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## Development seen as danger to state parks

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### Lean funding also trouble, group says

By Mike Lee  
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New roads, a proposed rail line and other development threaten to overrun California's park system, according to a nonprofit advocacy group that yesterday issued its second annual assessment of state parks.

Several San Diego County sites made the short list: Deferred maintenance jeopardizes the Fleming House at Torrey Pines, a proposed toll road threatens San Onofre State Beach and a planned high-speed rail corridor could put the squeeze on Old Town, the California State Parks Foundation said.

The group's report highlights themes familiar to many users of the parks. It found that California's burgeoning population and shrinking budget are putting too much pressure on the system.

Each year, tens of millions of people visit these locations, part of the largest and most diverse state parks system in the nation with more than 270 parks.

"State parks are probably more endangered now than they ever have been," said Sara Feldman, the foundation's Southern California director.

The foundation, which has 60,000 members, was founded in 1969. It

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bills itself as the only statewide organization focused on protecting state parks. The group said it has raised more than \$116 million in funds, land and artifacts for the parks system.

Its latest report, titled "State of Our State Parks," concludes that most threats stem from population growth.

Road development topped the list, with special concern over a possible toll road through San Onofre State Beach, a favorite surfing spot drawing 2.6 million people a year. Three of six road alignments being studied by Orange County transportation officials would cross the park. Many park advocates and users are criticizing the plan.

Similar roadway debates are taking place up and down the state.

A proposed high-speed rail line from Sacramento to San Diego could have the most far-reaching impact, the foundation said. The current map shows the train corridor plowing through or near 22 state parks, including Old Town San Diego, the report says.

Rail lines already run near Old Town, but Feldman fears that making way for the high-speed rail would harm the popular destination.

"It would entail a lot of extra construction, noise and frequency of trains," she said.

California State Parks spokesman Roy D. Stearns said the foundation's report echoes many concerns of agency officials.

"We have a growing population and a huge and growing demand for outdoor recreation," he said.

California is expected to have nearly 44 million people by 2020, up 30 percent from five years ago.

Already, it's nearly impossible to find a midsummer camping spot at state beaches, Stearns said. "It's like trying to get tickets on the 50-yard line for the Super Bowl a week before," he said. "That is symptomatic of demand on the entire system."

Meanwhile, the agency's operating budget is shrinking. It's down about \$20 million from four years ago to \$270 million this year. Stearns said more than \$800 million in deferred maintenance has piled up during the last 20 years.

"It's stem to stern from the northernmost park all the way to the border," said Denny Stoufer, a regional parks official in San Diego. "There are lots of problems out there."

Some of them involve the Torrey Pines State Reserve, a popular coastal

## Visitors to California state parks

1997-98	57 million
1998-99	64 million
1999-2000	73 million
2000-01	78 million
2001-02	86 million
2002-03	85 million

Totals are for fiscal years

*Source: California Department of Parks & Recreation*

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hiking spot that includes the Fleming House, built in the 1920s for reserve founder and custodian Guy Fleming.

Today, the lath and plaster home is full of leaks, infested with honeybees and weakened by dry rot. Stoufer said remodeling will cost several hundred thousand dollars because of rules for maintaining the character of historic homes.

"We're up against it," Stoufer said.

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