

Federal Parks & Recreation

Bulletin # 1: January 23, 2012

Dear Subscriber:

This bulletin from Federal Parks & Recreation newsletter reports on the following:

- * **International tourism pitch seen as boost to parks, rec**
- * **California closing parks; feds may be adding DoI lands**

NOTE: This bulletin is a supplement to your regular edition of Federal Parks & Recreation. It is NOT your regular issue. The next issue will be published January 26.
The Editors

Obama emphasis on international visitation may aid parks, rec

The White House excited the outdoor community January 19 by launching a government-wide campaign to attract foreign tourists to the United States.

An executive order from President Obama gives visitation to parks, refuges and related sites a prominent seat at the table. At the bottom line the administration intends to greatly expand tourism visits from China, Indian and Brazil, three nations with rapidly expanding economies.

"We're going to see how we can make it easier for foreign tourists to find basic information about visiting America," Obama said at an event at Walt Disney World in Orlando. "And we're going to see how we can attract more tourists to our national parks. We want people visiting not just Epcot Center, but the Everglades, too."

The President said the secretaries of Interior and Commerce will head up a task force to recommend methods of increasing tourism and recreation visits to the United States. The task force will work with the Corporation for Travel Promotion (better known as BrandUSA) to promote the United States.

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BrandUSA is a nonprofit group established by Congress that has some \$200 million to spend. The money for the campaign is to come from nonfederal sources, mostly private industry. Brand USA's website is at www.thebrandusa.com.

National parks are expected to be a major focus of the President's campaign. Presently, about 10 percent of visitors to the parks come from foreign countries. Backers of the White House strategy hope to increase that by 50 percent over the next two years.

Coincidentally or not, three major Park Service support groups have scheduled a summit for this week in Washington, D.C. to discuss the future of the agency. The *America's Summit on National Parks* will attempt to build on a major new NPS report, *A Call to Action*, that establishes a 36-point agenda for the parks. Among other things the participants will attempt to make parks and outdoor policy part of the political baseline.

The summit is being hosted by the National Parks Conservation Association, the National Parks Foundation and the National Park Hospitality Association.

The Obama international strategy has a different focus. The theory holds that the United States over the last two decades has lagged behind other countries as a tourist destination for international travelers. The theory continues that the United States has not worked hard enough to lure middle class citizens from emerging economic powers such as China, Brazil and India.

In fact the United States has imposed tough visa laws to protect the country from terrorists. As part of the President's new strategy the State Department will expand a Global Entry Program to make it easier for visitors to get around once they arrive in the United States. However, the country will continue with rigorous background checks.

Once the visitors arrive the Interior Department-Commerce Department task force will try to persuade them to visit park and recreation areas. Said the White House:

"A particular focus of the Task Force will be on strategies for increasing tourism and recreation jobs by promoting visits to our national treasures. The Department of the Interior manages iconic destinations in our national parks, wildlife refuges, cultural and historic sites, monuments and other public lands that attract travelers from around the country and the globe."

The White House added, "Eco-tourism and outdoor recreation also have an outside impact on rural economies, particularly in Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Nevada, North Carolina, Oregon, Utah and Wyoming."

The Obama administration didn't mention increased visitation to state and local parks and recreation areas. But Tom Wolfe, Washington representative of the National Association of State Park Directors, said, "We welcome and appreciate what the President has done, both with this initiative and with the America's Great Outdoors. It stands to reason that state parks will benefit to some degree from this campaign."

Several federal departments followed up on Obama's announcement the next day (January 20) by holding an inaugural meeting of the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation (FICOR). The council has a broad charge "to improve access to federal lands, promote outdoor education through interagency coordination, support recreation-based activities to stimulate local economies and back conservation measures to maintain healthy lands."

At the January 20 meeting the FICOR members agreed to upgrade the federal outdoor recreation website, *www.recreation.gov*. Participating departments include Agriculture, Army and Interior. The Council on Environmental Quality is honchoing the group.

California closing parks, but feds may be adding lands

Just as the Department of Interior is pondering the advisability of adding two major new units in California, Gov. Jerry Brown (D) is gearing up to close 70 state parks. And to slash ranger levels in the state park system to the bone.

The enacted fiscal 2011-12 California state budget mandates the closure of 70 of the state's 278 parks by July 1. That will save \$11 million.

In addition, the governor has proposed a fiscal 2012-13 budget that could eliminate 20 percent of ranger positions in the state park system and all lifeguard positions. That would save another \$22 million.

