

Division of Parks and Forestry Proposed Budget Summary

This document identifies potential reductions to the State Park Service as a result of the Governor's proposed Fiscal Year 2009 budget. The document outlines potential impacts to the future operations of the New Jersey State Park System as a result of the proposed reductions.

An \$8.8 million reduction from the \$34 million Parks Management General Fund appropriation is anticipated.

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An approximate \$1 million reduction would be made to the summer, winter and overtime allocations. Elimination of the winter blanket, which funds hourly employees in the off-season, would result in office hour reductions from November 1st through March 31st annually. During this time period, park offices statewide (except for Liberty State Park and Island Beach State Park), would be closed to the public on Mondays and Tuesdays. Summer blanket reductions and overtime reductions would result in area closures and the elimination of services.

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Operating funds system-wide would be reduced by 20 percent (\$1.4 million). Merely reducing the hours of parks or closing parks periodically will not close the large-scale funding deficit. The majority, approximately 80 percent, of the State Park Service budget funds salaries (rather than operating costs). In order to achieve the targeted cuts, staffing must be reduced, necessitating the closure of areas and elimination of services.

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Approximately \$800,000 would be achieved through the elimination of 16 vacant, funded positions. These vacant positions were previously allocated to Trenton Headquarters, as well as field areas statewide.

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The staffing budget would be reduced by approximately \$4 million as follows: Full elimination of services and/or closure would occur at the following areas: Monmouth Battlefield State Park; Stephens State Park (administered under Hopatcong State Park, which will remain open); High Point State Park; Brendan

T. Byrne State Forest (including Indian King Tavern); Round Valley Recreation Area; Parvin State Park; Jenny Jump State Forest; Worthington State Forest; and Fort Mott State Park (including Hancock House).

Partial elimination of services and/or closures would occur at Ringwood State Park (including reduced hours at Ringwood Manor, closure of swimming at Shepherd Lake Recreation Area & Steuben House), D&R Canal State Park (including reduced interpretive services and closure of Bulls Island Recreation Area) and Washington Crossing State Park (40 percent reduction in interpretive staff – resulting in reduced hours of operation at Clarke House, Johnson Ferry House and the museum).

- There would be several organizational consolidations that will impact the four regional offices, Kittatinny Valley State Park and Voorhees State Park.

[Explanation of consolidation: Targeted staff from each park would be part of the 80 persons being laid off statewide. Each park would then be managed by a nearby park. In this case Voorhees State Park would be administered by Spruce Run Recreation Area. Kittatinny Valley Would be administered by Swartswood. The immediate impact on KVSP is as follows: 3 positions are targeted for layoff and the other 3 would report to Swartswood beginning on July 1, 2008. All employees subject to layoff do have bumping rights within their permanent title. All services previously offered at KVSP would be eliminated, the office would be permanently closed, restrooms would remain open and be cleaned by crews coming from Swartswood, and the grounds and trails would be maintained as best as possible by crews from Swartswood. Park Police are being reassigned to Hopatcong. There would be little or no Park Police presence on the Sussex Branch Trail and Paulinskill Valley Trail or KVSP.]

The methodology for closure or elimination of services was as follows:

- What is the approximate visitation/attendance at the site?
 - What is the revenue generated by an area compared to operational and staffing costs?
 - Are similar public services provided at a nearby state site?
 - Can the area be effectively closed to the public and will such closure result in savings?
- This analysis resulted in a list of areas distributed throughout the park system's four regions whose closures would yield the required savings from our budget while minimizing the impact to park users and loss of revenue. Approximate revenue loss for the targeted sites is approximately \$860,000 out of a total of approximately \$7.5 million in revenue generated by the system annually.
- Some areas, even when closed, may still accrue significant, ongoing caretaking costs necessary to protect both the public and the resources. Specific closure plans would be developed area by area.

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The State Park Police budget would be reduced by approximately \$740,000. The budget will maintain funding for State Park Police patrols to monitor closed parks.

