



PARKSTM
CALIFORNIA

POTRERO
GROUP



LEADING TOGETHER

A NEW MODEL FOR THRIVING STATE PARKS



Parks California Celebrates Five Years 2019–2024



Parks California is State Parks' official statutory nonprofit partner.

Parks and public lands are one of America's best ideas, preserving precious resources and offering places of respite for more than 150 years. The next 150 years of stewardship pose new challenges and questions. Across the United States and beyond, public lands managers are asking, "How can we manage natural resources for resilience in the face of climate change? And how can we reach and serve even more constituents and elevate missing narratives and perspectives?"

This report was produced by Potrero Group, a leadership consulting firm that specializes in park partnership, to examine the strengths of Parks California's statutory partnership and help spread lessons learned in its first five years. We believe this partnership model is a powerful tool that can be adopted almost anywhere.

Parks California is a nonprofit created by legislation to support the work and mission of California State Parks by bringing new resources, expertise, and flexibility, including the ability to accomplish capital improvements and fundraising in collaboration with the Department.

STATE PARKS MISSION

To provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.

PARKS CALIFORNIA MISSION

Parks California is on a mission to make our state parks and public lands welcoming, inclusive and climate-resilient spaces where all people throughout California truly feel at home.

As part of our review of this unique public-private partnership, Potrero Group sat down with Parks California President & CEO, Kindley Walsh Lawlor, and Director of California State Parks, Armando Quintero, to discuss their first five years of work and how they are thinking about the future.

POTRERO GROUP: Why was Parks California created?

KINDLEY: We're here as an extension of California State Parks, the largest and most diverse state park system in the country. We were designed to help parks thrive in the face of escalating climate threats and help create stronger connections between people and parks, working together to lower an invisible barrier felt by many communities.

POTRERO GROUP: Is the model doing what it was designed to do?

ARMANDO: There's no question. As partners, we're opening up new worlds of possibility for State Parks. It's like we're standing on the edge of a new universe and we're only just beginning to see the first glimpses of what this partnership makes possible. There's so much more to explore.

KINDLEY: This is not a transactional relationship; it is a very strategic one. Parks California brings a start-up mentality to State Parks' enormous purview and well-established expertise, infusing this partnership with new energy, ideas, and scrappiness—all with intention, alignment, and focus. This is a really powerful approach to solving complex problems and bringing solutions to scale.



POTRERO GROUP: Give me some examples.

ARMANDO: Parks California supports our system-wide strategies, such as our first-ever sea level rise plan and our ongoing climate resilience planning, by working with our staff to identify ways to operationalize them, creating the tools necessary to get the work done and ensuring resources are in place. Working with Parks California, we are also able to take a pilot—like our “early detection rapid response” program addressing invasive species, developed with local partners in one of our Bay Area parks—and take it to scale across 279 other parks with the help of Parks California. Just as critically, Parks California is building relationships with communities that have not been as engaged with parks—not just as new visitors, but as people who come to parks to create personal connections and become stewards of these places. All of these things meet our needs right now, and they’re going to have a lasting, positive impact on the way we fulfill our mission in the long term.

POTRERO GROUP: What is working about your approach, and what are you going to bring with you into the next five years?

KINDLEY: Parks California is a partnership-driven organization that is always focused on building relationships, listening and learning at every step. Rather than telling people how they can engage with parks, we’re inviting all communities across California to tell us what they need. Then we bring in experts and consultants, identify the right partners or the right resources. That’s when our work truly begins, working continuously and closely with our State Park partners to design parks for the future.

ARMANDO: These deep external relationships Parks California builds bring immense value to parks. They help connect us to a world beyond the Department so we can keep bringing inspiration and new ideas into the system. This will ultimately help us meet the emerging needs of the next century.

POTRERO GROUP: It sounds like a delicate balance, prioritizing community interests while keeping aligned with State Parks and serving your shared mission. How does Parks California thread that needle?

KINDLEY: We say we lead from the inside out; meaning we set joint priorities directly with the Department while we engage innovative thinkers, partners, and experts from new and unexpected sources. Building collaboration and trust within the statewide ecosystem of park partners and inviting new stakeholders to the table is essential to achieving our shared vision of the future of parks—and will always be at the core of how we do our work.

POTRERO GROUP: What else is unique about Parks California’s partnership with State Parks?

KINDLEY: One of the most exciting things, I think, is that we can help meet broader environmental and social justice goals by being a conduit to philanthropy. Parks can and should play a central role in creating California’s climate-resilient and equitable future. Our statutory partnership model captivates the imagination of people, foundations, and companies who resonate with that vision and want to invest in it. It’s not just about playing the role of a nonprofit raising funds for a public resource, it’s being a thought partner to State Parks and working together to ensure resources are brought into play in a way that serves a bigger picture, the larger strategy.

ARMANDO: A simple strength of our partnership is that it’s outlined in statute. It supports good governance by any definition: we have an established process for setting joint priorities and working with the state’s Finance Department, and have written agreements for any work contract—we are aligned by design, through this statute. That means there is stability and longevity built into our partnership that allows us to engage in visionary, long-term thinking and take really big swings.

KINDLEY: It’s true. Our conversations aren’t just about what we’re trying to accomplish this year or next year, but how we keep building a future where parks are thriving, resilient spaces that all people—not just those who have traditionally come to parks—can explore and create their own meaningful connections with nature.

FOUNDING PERSPECTIVES

“The big opportunity we saw in establishing a statutory nonprofit partner was forging stability and sustainability for an agency facing incredible headwinds. In five years, Parks California has done just that—demonstrated the transformative power of partnership. Parks California has shown that, by working with California State Parks, together we can address the complex challenges facing our parks and communities, from climate resilience to equitable access. This journey has only just begun, and I am excited to see how we can further innovate and collaborate for the benefit of all.”

