Discovery Pass Sales At Half Expected

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

Posted on : January 16, 2012 at 5:49 am

OLYMPIA, Wash. - With Discovery Pass sales at about half what the State Parks Department had projected by this time, administrators announced another reduction. But this time, with the new Discover Pass as a main mode of earning revenue for the agency's operations, closing parks is not part of the equation."We've made some very tough decisions about how to make an $11 million reduction so we can live within our budget and stay above state-mandated minimum reserves," said Don Hoch, agency director. "The approach we're taking is to keep parks open. We're now almost completely reliant upon fees to run the park system, and we need people to buy the Discover Pass. In return, we're doing our best to keep parks open for people."The new reduction being undertaken now is focused primarily on restructuring the agency and making field operations more seasonal. The goal is to ensure that parks have near-current levels of staffing in place from May through September, when most people use parks.Hoch said As restructuring continues, numbers will continue to shift, but current estimates are that 123 of 189 permanent rangers will remain in place year-round, while 66 ranger positions shift to seasonal. Of 76 year-round construction and maintenance staff, approximately 60 will remain year-round. Next summer, there will be 449 park aides, compared with 440 in summer of 2011. It is anticipated that statewide, among all 116 parks, staffing will be approximately 20 fewer than in 2011. Staffing reductions and changes also are occurring in region and headquarters offices.Meanwhile, legislators have expressed support for agency-requested legislation proposing this change, which a recent survey indicates could generate additional public participation and revenue. While this won't solve State Parks' revenue gap entirely, it could help make the pass more workable for people and state recreation services over time.