

STATE PARK CRITERIA

Prepared by Newton B. Drury, Chief, Division of Beaches and Parks, California, the following article originally appeared in California NEWS AND VIEWS, Vol. 13, No. 11, November, 1956, under the feature "Chiefly Speaking."

What Is A State Park?

It is easier to ask a question like this than to answer it definitively. Over many years some of us have felt that we knew what were the appropriate standards to which a great state like California should adhere in selecting areas for its State Park System. These standards, in my opinion, have been adhered to surprisingly well, considering everything. Much has been written on the subject, but until the issue of deciding upon the worth of certain projects that were added by amendment to the 1956 budget we have not recently put in concise form the considerations involved in the basic concept of State parks. At the meeting in Los Angeles on October 19, 1956, the State Park Commission, after due consideration and review of the text, adopted the following set of principles:

State Park Criteria

Ever since the Legislature in 1927 authorized the establishment of a State Park System, and by statute (Public Resources Code, Section 5006) empowered the State Park Commission to acquire, as a part of that system such lands and other properties as "the Commission deems necessary or proper for the extension, improvement or development of the State Park System", there have been definite criteria for the establishment of State Parks.

These have been used as a guide by the Commission in the acquisition of State Park lands in accordance with their understanding of the State Park concept since the founding of the system. They have been frequently stated, notably in four documents: (1) The Olmsted Survey and Report to the Legislature (Chapter 764, Statutes of 1927); (2) Statement by the original State Park Commission in 1928, entitled "State Parks--What Are They?"; (3) Supplementary Olmsted Survey of 1950 (Section 1, Chapter 1422, Statutes of 1945); and (4) The Five Year Master Plan, 1956.

These criteria involve certain principles:

1. Areas in the State Park System should be of statewide and not local significance.
2. They should possess outstanding qualities of landscape or features of special significance that make their preservation and public recreational use a matter of statewide concern.
3. They should be on a scale worthy of inclusion in the State Park System.
4. They should be unified and complete areas with logical

boundaries.

5. State Parks are primarily natural areas. Developments are for the purpose of making the areas available for public enjoyment in a manner consistent with the preservation of natural attractiveness and should be of the simpler sorts in a natural environment (i.e. camping, picnicking, sightseeing, nature study, hiking, riding, boating, swimming, fishing, etc.) involving no major modification of their lands, forests and waters, and without extensive introduction of artificial features such as athletic fields, playgrounds, golf courses, and other forms of recreational developments that primarily are for local benefit.

6. Funds for the State Park System are not intended to be used as a subsidy to local recreational developments. Important as these are, they have traditionally been considered as the responsibility of local communities, and are not a part of or related to the State Park System, which supplements on a statewide basis the local recreational provisions.

7. The State Park areas should be equitably distributed so as to assure proper balance in their use by the citizens of all parts of the State, but not necessarily located in specific communities on the basis of population or area. The statewide value of the present State Park System is shown by the fact that a majority of visitors to many remote parts come from the populous centers of the State. One of the primary purposes of the State parks is to afford city dwellers the benefits of life in the open country; therefore, county lines cannot be taken as the basis of distribution of parks, but rather the determining factor should be the availability of the types of lands that can most satisfactorily afford the sorts of outdoor recreation that are characteristic of State Parks.

8. In determining the value to the different parts of the State of areas proposed for State Park purposes, not only should reasonable accessibility to the entire population be taken into account, but also the relative cost to the State in terms of the types of recreation characteristic of State Parks.

The above and other established principles have been followed by successive State Park Commissions to the best of their ability in building up the State Park System, and according to the experience and understanding of the State Park Commission have been generally supported by the Legislature and the people of the State. They are the basis of action by the State Park Commission in carrying out the responsibility placed upon it by the Legislature.

▲▲▲