–Dr. Stephen Lockhart

Founding Board Chair, Chief Medical Officer, Sutter Health (Ret.), David and Lucile Packard Foundation Trustee, and Parks Forward Commissioner

“Parks California’s progress, to date, is proof of concept. This true partnership between Parks California and State Parks is exemplified by the achievements we are starting to realize through our mutual strengths and a united vision in how to tackle urgent issues facing our parks. The next five years will be about accelerating this work, ensuring that parks are not only maintained but are also accessible and welcoming to everyone. Together, we will continue to build a resilient and inclusive future for California’s treasures and the people who cherish them.”

–Deanna Mackey

incoming Chair, Board of Directors, Founder and Board Chair, Public Media Women in Leadership, and General Manager, KPBS San Diego

“California State Parks accomplishes so much more through this incredibly effective partnership. It enables the leadership and staff of State Parks to focus more on creating valuable, cutting-edge initiatives for its resources and visitors, and Parks California’s resources and thought partnership help ensure their successful implementation.”

–Michael Mantell

Board Member, Governing Council Chair, The Wilderness Society, and former President of Resources Legacy Fund and Undersecretary of California Natural Resources Agency

“Supporting Parks California from its inception has been incredibly rewarding. We got involved because we believe our parks are part of our heritage and our legacy, and we need to support the parks and the people who care for them as well as all of those who benefit from them. We remain invested in Parks California because of its unique ability to bring together diverse perspectives and drive innovative solutions that are informed by research, grounded in best practice, and fueled by the collective power of partnership. This collaborative relationship between Parks California and State Parks is essential to the state’s goals of creating thriving park spaces and fostering a deeper connection between people and nature.”

–Lauren B. Dachs

Advisory Council Member, President, Laural Foundation, Water Foundation Trustee, Sustainable Conservation Trustee, and Advisory Council Member, PPIC Water Policy Center

“We became involved because we’re dedicated to fostering a more sustainable and inclusive society for all Californians. Actively engaging coastal, rural, and urban communities to facilitate connections among leaders from state agencies, Tribal groups, and scientific institutions, Parks California’s unique strength lies in their ability to engage diverse perspectives and skillfully bring them together to make progress.”

–Emily Hobbs

Manager, Community Giving, BMO, which was recently named one of the most sustainable companies in North America by the Dow Jones Sustainability Index

FIVE YEARS OF PARTNERSHIP

PARKS CALIFORNIA AMPLIFIES AND ENHANCES STATE PARKS

- **Adds capacity** to State Parks to address challenges through innovation and external expertise
- **Convenes partnerships** between State Parks, community partners, grantees, and the people they serve
- **Grants funds** to strategically aligned nonprofits

California State Parks are:

