

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: July 26, 2010

From : 
Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Hon. ASLA, Executive Director

Subject: Agenda Item 15: Consideration of resolution supporting Proposition 21, the State Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund Act.

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy support Proposition 21, the State Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund Act.

Legislative Authority: Section 33211 (c) of the Public Resources Code.

Background: The California Department of Parks and Recreation maintains 278 state parks across nearly 1.5 million acres. California state parks have more than 280 miles of coastline, 625 miles of lake and river frontage, nearly 15,000 campsites, and 3,000 miles of hiking, biking, and equestrian trails and support the most diverse assembly of natural resources of any state agency. The state parks preserve examples of nearly half the rare habitat types in California, including coastal prairie, valley oak woodland and Mendocino pygmy cypress forest. They are second only to the national forests in the number (162) of endangered, rare and threatened species they protect.

Many of California's parks, once considered the best in the nation, are in dire repair because of chronic underfunding. Less than four percent of the State budget is dedicated to parks and conservation. Roofs and sewage systems leak, restrooms are not able to be cleaned regularly, trails are washed out, and buildings and structures throughout the system are badly deteriorated. With no reliable source of funding, the state parks have accumulated a backlog of more than \$1 billion in maintenance and repairs. Thousands of acres of scenic acres are closed to the public because of reductions in park rangers, and crime has more than doubled.

Twice in the past two years, state parks were on the brink of being shut down because of California's budget cuts. In 2008, 48 parks were proposed for closure, and in 2009, 220 of state's 278 parks (80percent of the entire system) were proposed for closure. In each case, a last-minute budget reprieve kept the parks open. Last year, nearly 150 state parks were shut down part-time or suffered deep service reductions because of budget cuts, and more closure proposals are expected this year because of the state's continuing budget difficulties. The parks are in such peril that the National Trust for Historic Preservation has named California State

Parks one of the most endangered sites in America.

Proposition 21, the State Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund Act on the November 2010 ballot, will establish the State Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund in the state treasury funded from and \$18 annual State Park Access Pass surcharge on all California cars, motorcycles, and recreational vehicles. Larger commercial vehicles, mobile homes, and permanent trailers will be exempt. California vehicles subject to the State Park Access Pass surcharge and all occupants of those vehicles will receive free day-use admission to all state parks throughout the year, which currently costs as much as \$125 for an annual pass or \$10-\$15 per day. Also, all Californians will benefit from the creation of a stable, reliable and adequate source of funding for state parks and wildlife conservation that will ensure these priceless public assets are protected and that the parks are open and available for all Californians today and in the future. Out of state vehicles will continue to pay full entrance fees at state parks per day.

Trust Fund revenues will amount to approximately \$500 million each year (based on about 28 million registered vehicles) and 85 percent will be allocated to state parks and 15 percent to other state wildlife and ocean protection agencies. With a new dedicated and reliable funding stream, state parks no longer will need to receive a portion of their funding from the state's General Fund, freeing up approximately \$130 million to prevent cuts to other vital services – like schools, health care and transportation