



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Parks Alliance Seeks Community's Help to Keep Sonoma County State Parks Open

Forum explores solutions for imminent State Park closures

Santa Rosa, CA (Oct. 12, 2011) — The Parks Alliance for Sonoma County is a coalition of community-based and land conservation organizations, along with local government, pulled together in response to the California State Parks Department's May announcement of planned park closures of 70 State Parks — five of which are in Sonoma County. This Sonoma County effort is one of a few throughout the state, including Marin and Napa Counties, to address local impacts and on-the-ground effects of the impending State Park closures.

With nearly 75 percent of the closures occurring in the northern part of the state, Sonoma County will lose five of its 11 State Parks when the closures occur, and service reductions have closed facilities and reduced open hours significantly at the remaining six parks. State Parks slated to close in Sonoma County on July 1, 2012 include Annadel State Park, Austin Creek State Recreation Area, Jack London State Historic Park, Petaluma Adobe State Historic Park and Sugarloaf Ridge State Park.

The Parks Alliance, comprised of Sonoma County Regional Parks, Sonoma Land Trust, Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, and a growing base of local nonprofit and community-based organizations, is seeking short- and long-term solutions to preserve and protect California's State Parks in Sonoma County. Initial funding for the Parks Alliance has been provided by the Sonoma Land Trust and the Sonoma County Regional Parks is providing office space. The group meets monthly and is managed by Dave Gould, a recently retired State Parks District Superintendent, and Lauren Dixon, a policy and program specialist with a background in community development and project management.

"Being forced into the idea of closing any State Park is unfathomable," says Gould. "So many people over the course of history in California have worked hard to provide these park resources for all to enjoy. Right now, closing them is not an option for the people of Sonoma County. They are very supportive of the efforts of the Parks Alliance and are the driving force behind this effort to keep the parks open."

Working closely with State Parks and its Foundation, the Parks Alliance has been gathering the most recent information available for dissemination to the public. It has launched a website, www.parksalliance.com, and continues to map community assets and assess local capacity to keep the five State Parks in operation.

“California has fallen on hard times,” says California State Parks Director Ruth Coleman. “We did everything in our power to keep the parks open, but with years of budget cuts, we simply ran out of options. Luckily, there are groups like the Parks Alliance for Sonoma County that can step up and bring the community together to pick up where we left off.”

According to Ralph Benson, the Executive Director of the Sonoma Land Trust, “The Parks Alliance provides a forum for the many organizations and agencies concerned with our parks in Sonoma County to come together, share ideas and innovations, promote new funding and not only keep all our State Parks open, but make them better.”

The next phase of work will include a fundraising campaign and a series of public events — including the Broadway Under the Stars event at Jack London State Historic Park that occurred on October 1 — to celebrate the five unique State Parks and to encourage the public to get involved through volunteerism and donations.

With the signing of AB 42 last week, the stage is set for local nonprofit associations to become key players in operating the five State Parks while adhering to the State Parks’ mission to protect the valuable natural and cultural resources of these parks. A fundraising campaign, will seek both public and private funding to keep our State Parks open.

“The State Parks are part of what make Sonoma County such a desirable destination for locals and visitors alike,” says Dixon. “Year-round, they walk, bike and ride horses on the trails of Annadel, camp at Austin Creek, explore the history of one of California's great literary figures at Jack London, dance the Fandango at Petaluma Adobe and explore the wonders of the night sky at Sugarloaf Ridge. We cannot allow these opportunities to disappear.”

For more information on how to get involved, please visit www.parksalliance.com.

Parks Alliance Coordinating Committee Members:

Back Country Horsemen
Bay Area Ridge Trail Council
Bike Monkey
California State Parks
Community Foundation Sonoma County
Conservation Corps North Bay
LandPaths
Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District
Sonoma County Regional Parks
Sonoma County Trails Council
Sonoma Ecology Center
Sonoma Land Trust
Sonoma Petaluma State Historic Parks Association
Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods
Valley of the Moon Natural History Association/ Jack London Lake Alliance
Valley of the Moon Observatory Association