities, more investment in recreation for healthier lifestyles, and greater engagement of youth and families and underserved populations.

For more information

Find a summary of the America's Great Outdoors Initiative at <http://www.doi.gov/americasgreatoutdoors/Press-Release.cfm>. ●

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Published twice a year, *The California Park Planner* provides employees of California State Parks and park agencies with information on trends and developments affecting park planning.

Park partners' survey to provide insight about state park users

by Traci Verardo-Torres, California State Parks Foundation

Earlier this year, the California State Parks Foundation (CSPF) kicked off a new Park Excellence Project, in partnership with the Save the Redwoods League. The goal of the project is to develop a vision for the state park system's future by engaging Californians in a dialogue about excellence for their state parks.

Data have been drawn from a diverse set of sources, including a statewide online survey conducted in February that resulted in

more than 6,000 responses, a telephone poll, listening sessions with stakeholder groups and personal interviews with external park partners.

CSPF and the League continue to "crunch the data" and are currently synthesizing the findings in key themes: resource protection, public access, education and interpretation, partnerships, connections across systems and more.

Preliminary survey analysis suggests that almost three quarters of Californians visited state parks at least once last year. Demographic differences



Ahjumawi Lava Springs State Park.
(Photo © Jim Duckworth; courtesy of CSPF.)

between those who visit state parks and those who don't are not large, although visitors are somewhat younger, better educated and more likely to have school-age children at home than non-visitors. Non-visitors value state parks' opportunities for outdoor relaxation, their majestic landscapes and historic sites, and the hiking, camping, and other recreation they offer, much as do visitors. If they were to visit a state park, non-visitors would want more contact with park staff and more education and interpretive services to help them become familiar with the park's resources and recreation opportunities, survey results suggest.

A full report for the Park Excellence Project will be available in December. ●