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June 11, 2009 UPDATED

President Barack Obama
The White House

Senator Barbara Boxer
Senator Dianne Feinstein
The Capitol

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger
State Capitol

Re: Support the National Park Service Saving California State Parks for All

Dear President Obama, Senator Boxer, Senator Feinstein, and Governor Schwarzenegger:

We respectfully submit that the National Park Service should take over and manage the California State Park and Recreation system on an interim basis for three years until California regains fiscal and political stability, as an alternative to the Governor's proposal to close state parks. This will save the jobs of state park employees, and preserve the economic, health, equity, educational, and environmental benefits of the parks for all. Turning over state parks to the National Park Service makes sense for economic stimulus and many other reasons. California's state parks spend an average of \$4.32 billion per year in park-related expenditures, based on attendance estimates by state Parks and Recreation of about 74.9 million visitors a year. Closing state parks does not make sense. Drastic proposals to close state parks call for creative measures. While the National Park Service administers state parks, the people of California could fix state government through a constitutional convention or initiative that would, for example, abolish the 2/3 vote requirement to pass a budget and new taxes. The people of the United States have bailed out banks and insurance companies and should bail out state parks.

There are sound justifications to support this win-win solution. Congress has authorized the acquisition of over 700,000 acres of green space in California. The Governor proposes closing 1,287,645 acres of state parks, which would more than cancel the federal government's efforts to green California. Yosemite began as a state park until the National Park Service made it one of the crown jewels of the National Park System. Army soldiers, including Buffalo Soldiers, served as the original park rangers. The National Trust for Historic Preservation has named California's state parks as one of the nation's eleven most endangered historic treasures. New Deal programs created 8,000 parks, and the Civilian Conservation Corps created parks and green jobs during the Great Depression. The Auburn Recreation Area is one example where California currently manages the area under contract for the United States. The people of the United States can return the favor by managing the California state parks until the state can serve as the steward of our children's heritage.

In the 1980s and -90s, California gave up state parks and beaches to counties and cities. That is how, for example, El Pueblo de Los Angeles State Historic Monument became an agency of the City of Los Angeles. More recently, California turned over half of Rio de Los Angeles State Park to the City of Los Angeles to ensure the park met the needs of the community as defined by the community.

State parks provide economic benefits including places for physical activity to reduce obesity, improve health, and cut medical costs; local green jobs for youth and small and disadvantaged business

enterprises; Conservation Corps type programs to diversify job and career opportunities and to permanently improve the park system, and transit to trails.

Parks offer multiple benefits beyond dollars and cents. These include the simple joys of playing in the park; social cohesion, or bringing people together; improved physical, psychic, and social health; improved youth development and academic performance; educational programs on stewardship; positive alternatives to gangs, crime, drugs, and violence; conservation values of clean air, water, land, and habitat protection, and climate justice; art, culture and historic preservation; preservation of Native American sites; spiritual values in protecting the earth and its people; and sustainable regional planning. Fundamental principles of equal justice and democracy underlie these benefits.

The National Park Service recognizes the need to invest in parks. During the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, the National Park Service is providing “fee free” use of the national parks this summer.

California was a model for the nation when it adopted the first strategic plan for state parks under Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. California has lost its way. The people of the United States can help California find its way again.

Everyone would suffer from the closure of parks, but people of color and low income communities would suffer first and worst because they systematically lack access to parks and recreation. The proposal to close state parks is part of a pattern and practice of depriving people of color and low income communities of the social net of state services. A diverse and growing alliance supports equal access to green space to achieve healthy livable communities for all, including economic justice, health, youth, job, and environmental advocates. *See* letter from diverse allies to Governor Schwarznegger re Keep State Parks Open for All (June 1, 2009), available on the Web at tinyurl.com/ntdhwq.

See generally the Policy Report *Economic Stimulus, Green Space, and Equal Justice* (The City Project 2009), tinyurl.com/m5xpyd; the principles and policies of the California Green Stimulus Coalition, tinyurl.com/m3kg4j; the Policy Report *Realizing the Vision for a Healthy California: Opportunities in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009* (Strategic Alliance 2009), tinyurl.com/krkx4d; and the Policy Statement *The Built Environment: Designing Communities to Promote Physical Activity in Children* (American Academy of Pediatrics 2009), tinyurl.com/pfo63r.

We look forward to working with you on creative solutions to save the benefits of state parks for all.

Very truly yours,

Raul Macias, Anahuak Youth Sports Association
Harold Goldstein, California Center for Public Health Advocacy
Robert García, The City Project
Paul Moreno, Coalition to Preserve Sacred Sites
Ian Kim, Ella Baker Center for Human Rights
Tara Marchant, Greenlining Institute
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