Meanwhile, the Park Service is taking public comment on a proposal to add some or all of the 700,000-acre San Gabriel watershed outside Los Angeles to the park system. And the Obama administration is reportedly considering the designation of Fort Ord as a national monument.

Fort Ord: Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar a fortnight ago made noises that he will recommend the designation of Fort Ord near Monterrey as a monument. He was cheered on by the local Congressman, Rep. Sam Farr (D-Calif.), and conservationists. The monument would be managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

After a listening session in Marina, Calif., January 13 Salazar said, "Today I heard broad-based community support from many diverse stakeholder groups and organizations who want to protect the unique natural resources of Fort Ord and to build upon the great recreational opportunities that the public lands have to offer."

Said Farr at the event, "With the help of President Obama's Great Outdoors Initiative and continued community support, I have no doubt that we can continue to preserve this Central Coast jewel for future generations."

The Fort Ord Reuse Authority has since Congress established it in 1994 been preparing the transition of the fort to BLM, to California state parks, to colleges and

universities, and to other uses. More than 7,000 acres has been transferred to BLM from the 28,000-acre post and another 7,450 acres may be transferred. Presumably, a monument designation would parallel the latter transfer. More information is available at <http://www.fora.org/>.

Conservationists are actively supporting the national monument idea. On January 19 environmental groups and their allies held a press conference to decry Republican attacks on wild lands. At the same time they called for the designation of Fort Ord as a national monument.

Said Mart Starr, program director for the Vet Voice Foundation, "We're very hopeful that in California we will see the designation of Fort Ord as a national monument. Secretary Salazar was at Fort Ord last week to take comments from the public. There has been no official position from the administration or the Department of Interior but we're hopeful."

San Gabriel: The Park Service recommended in a draft study October 17 the inclusion in the National Park System of a portion of 700,000 acres in the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains in greater Los Angeles.

But NPS recommended against a traditional national park owned and operate by the agency. Instead it called for a national recreation area (NRA) managed in partnership with landowners in the area. That includes the Forest Service, which manages 415,000 acres of the Angeles National Forest.

The proposal raised alarms among property rights groups who objected a decade ago to the cost of the nearby Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area and to its impact on private inholdings.

Chuck Cushman, president of the American Land Rights Association (ALRA), fears a repeat. His group has been conducting a guerilla war during the current round of public hearings, sending out 40,000 E-mails a day to its members. The Park Service has extended a public comment period until February 13.

In addition to the land rights issue ALRA questions the cost if the Park Service were to try to acquire private land in and around Forest Service holdings in the area.

"The proposed new San Gabriel Mountains National Recreation Area and the Rim of the Valley National Recreation Areas (a nearby area that is also being studied for inclusion in the park system) are likely to cost \$7 billion," ALRA told its members. "That could be grossly understated. The funding required would detract from existing national parks that are already strapped for funds for basic health, safety and visitor services."

In the study the Park Service downplayed the possible cost of a San Gabriel unit and possible loss of private land. Of the preferred alternative D in the study it said, "The majority of land in the proposed NRA is owned and managed by public agencies. Lands within the NRA would remain under their current ownership and jurisdictions, with each

land management agency continuing to fund its own operations. The need for NPS land acquisition would be small, targeted for protection of significant resources, and subject to funding availability. Partner agencies would also contribute funds for land acquisition within the NRA when funding is available.”

The study estimates operating costs of an NRA at between \$2 million and \$4 million per year.

California State Parks: While the feds are talking additional spending for Fort Ord and San Gabriel, Gov. Brown is going in the other direction. On January 5 he proposed a fiscal 2012-13 budget that recommends a \$22 million reduction in parks funding that, according to the California State Parks Foundation, could eliminate all lifeguards and cut 20 percent of ranger positions.

In the fiscal 2011-12 budget the state is already committed to closing 70 of the 278 state parks. These closures come on the heels of years of promised closures.

The powerful California State Parks Foundation, which helped head off closures for years, will try again. It has launched a *Defend What’s Yours* campaign to keep parks in business.

Said foundation president Elizabeth Goldstein, “The governor’s budget proposal not only locks the gates to one-quarter of the state parks system - 70 parks - but it further threatens Californians’ ability to visit and enjoy their state parks with safety and confidence.”

She added, “Proposing to eliminate all lifeguards on state beaches and one-fifth of all state park rangers is a grave threat to the public’s safe access to state parks. This cut goes too far and must be stopped.”

Coincidentally, the National Association of State Budget Officers January 21 told *Bloomberg News* that many states are making economic recoveries. The association said 15 states show higher revenues for the current fiscal year than expenditures. And many other states are closing the gap.

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