



# Save Our Parks!

## Protect Arizona's History, Our Legacy, and Our Future

Arizona's State Parks – natural areas, historic places, archaeological sites, cultural resources, and much more – are in trouble. Over the last eight years, parks funding from the Arizona State Legislature has decreased significantly. The system has suffered its most severe cuts in recent years, however, down from \$26 million in January 2009 to only \$7.5 million or possibly even less today.

Arizona State Parks' system consists of 27 parks and three natural areas and includes places such as Homolovi Ruins, the Tubac Presidio, Lost Dutchman State Park, Kartchner Caverns, among many others. Recently, the State Parks Board voted to close 13 of these parks due to the lack of operational funding. Four additional parks had previously closed: Jerome State Historic Park, McFarland State Historic Park, Oracle State Park, and the San Rafael Natural Area. By mid-year 2010, more than half of our State Park system will be closed and, without additional funding, nine more parks will likely close later this year.

Arizona State Parks has had no increase in operating funds since 2002, a limited capital budget since 2003, and unmet capital needs of \$150 million. The agency currently stands at a 40 percent personnel vacancy rate. The latest cuts by the Legislature will mean the loss of 70 more positions. At parks where law enforcement, public safety, and water safety must be provided, reductions in staff means those parks must close. State Parks was prepared to limp along with a seasonal park system on \$19 million of revenue composed mainly of the enhancement fund (park entrance fees), state lake improvement fund (gas and usage tax), and lottery revenues (Heritage Fund). However, the Arizona Legislature diverted and swept away about half of that, leaving State Parks with almost no source of operating funds.

These 30 exceptional places have been conserved over the past half century for the recreational, environmental, and cultural enjoyment of all Arizonans. They represent our history and our future. We must do better as stewards of these amazing resources.

### Immediate Actions to Save State Parks

- Discontinue the transfer of monies from the Heritage Fund to the State Forester.
- Eliminate all of the Fund Reductions and Transfers and Excess Balance Transfers from December 2009 – totaling about \$8.6 million.
- Allow Parks to keep all enhancement dollars for operations, including those being collected currently.
- Reject proposals for Fiscal Year 2011 that would divert all of the Heritage Fund dollars to the General Fund.



## Long-term Actions to Protect Parks

- **Support a program that would allow Arizona residents with an Arizona license plate to visit all Arizona parks without paying an entrance fee.** This can be accommodated by implementation of a \$9 fee on Arizona vehicle licenses that will generate about \$39 million, which will allow parks to maintain and operate the system. This will be good for the parks and for the people of Arizona.
- Stop all Fund Reductions and Transfers and Excess Balance Transfers – keep fee funds for their intended purposes.
- Expand partnerships with local governments and volunteer entities to keep parks operating and maintained.
- Recognize parks and open space as integral to our quality of life, our economy, and to the future of our state and generations yet to come.



## Reasons to Protect State Parks and Open Space

Keeping State Parks open provides much more economic benefit than cost to operate them. According to Northern Arizona University, Arizona State Parks attract 2.3 million visitors annually. Those visitors produce \$266 million of direct and indirect economic impact in Arizona, plus \$22.7 million in state and local taxes. Arizona State University's Morrison Institute on Public Policy has provided an analysis estimating that it costs \$32 to \$34 million to operate our state parks

– about 1/10th of their economic contribution – and none of the operating funds come from the Arizona state general fund. Additionally, parks provide and support jobs throughout our communities.

Public open space is critical to the well being of Arizonans and is essential to the future quality of life. Access to parks and other public lands affects the health of our community and, in particular, children who are increasingly sedentary, which risks their health and can shorten their life spans. Our parks provide informal learning environments that compliment and add value to in-school learning, plus stimulate the arts and creative expression.

## Privatization of Parks is not the answer

The Arizona State Parks' Mission Statement is this:

*“Managing and conserving Arizona’s natural, cultural, and recreational resources, both in our parks and through our partners for the benefit of the people.”*

Many aspects of this mission cannot be accomplished via a private entity – parks are a public resource that must be conserved for the benefit of the people of Arizona, including future generations. That responsibility is not always consistent with a business plan. Parks are not set up to make money. They are established to protect resources and to provide learning and recreational opportunities. Even business interests, including those who have concessions at state parks, do not see privatization as the answer to the major issues facing parks.

*“. . . I am not one to offer up privatization as a panacea for all the park’s woes – the state parks organization fulfills a variety of public missions that cannot be undertaken well privately.”*

Coyote Blog – Dispatches from a Small Business

**Please act to protect Arizona’s history and its future – Save State Parks!**