280 park units

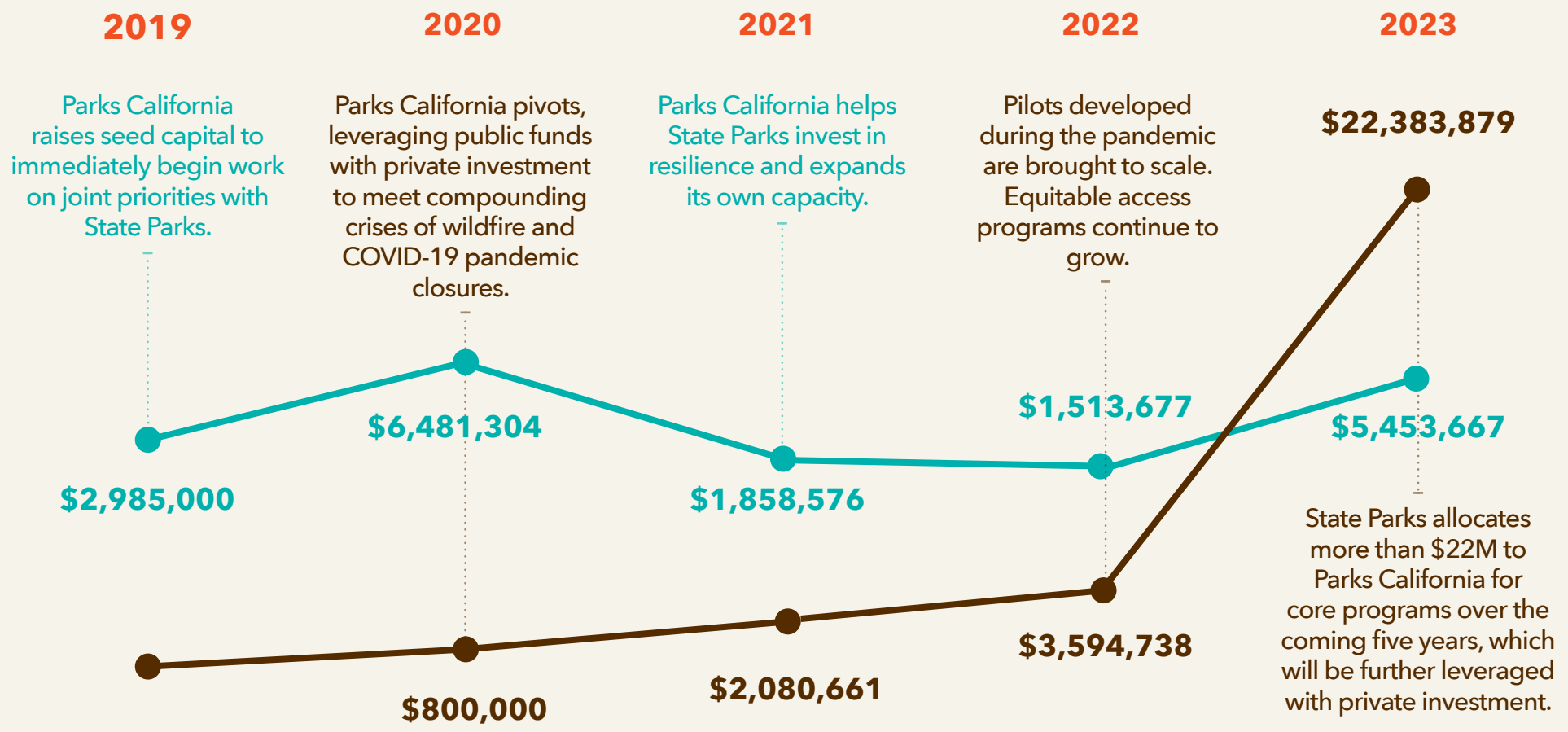
1.6 million acres

340 miles of coastline

970 miles of lake and river frontage

5,200 miles of trails

68 million annual visitors



TOTAL

Private Funds
\$18,292,224

Public Contracts
\$28,859,278

REVENUE ALLOCATIONS BY PROGRAM AREA

Access & Belonging: 51%
Climate & Stewardship: 30%
Parks of the Future: 19%

ALL PROGRAMS

ACCESS & BELONGING

- Adventure Pass Grant Program
- Arts in California Parks Grant Program
- Climate Literacy - Climate Stewardship Interp Trainings
- Covid 19 Park Reopening Mini Grant Program
- Every Kid Outdoors LA
- passPORTS Blended Access Field Trips
- PORTS Virtual Learning Support
- Route to Parks Grant Program

- Statewide Park Program - Community Stories
- Untold Stories - African American History & Engagement
- Untold Stories - Inclusive History Training
- Untold Stories - Tribal Land Acknowledgement
- Urban Parks - Candlestick Point SRA
- Urban Parks - Other; Events/Programming

CLIMATE & STEWARDSHIP

- 2020 Wildfire Relief Fundraising Support
- Bay Area District: One Tam Stewardship Support
- Climate Fellowships
- Climate Smart Partnerships Assessment

- Collaborative Leadership Training
- Landscape Scale Partnerships Capacity Building
- Natural Resources Division Data Management Systems Support
- Snowy Plover Data Informatics

PARKS OF THE FUTURE

- Big Basin Planning Support
- Big Basin Hydrology Study
- Big Basin Community Outreach Grant Program
- Big Basin Forest Management Strategy (with Save the Redwoods League)
- Big Basin Visitor Use Management Study

- Big Basin Park Road Surveys
- Big Basin Park Well Water Assessment
- Career Pathways Grant Program
- Oceano Dunes Community Study
- Jr. Lifeguards Fundraising Support
- Silver Strand, Low Cost Accommodation Study
- State Parks App (OuterSpatial) Support
- State Parks Partnerships Study
- State Parks Real Property Support
- Untold Stories - Virtual Adventurer App
- VIPP Program Support

FIVE YEARS OF PARTNERSHIP

Potrero Group selected the following stories to demonstrate the power of Parks California's statutory partnership with State Parks.



REIMAGINING BIG BASIN

RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE AT CALIFORNIA'S FIRST STATE PARK

On the morning of August 16, 2020, lightning struck in the Santa Cruz Mountains. The resulting 86,509-acre CZU Complex Fire burned through 97% of Big Basin Redwoods State Park, California's oldest state park, home to three watersheds and some of the tallest and most ancient trees in the Bay Area.

State Parks saw an opportunity to revisit a shared vision for Big Basin's future. Along with the recovery of natural resources and infrastructure, this was a chance to plan for a changing climate, to engage Indigenous perspectives in resource management and access, and to work with new partners to increase equitable access to the park.

All eyes were on Big Basin. Those who loved the park wondered how well and how quickly Big Basin would recover. State Parks and Parks California wondered, could equity and climate resilience take center stage in the park's recovery? Would these fresh approaches define a new era for park planning?

Parks California and State Parks' statutory partnership allowed them to act fast. In support of the park's reimagining, Parks California:



SC

Big Basin Redwoods State Park began to reopen to visitors on July 22, 2022, less than two years after the fire.

Parks California translated lessons in climate planning and community access into training and tools for use across the State Park system. State Park Districts are now better prepared to employ new approaches in park planning moving forward.

Quickly hired a skilled planning professional to embed within Big Basin State Park staff, adding much needed capacity

Facilitated an immediate post-fire inventory and coordinated site visits and press so that park staff could focus on a vision and strategy for recovery

Coordinated with the park's key nonprofit partners—Sempervirens Fund, Save the Redwoods League, and Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks—to proactively engage the public and community leaders in creating a shared recovery vision with State Parks

Reduced barriers for Indigenous leaders to participate in the process, providing compensation for their expertise and guidance in planning efforts

“Everyone had a role to play. Parks California was the perfect partner to coordinate our shared efforts because their mission and goals are the same as ours, by design. They come from a perspective that looks broadly at how to align their work with the Department's needs, which makes them unique. Parks California also supported elements of the recovery that wouldn't have happened otherwise: a big part of the vision was to expand public access and be more inclusive in our planning, and Parks California's programmatic assistance and grantmaking made those possible.”

