

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING

AB 618 (Bauer-Kahan)

As Amended May 18, 2023

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Requires changes to the Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) reservation system and requires State Parks to institute a reservation lottery system at up to five of the most popular camping and lodging sites.

Major Provisions

- 1) Requires any contract State Parks enters into, on and after January 1, 2024, for purposes of managing the State Parks reservation system, to include, but not be limited to, the following provisions:
 - a) A cancellation made within seven calendar days of the reservation start date shall result in credit that can be used for future reservations within five years of the original reservation start date;
 - b) The entire reservation cost shall be forfeited, and no credits shall be given, if the reservation holder does not show up within 24 hours of the reservation start time and the reservation holder has not provided advance notice to staff at the state park where the reservation is held;
 - c) The contractor shall send at least two reminder emails to reservation holders; and
 - d) Display the real-time availability of sites available for walk-up reservations.
- 2) Requires State Parks to, on or before January 1, 2025, and until January 1, 2029, implement a reservation lottery system for up to five of the most popular units of the state park system, as determined by State Parks based on units that have the most booking interest six months before the reservation date. Requires State Parks to report, on or before January 1, 2028, information regarding the reservation lottery system to the Legislature.

COMMENTS

State Parks oversees 280 park units throughout the state, with more than 15,000 campsites and other lodging options, like rustic cabins, cottages, tent cabins, floating campsites, and yurts. For many of these locations, reservations are available six months in advance of the arrival date through an online or phone-based reservation system called Reserve California, which is managed by a contracted vendor. Not all state park units utilize the Reserve California system, with roughly 150 park units lacking internet connectivity. The current reservation system contract expires in 2024. State Parks anticipates issuing a request for proposals (RFP) in Spring 2023 and awarding a new contract by August 2023.

Many camping and lodging locations are very popular and some sites are reserved within minutes of becoming available. State Parks estimates there are about 10 very popular locations. All sites become available for reservations at 8 a.m. six months prior to the reservation start date. However, there are anecdotal stories of fully reserved popular campsites with many empty spots

due to no-shows. State Parks estimates a system wide cancellation rate of 15%. It is unclear if this figure includes no-shows.

This bill requires any contract State Parks enters into, on and after January 1, 2024, for purposes of managing the State Parks reservation system to include provisions to incentivize early cancellations by increasing the financial consequences of a late cancellation or no-show. For example, under this bill, the maximum financial consequence would be the entire reservation cost plus fees for reservation holders that do not show up for their reserved site.

According to the Author

"All Californians should have equal opportunities and access to reserve a campsite within our public parks. [This bill] promotes outdoor access for everyone by requiring State Parks to adopt modifications to the online camping registration system that deter late cancellations and no-shows."

Arguments in Support

The California State Parks Foundation writes in support, stating that this bill "proposes changes to the reservation system that incentivize early cancellations, which in turn should make more campsites available to everyone. [...] [E]veryone should get to enjoy our amazing state parks and [this bill] implements common sense changes to get more people into these beautiful places.

Arguments in Opposition

No opposition on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, State Parks estimates ongoing annual costs of approximately \$256,000 (General Fund) for two positions in its accounting office to monitor and approve credit transactions, process deposits, and perform monthly reconciliation.

VOTES

ASM WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE: 15-0-0

YES: Bauer-Kahan, Mathis, Alanis, Bennett, Megan Dahle, Davies, Friedman, Hart, Wood, Pellerin, Blanca Rubio, Schiavo, Villapudua, Ward, Weber

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-0-5

YES: Holden, