

San Francisco Chronicle

**CALIFORNIA**  
**State parks in trouble, backers say**  
**New road projects, high-speed rail called biggest threats**

Glen Martin, Chronicle Environment Writer

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A new report from a public interest group concludes California's state parks are in big trouble, beset by boondoggle transportation schemes, deferred maintenance and inadequate funding.



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In its second annual "State of Our State Parks" analysis, the California State Parks Foundation listed six imminent threats to California's 278 state parks, which encompass about 1.5 million acres.

According to the report, the top threats are new road construction and high-speed rail projects.

The other major threats to parks identified by the report are:

- Development.
- Inadequate resource conservation and restoration.
- Overuse of parklands and concomitant short staffing.
- Environmentally harmful activities in adjacent areas, such as logging and agriculture.

Roy Stearns, a spokesman for the state Department of Parks and Recreation, said the foundation hit some of the main threats to the state park system.

Among the parks threatened by new road projects is Candlestick Point State Recreation Area in San Francisco, which could become the site for a flyover road project, said Elizabeth Goldstein, president of the foundation.

Goldstein said plans for a high-speed rail system that could ultimately crisscross California also poses a dire threat to parks.

"We're not against the concept of a high-speed rail system," Goldstein said. "If properly planned and constructed, it could be an environmental gain. But as it stands now, there are 22 parks that would be affected by the rail system. And nine parks would be bisected by railways."

Stearns said his department shares Goldstein's concerns about road and rail impacts.

"Whenever habitat is bisected by roads or rails, it is fragmented and diminished," he said. "It's a big issue for us."

Another big problem, Goldstein said, is inadequate funding. She noted that the deferred maintenance backlog for state parks is now running close to \$900 million. That translates as general parkland decline, she said.

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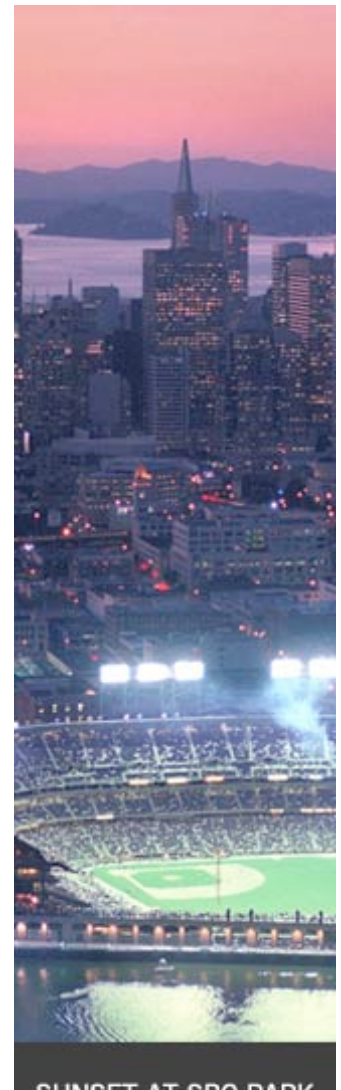
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"It means fewer lifeguards on the beaches, more litter, degraded water quality and wildlife habitat," she said.

Based on a survey it conducted, the foundation concludes there is strong support among Californians for greater park funding.

More than half the survey respondents said a lack of funds for operation and maintenance is the greatest threat facing the parks. More than 80 percent favored state acquisition of new parkland, and 55 percent said they would support state bonds to fund such acquisitions.

But park staffers say people don't always put their money where their passions are, at least where expensive land acquisitions are concerned.

"There's a saying around here," Stearns said. "Parks are first in the people's hearts, and last in their wallets."

The larger issue underlying all the problems, Stearns said, is the state's surging population.

"Parks that were once isolated now have development pushing against their borders," he said. "And all those thousands of people want their own special piece of nature to bike, hike or ride horses and off-road vehicles. We don't have enough open space now to accommodate everyone. What will we do in 20 years? There're no magic solutions."

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