—Chris Spohrer

Santa Cruz District Superintendent, California State Parks

GUIDING PRINCIPLES: A COLLABORATIVE VISION FOR RECOVERY

- Prioritize forest health
- Provide equitable, diverse, and evocative visitor experiences
- Diversify transportation and access opportunities
- Practice land stewardship
- Include Indigenous perspectives
- Promote landscape connectivity
- Design with reverence and resilience
- Engage the park community and build partnerships

Provided project management of general site plans for facilities and restoration built on visionary guiding principles (see pullout) informed and embraced by community partners

Reconnected stakeholders with the park by providing ongoing updates on the park's conditions and recovery efforts

Provided funds to increase access to the park, realizing the vision of community partners

CANDLESTICK POINT

THE COMMUNITY'S PARK

Candlestick Point State Recreation Area is a shoreline park that provides access to open space and recreation (including fishing, biking, bird watching, hiking, and windsurfing) in one of San Francisco's most underinvested neighborhoods, Bayview Hunters Point. This community has experienced disproportionate levels of forced displacement, environmental harm, and other issues over many decades. In fact, Candlestick Point became a state recreation area thanks to the efforts of local residents who organized for environmental justice in the 1970s.

Candlestick Point narrowly avoided closure in 2011-2012 due to state budget cuts. In the decade since, the park has continued to face challenges while also grappling with the consequences of the demolition of Candlestick Park stadium and subsequent deterioration of the lands, roadways, and sidewalks adjacent to the park, including unmanaged flooding. The park faces issues common to public spaces in urban settings, such as illegal garbage dumping and vandalism. As a result, residents feel cut off from the park and point to a number of concerns that include lack of trust, safety, accessibility, belonging, and recreational opportunities. Local partners and State Park staff are dedicated to helping the park regain its role as an integral part of the community.

Parks California began meeting with local community members in 2020 to understand their needs. To support ongoing community engagement, Parks California:



REVITALIZING A PARK, TOGETHER

When Parks California and State Parks selected San Francisco artists Joe Colmenares and Hazel Barrera to design and produce a mural within Candlestick Point, the duo asked, “After we finish the mural, what happens next?” As locals with a strong connection to the park and its surrounding neighborhood, their question had a deeper backstory. It also spurred transformative community engagement.

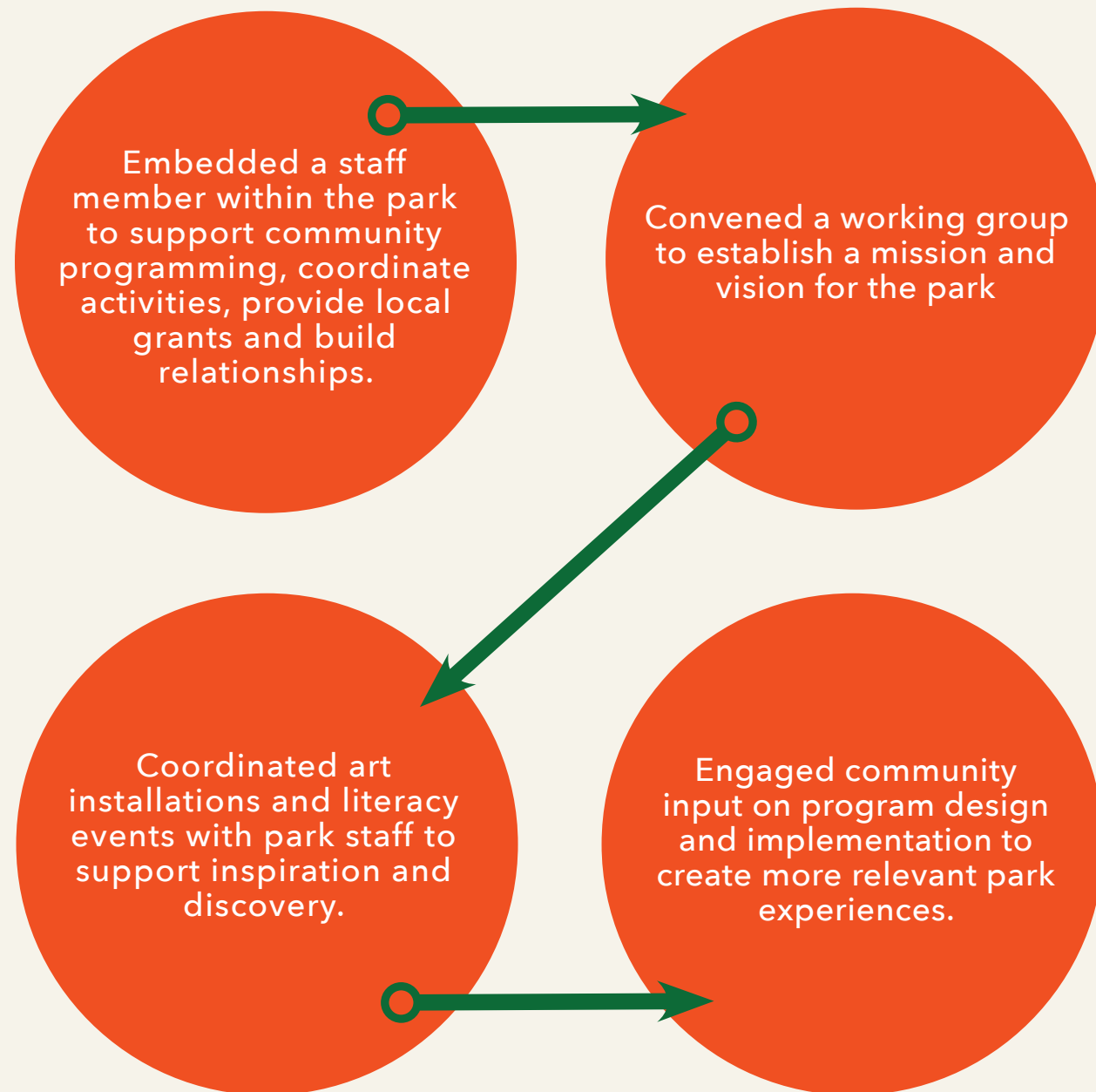
Joe and Hazel had a vision to co-create their murals with community members, inspiring ownership and care for the art and for the park. They created their first mural in 2021 with the help of local students, who painted jackrabbits across a large windscreen facing the San Francisco Bay. Park staff also led the students in educational activities and local community organizations hosted “inspiration stations.”

