

From: <http://www.parks.wa.gov/whatsnew/> (As of March 20, 2012)

## **Governor Gregoire – special guest at Commission meeting**

At its last regular meeting in February, the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission had the honor of a special guest – Gov. Chris Gregoire. Gov. Gregoire told the Commission and audience that she invited herself to the meeting because she wanted to express her understanding of the tough budget decisions made by the Commission – and the hardship placed on those who have lost jobs or had their jobs reduced to seasonal.

The Governor told her audience that of the state's \$32 billion budget, virtually all services have been reduced in order to cut \$1.5 billion dollars – and said that the fact that State Parks have taken a share of those cuts does not indicate that these services are unworthy or lower on the priority list.

On behalf of the Commission, Director Hoch thanked the Governor's and said her visit was important for information sharing as well as appreciated moral support. The agency will be following up with the Governor on strategies to use her support for State Parks.

She said she supported Discover Pass legislation last year, in part, because the number one complaint her office heard about reductions in the current economy was about cutting state parks.

Read a transcript of the Governor's remarks [here](#) (60kb pdf) (from State Parks web server).

## **State Parks makes reductions**

### **But keeps all parks open**

You may have heard that State Parks is making another reduction, and it's true. But this time, with the new Discover Pass as a main mode of earning revenue for the agency's operations, closing parks is not part of the equation.

"We've made some very tough decisions about how to make an \$11 million reduction so we can live within our budget and stay above state-mandated minimum reserves," said Don Hoch, agency director. "The approach we're taking is to keep parks open. We're now almost completely reliant upon fees to run the park system, and we need people to buy the Discover

Pass. In return, we're doing our best to keep parks open for people."

The Discover Pass became law last spring and was launched July 1, to earn revenue for state recreation lands, since general fund tax dollars are no longer available for that purpose. Revenues from the pass are distributed to three agencies that manage state recreation lands; 84 percent of revenues go to State Parks, and the Department of Fish and Wildlife and Department of Natural Resources each receive 8 percent. The program is new and represents a dramatic change for the public. For that reason, it is anticipated it will take time to catch on. As yet, Discover Pass revenues have not met projections.

For Parks, earned revenue from the Discover Pass to date is 58 percent less than originally projected in its 2011-13 budget. This is dramatic, since State Parks now receives only 12 percent of its operating budget from general fund tax dollars (this is down from 66 percent of State Parks' budget in 2007-09). For more information, visit [www.parks.wa.gov/agency/finance/](http://www.parks.wa.gov/agency/finance/).

To make budget and keep parks open during the recession the past three years, State Parks already made agency-wide reductions in staffing and programs, decreasing staffing in headquarters and regions by 20 percent each and decreasing field staff by 6 percent.

The new reduction being undertaken now is focused primarily on restructuring the agency and making field operations more seasonal. The goal is to ensure that parks have near-current levels of staffing in place from May through September, when most people use parks. Day visits require a Discover Pass; people who camp or rent overnight accommodations are not required to have a Discover Pass for the park where they are staying. For information on the Discover Pass, visit [www.DiscoverPass.wa.gov](http://www.DiscoverPass.wa.gov).

Hoch says the reduction approach is difficult for State Parks, because it affects so many staff, but the focus of the reductions is to be as seamless as possible for the public. The plan shifts many ranger positions from year-round to seasonal, eliminating management positions, cutting region staff and reducing construction and maintenance and administrative positions. Up to 175 people are affected by job changes, with a lesser but as-yet-unknown number of job losses anticipated.

As restructuring continues, numbers will continue to shift, but current estimates are that 123 of 189 permanent rangers will remain in place year-round, while 66 ranger positions shift to seasonal. Of 76 year-round

construction and maintenance staff, approximately 60 will remain year-round. Next summer, there will be 449 park aides, compared with 440 in summer of 2011. It is anticipated that statewide, among all 116 parks, staffing will be approximately 20 fewer than in 2011. Staffing reductions and changes also are occurring in region and headquarters offices.

Meanwhile, Parks and the other Discover Pass agencies have been responsive to public feedback that the pass be transferrable between vehicles. Some legislators have expressed support for agency request legislation proposing this change, which a recent survey indicates could generate additional public participation and revenue. While this won't solve State Parks' revenue gap entirely, it could help make the pass more workable for people and state recreation services over time.

Please stay tuned – and encourage your friends and family to buy the Discover Pass.