



## Reinvesting in State Parks in 2015-17

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission and Gov. Jay Inslee agree that the state park system should not and cannot be fully self-supporting, which is the current legislative policy direction. Despite State Parks’ success in raising revenues, it is clear to the Commission, the Governor and the 2014 Parks and Outdoor Recreation Task Force that it is not practical nor viable to run the park system on earned revenues alone. As it stands today, the park system is in decline and struggling to meet its mission.

The Commission’s 2015-17 budget request of \$159 million\* for **general operations** includes \$64 million in public tax support and \$95 million in projected earned revenues. This request focuses on moving toward a healthy park system—one that continues to benefit all citizens’ quality of life, protects the state’s natural and cultural heritage and contributes significantly to strong state and local economies.

The Governor has agreed that public financing is appropriate to fund State Parks. Even with an enormous fiscal challenge facing the state, he has proposed reinvesting in the park system with a general operations budget of \$136 million including a significant increase in General Fund over the current level of tax support.

### A Step in the Right Direction

The Commission is deeply grateful and appreciates the Governor’s leadership as demonstrated in his 2015-17 Budget for Parks. The Commission appreciates the value that the Governor places in parks.

The Governor’s budget is a step in the right direction. It provides \$136 million for general operations (\$29 million General Fund, \$10 million litter tax and \$97 million earned revenue). The Governor’s proposal makes a mild investment in parks by addressing known cost increases, slowing the decline of park conditions and keeping parks open. It adds the equivalent of 50 full-time staff to replace a portion of staffing lost during the Great Recession.

	State Parks request	Governor's proposal
<b>General Operations</b>	<b>\$159 million</b>	<b>\$136 million</b>
Dedicated funds	\$20 million	\$20 million
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$179 million</b>	<b>\$156 million</b>

*Note: State Parks original budget request of \$153 million has been adjusted to reflect the additional \$6 million in employee compensation and benefits in the Governor's budget.*

Meanwhile, the Commission also has expressed its gratitude for the Governor’s **Capital Budget** for state parks. It funds nearly 90 percent of the Commission’s request and represents a sizable investment that will improve the condition of park facilities and infrastructure and help State Parks reduce a \$470 million maintenance backlog. Gov. Inslee’s Capital Budget also enables the agency to steward existing natural and cultural resources, enhance facilities to generate revenue and save operating costs to support further financial stability of the park system into the future.

\* \$159 million is the general operations portion of the Commission’s total 2015-17 request and includes post-budget submittal adjustments of approximately \$6 million for employee compensation and benefits. The total 2015-17 budget request of \$179 million includes programs that operate from dedicated fees, federal money and other grants.



The Commission shares the Governor's intent to support a reinvestment in state parks. To that end, the Commission's 2015-17 budget request describes the financial needs to move the park system toward a healthy, sustainable situation.

**The Commission's 2015-17 request includes mission-driven items** focused on continuing to attract visitors and earn income, delivering life-enhancing recreational and educational experiences, and addressing needs for natural, cultural and historical resource stewardship. The Commission's request goes beyond the Governor's budget to fund the following:

- **Additional staff on the ground** to improve customer service in parks and perform the day-to-day customer maintenance and cleaning that visitors expect
- **Three additional staff to manage forest health and public safety** by identifying and treating the most critical forest health issues statewide
- **Two maintenance specialists with specific skills to care for historic structures**
- **Investments in technology, including installation of technology infrastructure** necessary to ensure more efficient operations, as recommended in a 2008 performance audit. Infrastructure additions also would enable Parks to provide the Wi-Fi services customers (park visitors) want and expect; and a new system to manage and report on law enforcement citations
- **Restoring interpretive, partnership and educational capacity** with additional staffing in interpretive centers and restoration of staff in five key park areas to provide education to visitors, including school groups and families with children
- **Funding for a system-wide assessment of utilities infrastructure** to guide capital investment and keep park facilities in operable condition
- **Additional staff to rebuild lost institutional capacity** in key administrative areas, including internal audit, health and safety and records management

For its part, the Commission remains committed to pursuing entrepreneurial, philanthropic and partnership opportunities that will increase income to support park operations. The Commission is committed to continual improvements through Lean and other management activities to ensure operating efficiency and to make the most of available financial resources.

The Commission will continue its commitment and will work with the Governor and Legislature to provide the parks and recreation services that the public wants, expects and deserves.

#### **For more information:**

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