Joe and Hazel designed several more murals highlighting special aspects of the park. This time, they brought the murals to life during community events that attracted large crowds of all ages. From California poppies to shorebirds and butterflies, and even a new park logo in the shape of home plate—an homage to the Candlestick Park sports arena that once stood adjacent to the park—kids and adults participated in mural painting alongside activities like guided walks, food trucks, kite flying, face painting, and inspiration stations.

“Parks California and State Parks’ team as a whole, they’re very interested in what the community has to say,” says Joe. “It shows that they care and that they want to see the park for what it could be. Everyone involved—from the ground up—they are giving it their all, they are contributing to the bigger picture.”

—Joe Colmenares
Mural artist, Custom Lifestyle SF

The mural projects at Candlestick Point are one example of how art can create community connections to parks in non-traditional ways. Over the next four years, in partnership with California State Parks and the California Arts Council, **Parks California will administer \$8M** to establish art installations and programming in local community parks.



Community events supported by Parks California have brought the Bayview neighborhood together to celebrate community through art and nature.



PARKS FOR THE FUTURE

CLIMATE RESILIENT LANDSCAPE STEWARDSHIP

Given how important natural ecosystems are in protecting and defending against climate change, it is critical that State Parks remain resilient, collaboratively stewarded spaces. Parks California works with State Parks leadership to pilot innovations in resource management and park planning and scale best practices across the system. Some examples include:

CLIMATE FELLOWS

Parks California Climate Fellows serve year-long positions that advance climate planning at California State Parks. Fellows are embedded within State Parks offices to provide scientific expertise, facilitation, planning, and technical assistance in support of climate adaptation and mitigation strategies.

“When we undertake a major planning effort to address sea level rise or climate change system-wide, staff from across the Department are asked to contribute on top of their regular duties. The Climate Fellows have been critical to coordinate and facilitate our planning, to engage experts from the National Park Service and other systems engaged in similar work, and to bring those learnings back to our staff and move our thinking forward. We have a number of General Plans at the park level that address climate change in some way, but this is the first time we are able to take a systematic approach and consistently assess our vulnerabilities and adaptation opportunities across all State Parks. This is truly transformative—and exactly the kind of systems-level impact we hoped Parks California would support.”

—Jay Chamberlin

Natural Resources Division Chief, California State Parks



EARLY DETECTION RAPID RESPONSE (EDRR)

Early detection and rapid response (EDRR) is a management approach that capitalizes on the ability to most effectively eradicate invasive plant populations when they are small. By detecting a new invasive plant before it has a chance to spread or build a large seed bank, managers can respond early enough in the invasion process to fully eradicate the species from a given area.

The One Tam partnership in the Bay Area District developed an EDRR protocol to coordinate actions across local, state, and national park jurisdictions on Mount Tamalpais. Parks California is now scaling this EDRR training to staff across all districts in the State Parks system.

“Expanding essential EDRR programs is just one example of Parks California’s unique ability to connect innovative land stewardship approaches from the District-scale to the State-scale in partnership with State Parks.”

–Sharon Farrell

Founding Board Member, The Stewardship Network & One Tam co-founder

PARKS FOR EVERYONE

EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE ACCESS

Parks California invests in local partnerships that create access and remove barriers for diverse communities so that State Parks can better serve all Californians. To date, Parks California has granted \$4.5M to 96 community organizations, reaching 28,934 people and thousands more indirectly. Some grantmaking examples include:

ROUTE TO PARKS

Parks California launched the Route to Parks grants program in 2020 to support local organizations that are best able to address transportation and other obstacles faced by their communities. More than 100 programs have connected people and parks using these grant funds. Route to Parks is helping people develop a connection, appreciation, and love for nature. According to surveys, first-time park visitors comprise 50-80% of participants each year.

“ We’ve reached out to a few of our participants, all of which are formerly incarcerated including myself, and mostly folks who’ve never really experienced nature in this way—being in a state park, staying for a few days—and I think there’s kind of a misnomer that this is not accessible, that it is not something that could be accessed by the average person....you can already see how much they love it, and how new it is, and how vibrant they are. How they’re responding to it is more than we even hoped. ”

—Jamala Taylor
Reentry Manager, Insight Garden Program



CAREER PATHWAYS

Career Pathways grants support programming that builds skill sets and generates interest in applying for State Parks jobs, particularly among communities that have historically been excluded from parks.

Supported by a Career Pathways grant, the Amah Mutsun Land Trust and Tribal Band is working with California officials to change views about cultural and prescribed burns as beneficial land management tools. Quiroste Valley serves as a model for literally fighting fire with fire—and the powerful ecological benefits of Indigenous stewardship practices.

Due to three waves of colonization and forced displacement from their ancestral territory, the Tribe largely lives in diaspora across California and elsewhere. This creates many layered barriers to Tribal members returning to do stewardship work in their lands. Career Pathways provides critical gap funding for costs such as transportation, food, additional trainings, and program administration that would not usually be covered in work contracts.

