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Chesbro co-authors legislation to rescue state parks

Ukiah Daily Journal Staff

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SACRAMENTO Assemblymembers Wesley Chesbro (D-North Coast) and Jared Huffman (D-San Rafael) have introduced legislation to revive California's ailing state parks system.

Assembly Bill 1589, the "California State Parks Stewardship Act of 2012," proposes to reshape the relationship between State Parks and state government and establishes a blueprint to stop park closures and ensure their long-term viability.

"The recent parks closures disproportionately impact rural California, and nowhere is that more true than on the North Coast," Chesbro said. "The economies of many of our small communities depend on state parks and the millions of visitors they draw every year. We must find a way to keep them open, safe and accessible. This legislation creates lasting security for the California State Parks system and saves the state money in the long-term."

Key provisions of AB 1589 include:

Encourages formation of a state compact that guarantees an ongoing level of state funding for operations and maintenance of state parks.

Creates a State Park Enterprise Fund to be used for construction and installation of modern revenue and fee collection equipment and technologies to increase park visitation and revenues.

Produces a California State Park environmental license plate that individual vehicle owners could purchase and have the fees go to support state parks.

Provides the option for taxpayers to voluntarily purchase an annual state park access pass when

they file their state tax returns.

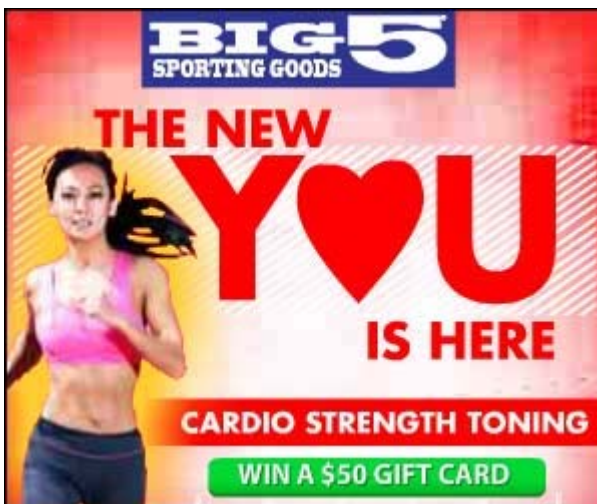
Requires the Department of Parks and Recreation to

be more transparent on how it evaluates and selects specific parks for closure, and places a cap of 25 state park units on the number of park closures allowed from 2012 to 2016 without legislative approval.

"We have an opportunity with this legislation to not only prevent park closures, but to begin to reinvigorate our neglected California State Parks system," Huffman said. "This bill is about charting a more sustainable approach to managing and financing our treasured state parks so that they will continue to be there for our economy and quality of life, and so that we can protect the valuable natural and cultural resources our parks contain."

"Our local economy centers on visitor service and if we lose our only state park, Hendy Woods, every business in our community will be badly affected," said Kathy Bailey, a member of the Anderson Valley Chamber of Commerce. "AB 1589 recognizes that closing parks should be the last choice, not the first, when trying to balance the budget. We're very happy that the authors want the state to formulate common-sense approaches to management reform and revenue enhancement before taking the drastic step of shuttering a vital component of our community's economy."

Assemblymember Roger Dickinson (D-Sacramento) is also a joint author of AB 1589.



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