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In addition to the elimination of vacant positions in Trenton Headquarters, staff costs in the Director and Assistant Director offices and the Historic Preservation Office would be reduced (\$500,000).

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Funding for the D&R Canal Commission would be shifted from the General Fund to a fee-based, dedicated account (\$300,000).

The above reductions involve civil service procedures mandated by law.

Summarized below is an area by area list outlining public services impacted or eliminated as a result of full or partial area closures.

Ringwood State Park (Partial Elimination of Services/ Closures) – Shepherd Lake Recreation Area (swimming) would be closed. Ringwood Manor would have reduced hours. Steuben House is currently closed. The State Botanical Gardens and Skylands Manor would remain open.

D&R Canal State Park – (Partial Elimination of Services/Closures) Camping/office at Bulls Island Recreation Area would be closed. Interpretive services would be suspended.

Rockingham Historic Site would remain open. The towpath will remain accessible to the public.

Washington Crossing State Park (Partial Elimination of Services) –There would be a 40 percent reduction in interpretive staff resulting in significantly reduced hours of operation at the Clarke House at Princeton Battlefield State Park, the Johnson Ferry House and the museum.

Monmouth Battlefield State Park – (Full Elimination of Services/Closure) Visitor center and restrooms would be closed.

Stephens State Park – (Full Elimination of Services/Closure) Camping area would be closed. Stephens State Park is administered under Hopatcong State Park.

High Point State Park – (Full Elimination of Services/Closure) Swimming, camping areas would be closed. Office and interpretive center would be closed. Access to monument and some trails would be impacted.

Brendan T. Byrne State Forest – (Full Elimination of Services/Closure) Camping area/park office/group picnic area would be closed. Indian King Tavern, administered by Brendan Byrne State Forest, would be closed. Access to some trails would be impacted.

Round Valley Recreation Area – (Full Elimination of Services/Closure) Swimming, camping, Wallace House/Old Dutch Parsonage and park office would be closed.

Parvin State Park – (Full Elimination of Services/Closure) Swimming, camping, park office and interpretive center would be closed.

Jenny Jump State Forest – (Full Elimination of Services/Closure) Camping and park office would be closed. Access to some trails would be impacted.

Worthington State Forest – (Full Elimination of Services/Closure) Camping and park offices would be closed. Access to some trails would be impacted.

Fort Mott State Park – (Full Elimination of Services/Closures) Hancock House, park office and other historic sites would be closed. Access to ferry service would be provided.

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<http://www.nj.gov/governor/govmail.html>

Use the above link to contact the Governor's office directly by e-mail. It runs you through a form to complete and gives you a place to write a message.

<http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/members/legsearch.asp>

Use the above link to search for you local legislators in the Senate and Assembly.

Letters should include any or all of the following points:

1. A statement of protest of closing any State Park.
2. Question how much impact the proposed layoff of 80 park employees will significantly save budget. This total saved amounts to about \$4,000,000 out of a \$32,000,000,000 budget or about 0.0125%.
3. Another \$4,000,000 will be taken from the Park operating budget. Again, how will this significantly impact a \$32,000,000,000 budget.
4. Explain how closing parks, campgrounds, and swimming areas will have an effect on you personally.
5. Closing parks, campgrounds, and swimming areas will also affect the local economy, impacting local grocery stores, delis, gas stations, camping/outdoor equipment stores, bait shops, local farm markets, etc.
6. Eco-tourism takes a big hit.
7. In these times of a poor economy and high gas prices, families lose out on an inexpensive day out at the beach or picnic area if they can't visit a State Park.
8. In these times of a poor economy and high gas prices, families lose out on an inexpensive long weekend of camping or a week-long camping vacation if their favorite campground is closed.
9. Closing any facility will certainly have a negative impact on buildings and infrastructure, resulting in higher restoration costs in the future when or if the closed parks get re-opened.