“Trust has been built and continues to build through every meeting, conversation, and project together. It is strengthened by the many instances of pursuing shared funding, of reaffirming a shared goal to restore Mother Earth, and of course, by spending many hours together on the land.”

—Mohini Narasimhan

Development and Communications Manager, Amah Mutsun Land Trust



PARKS TO THE PEOPLE

BRINGING STATE PARKS TO THE PUBLIC IN CREATIVE WAYS

Arts in California Parks

Funding artists, culture bearers, and California Native American tribes to create artwork throughout state and local parks.

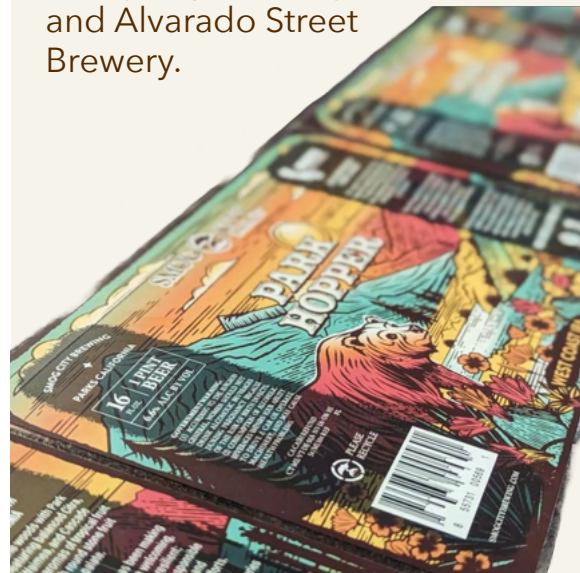


Return to Nature

A restored vintage clothing line developed with Transnomadica.

Park Hopper

A craft beer developed with Smog City Brewing and Alvarado Street Brewery.



Baywood Artists Show

Annual fine art show "State Parks Splendor" at Marin Art and Garden Center.

“Parks California is bringing us out into the open. We need to connect with everyone, not just the people who grew up camping in State Parks. When most people picture a State Park, they see a landscape or a resource. Parks California thinks differently—they think in terms of memorable experiences: a surf camp for kids, a concert on the lawn, a bike ride from San Francisco through Half Moon Bay to Big Basin. As our statutory partner, they aren't just focused on community engagement either. They understand the interplay between engagement and resource protection. As a resource management agency, we are not necessarily a community engager or social outfit, but Parks California is nimble and helps us connect.”

—Maria Mowrey

Bay Area District Superintendent,
California State Parks

PORTS Virtual K-12 Classrooms.

Technology to expand distance learning programs from twelve parks to fifty.

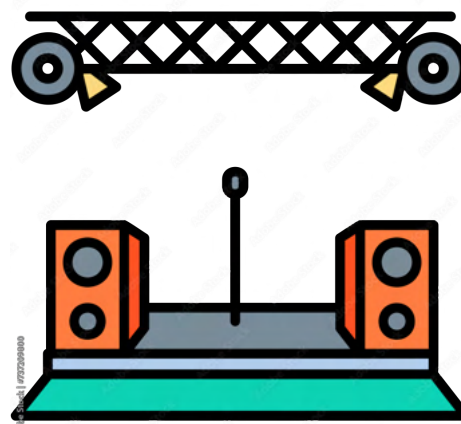


Art Collaborations

Obey Giant/Shepard Fairey and Jeremy Collins original art.

Virtual Concerts

Activating parks and bringing the community together during the pandemic.



Bike Rides

Friendraising and fundraising for California State Parks on two wheels.

On Tour with Dead & Company

Repping State Parks at Dead & Company's final tour.



THE POWER OF THE MODEL

THE BENEFITS OF A STATUTORY NONPROFIT PARTNERSHIP

1. Contributes to resilience

A well-aligned statutory nonprofit can provide much needed flexibility, capacity, and financial resources to its public partner. The nonprofit can quickly fill gaps and take action when timing may limit opportunities. It can also leverage public funds to attract contributions from private sources. Partners further contribute to resilience by increasing workforce development, skills, confidence, and morale among staff on both sides.

2. Elevates the agency's vision

Compounding crises (e.g. wildfires, climate threats, public health emergencies, and unstable or stagnant budgets) can trap public agencies in a cycle of reactive management, which in turn exacerbates vulnerabilities and hinders the agency's ability to plan for a changing future. The added flexibility and support of a statutory partner allows the agency to cast its sights beyond day-to-day operations and emergencies so its leaders can maintain an elevated, forward-looking vision.

3. Raises visibility

With the agency in a visionary rather than a reactive position, the statutory partner is an ambassador for that vision among the public, potential partners, funders, and other supporters. Raising the agency's visibility has a snowball effect of attracting even more support and expanding partners' vision of what is possible.

4. Expands participation

By brokering new relationships and adding flexibility and capacity, a statutory partner broadens opportunities for additional nonprofits, funders, and the public to connect with and invest in ongoing relationships with public resources. In addition to providing programming and facilitating new relationships, cultivating philanthropic support is an important role with a multiplying effect: it increases public awareness and connection at the same time that it attracts additional resources.

5. Creates opportunity, equity, and access

Partners accelerate equitable access and the creation of safe, welcoming spaces by inviting and supporting important perspectives from marginalized stakeholders. As a neutral facilitator with less institutional history, partners can be well positioned to bridge culture gaps and repair past relationships. Partners can also be more flexible to reduce barriers to participation with philanthropic funding and other in-kind support.

