

State Parks Commission to discuss budget reductions at Olympia meeting

Local News

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OLYMPIA - Feb. 26, 2009 - The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission will hear public comment on proposed 2009-11 budget reductions that could result in park transfers or mothballing at its regular meeting in Olympia next week.

The regular Commission meeting is scheduled to begin at 9 a.m. Thursday, March 5, at Commission Headquarters, 1111 Israel Road S.W., Olympia. The budget proposal agenda item and public comment are scheduled for no earlier than 1 p.m., beginning with a budget report. A full meeting agenda is available online at www.parks.wa.gov/commtg.asp.

The Commission will hear a report on the status of agency work to potentially transfer 13 parks to other public operators as part of the Governor's proposed 2009-11 budget, announced in December. The budget proposal, based on revenue forecasts predicting a state revenue shortfall of approximately \$5.7 billion, would require State Parks to reduce expenditures by 10 percent or \$10 million in General Fund support.

State Parks participated in the Governor's freeze in August and early autumn expenditure reductions to save money in the current budget. To meet requirements of the Governor's budget proposal for next Biennium, the Commission will make other cuts first in order to mitigate park transfers or closures.

These include reducing headquarters staff and programs, freezing equipment replacement, halting subsidies to non-core activities such as concessions and a consolidation of region offices.

The Commission has begun discussions with local governments to explore transferring 13 parks to other public operators. The parks on a list for potential transfer are Osoyoos, Brooks Memorial, Schafer, Bogachiel, Tolmie, Fay Bainbridge, Fort Okanogan, Wenberg, Fort Ward, Joemma Beach, Kopachuck, Lake Sylvia and Old Fort Townsend. Two additional parks, Nolte and Squilchuck, will potentially be mothballed until resources are once more available. For more information about the budget reduction proposal, see the news fact sheet at www.parks.wa.gov/newsreleases/. The Commission will consider public comment on the proposal as they implement the final state budget passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor.

In light of the February 2009 revenue forecast which predicts a worsening economy and a revenue shortfall of more than \$8 billion, the Legislature has asked the agency to develop a deeper reduction scenario to total \$23 million. The Commission will discuss possible criteria for selecting additional parks for potential mothballing. The Commission will welcome public comment on selection criteria. In morning business on meeting day, the Commission will consider extending the term of a concession agreement at Blake Island State Park from 20 years to 40 years, in exchange for a new operator to assume responsibility for all concession facility maintenance and improvements.

The current concession, Tillicum Village, offers park visitors a passenger ferry ride across Puget Sound to Blake Island for a hosted salmon dinner, interpretive programs and entertainment consistent with Northwest Coast Native American themes. Morning business also will include a report on the State Parks Capital Development program and an item asking the Commission to consider a perpetual maintenance easement for Bonneville Power Administration at Iron Horse State Park.

Commission budget work session: A Commission budget work session is scheduled to begin at 1 p.m. Wednesday, March 4, at State Parks Headquarters, 1111 Israel Road S.W., Olympia. The Commission takes no formal action or public comment at work sessions.