6. Scales innovation

Partnership catalyzes innovation by introducing new relationships, resources, and programs to public resources and their agencies. When a fresh approach succeeds locally, staff typically lack the capacity on top of their regular duties to develop the tools, training, and infrastructure supporting its widespread adoption. The statutory partner can work closely with the agency to scale these successes.

7. Makes systematic impacts

Because the partner is positioned to scale successes across the agency, its resource stewardship, resilience, access, and equity efforts have a systemic rather than piecemeal impact.

“ We need to allow for truly creative voices in everything that we're doing, we have to continue to mix things up or we're going to freeze parks in this era and become obsolete. Parks California keeps us open, they align stakeholders in a way that embraces innovative thinking. ”

—Armando Quintero
Director, California State Parks

HOW TO ACHIEVE IT

KEY INGREDIENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL STATUTORY PARTNERSHIP

PART I: BUILD THE PARTNERSHIP



The architects of this partnership spent years laying the groundwork and designing structures to support State Parks' highest ambitions.

RESEARCH

Design with the end in mind.

What are the systems' highest ambitions and what are its thorniest challenges? Identify model organizations that have proven the impossible and examine their enabling structures and authorities. Parks California was informed by congressionally chartered partners to federal lands, such as National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, National Park Foundation, and National Forest Foundation, and by direct park partners like Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy.

STRUCTURE

Create legal structures that support strong alignment.

Think carefully about the legal authorities required as well as supporting governance structures needed to reduce barriers. Parks California's enabling legislation specified an annual priority setting and budgeting process. It also specified ex officio roles on Parks California's board for the Director of California State Parks and the Director of California's Department of Finance to support alignment with the state.

ENGAGEMENT

Engage stakeholders in meaningful ways.

An early funder supported consultants to engage existing State Park partners in the feasibility, planning, and organizational design of the statutory partner. This helped illuminate Parks California's optimal role in a larger ecosystem and addressed potential concerns and opportunities before it was created. It also helped Parks California to make contributions that amplified others' successes.

SEED FUNDING

Give the new partner a "runway."

It can be difficult for the new partner to establish a track record if it has to focus early efforts fundraising for basic expenses. The architects of Parks California approached seed funders to create a "runway" supporting its growth. It was equally important to work with State Parks before the organization launched to identify a few key, high-priority projects to pursue immediately. When Parks California launched, it was well beyond the ideation stage and quick to develop a programmatic agenda in alignment with State Parks' priorities that tested and solidified the partnership.

PART II: GET STARTED

The first five years are a critical period. These guiding principles support a statutory nonprofit partner's successful launch.

CREATE CULTURE

There is a wealth of knowledge and best practice on partnerships. The late National Park Service superintendent Brian O'Neill's "21 Partnership Success Factors" is a foundational resource (see sidebar). It is critical that both partners are committed to the success of the partnership, foster a culture of collaboration, and follow best practices, including adopting a shared vision, building and maintaining trust, utilizing each other's strengths, sharing credit for successes, finding ways through red tape, and striving for excellence.

EMBRACE PARTNERSHIP SUCCESS FACTORS.

EMPOWER

Partnerships work best among peers functioning as equals. Bring partner staff on both sides to all critical meetings so they can benefit from the full context of your organization, participate meaningfully in joint decision making, and represent each others' interests with others outside your partnerships.

ENGAGE THE PARTNER AS AN EXTENSION OF THE AGENCY.

EXPERIMENT

When the statutory partner is structured to completely align with the agency's mission and priorities, it can be empowered to bring all of its creativity and resources to bear. Bring a sense of curiosity to early efforts. Begin with the highest impact priorities and experiment with what the partnership makes possible. A transactional relationship where the agency prescribes exactly how and what the partner will do only reproduces the status quo. With shared goals clearly defined, empower the partner to explore all tools available.

TEST THE BOUNDARIES AND CAPABILITIES OF PARTNERSHIP.

FOCUS

Choose initial projects that demonstrate the breadth and depth of what the partnership can offer the agency at scale, then support and empower the partner to deliver high-quality results. High-impact projects will raise the partner's profile and capabilities, ultimately increasing its ability to provide support to the agency. Avoid small requests that will ultimately limit the partnership's potential, especially initially. It can be tempting to ask the new partner to fill budget gaps and meet immediate service needs (such as, "we just need someone to clean the bathrooms") without adding capability or increasing the effectiveness of either partner. While the agency may see some immediate benefits, a transactional relationship will limit the partnership's potential over time, trapping it in a cycle of fundraising for piecemeal outcomes that lack impact.

INVEST IN THE PARTNER'S SUCCESS AND LAUNCH WITH FOCUS.

21 PARTNERSHIP SUCCESS FACTORS

by Brian O'Neill,
former National Park Service
Superintendent

As the Superintendent of Golden Gate National Parks, Brian O'Neill and his staff earned a reputation as a model partnership park where partnerships are a way of thinking about how best to accomplish the park's mission and build a community of stewardship. His white paper "21 Partnership Success Factors" has informed park partnerships across the United States and was a foundational document in Parks California's design.

- Focus on important needs.
- Make the partnerships a win-win.
- Adopt a shared vision.
- Negotiate a formal agreement.
- Ensure good communication.
- Ensure the partnership is owned by your whole organization.
- Maintain an environment of trust.
- Leave your ego and control at the door.
- Understand each partners' mission and organizational culture.
- Utilize the strengths of each partner.
- Find ways through the red tape.
- Build step by step.
- Strive for excellence.
- Diversify your funding sources.
- Constantly seek out and adopt best practices.
- Always be courteous and diplomatic.
- Honor your commitments.
- Celebrate success.
- Respect the right to disagree; act on a consensus basis.
- Network and build relationships.
- Put mechanisms in place to reinforce the partnership.

A CALL TO ACTION

Parks have something to offer everyone. They are places that inspire awe and wonder, offer respite and relaxation, and support physical and mental well-being. Many preserve cultural and historical treasures. Others are a frontline against climate threats, providing critical defenses and solutions to sea level rise, severe storm flooding, wildfires, and drastically rising temperatures. We need parks, and parks need people—not just jurisdictions, but people—to care for and steward them.

Parks California builds constituencies for parks by asking what communities' own interests are and finding ways to support those interests within state parks. It is significantly expanding investments in underserved areas in California by clearing paths for people who have been excluded and supporting them to define the road back. This powerful work fosters belonging, increases parks' value, and activates parks in new and exciting ways for future generations.

PARTNERSHIPS SUPPORT CHANGE FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Parks California is also helping State Parks become a leader in addressing biodiversity loss, overcrowding, wildfires, sea level rise, and more. The strength and flexibility of statutory partnership spur innovation and add capacity to meet unprecedented challenges, contributing to State Parks' resilience for decades—likely for centuries.

Parks everywhere are facing radically new environmental conditions and rising social consciousness, both of which require a change in business as usual. California State Parks is the largest state park system in the country; if transformation can take place here, it can take place anywhere. We hope these insights about the new public-private partnership model between California State Parks and its statutory nonprofit partner, Parks California, have sparked your imagination. We urge you to use this report to start a conversation about what is possible in your region or state.



WITH GRATITUDE

Powered by a shared vision and unique relationship with California State Parks, Parks California also shares its success with many community partners and supporters.

Acta Non Verba: Youth Urban Farm Project
Adventure Risk Challenge
Alvarado Street Brewery
Amah Mutsun Land Trust
Angeles Inspiring Connections Outdoors
Bay Area Wilderness Training, Project of Earth Island Institute
BayWood Artists
Big City Mountaineers
BIPOC Support Foundation
BMO
Brothers for Change INC
California Art Council
California Landscape Stewardship Network
California League of Park Associations
California Outdoor Recreation Foundation
California State Parks Foundation
Central Coast State Parks Association
Chino Hills State Park Interpretive Association
City Heights Community Development Corporation
City of Dreams
City of La Habra - Community Services
City Surf Project
Clockshop
Coastside State Parks Association
Color the Outdoors CORP
Community Bridges
Community Nature Connection
Computer Using Educators, Inc.
Crystal Cove Conservancy
Custom Lifestyle SF
David and Lucile Packard Foundation
Dead & Company

Disabled Hikers
DooDa Activities Corporation
Earth Discovery Institute
Earth Team
engageSimply
Exploring New Horizons Outdoor Schools
Fernandeño Tataviam Band of Mission Indians
Friends of San Diego Wildlife Refuges
Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks
Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy
Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation
Growers First Inc.
Growing Together Day Team
Growth Opportunities through Athletics, Learning & Service - GOALS
Hearts for Sight Foundation
Homeboy Industries
Hyde Hill Holdings, LP
Insight Garden Program
International Coalition of Sites of Conscience
Jeremy Collins
Justice Outside
Latino Outdoors
Laural Foundation
Literacy for Environmental Justice
Los Angeles Audubon Society
Los Angeles Conservation Corps
Los Angeles River State Park Partners
Lowell Community Development Corporation
Loyola Marymount University Center for Urban Resilience
Magic Tooth Bus
Marine Science Institute

Marmot
Mendocino Woodlands Camp Association
MeWater Foundation
Meztli Projects
Moral Conduct
Morgan Family Foundation
Mountain Parks Foundation
Napa County Office of Education
Nature for All
NatureTrack Foundation
Oakland Unified School District, Oakland Goes Outdoors
Orange County Community Foundation
Oceano Community Services District
Orange County Coastkeeper
Oregon State University
Outdoor Outreach
Oxnard Police Activities League, Inc.
Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History
PG&E Corporation Foundation
Pisces Foundation
Placer Sheriff's Activities League
Point Blue Conservation Science
Point Lobos Foundation
Poppy Reserve Mojave Desert Interpretive Association
Pukuu Cultural Community Services
Rafiki Coalition for Health and Wellness
Readi Ministries International
Real Options for City Kids (R.O.C.K.)
Redwood Community Action Agency
Regional Parks Foundation
REI
Resources Legacy Fund

Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples
San Diego Foundation
San Diego Gas & Electric
San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority
San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust
San Mateo County Libraries
Santa Barbara Police Activities League
Santa Monica Mountains Fund
Save California Salmon/Blue Lake Rancheria
Save the Redwoods League
Saved by Nature
SaveNature.org
S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation
Sempervirens Fund
SF Bike Coalition
Shepard Fairey

Sierra Institute for Community and Environment
Sierra State Parks Foundation
Smog City Brewing Co. LLC
Sonoma Ecology Center
StagelT
Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods
Student Conservation Association
The LEAP Institute
Transnomadica
TreePeople
Tribal EcoRestoration Alliance
Tuolumne River Preservation Trust
United American Indian Involvement, Inc.
University of Montana Center for Natural Resources
and Environmental Policy
Ventana Wildlife Society
Warriors for Christ Outreach Ministries
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**And a SPECIAL THANK YOU to those who
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Potrero Group is honored to support the work of Parks California. We are a leadership consulting firm that helps changemakers thrive by providing strategic planning, organizational development, and executive search to mission-driven organizations.

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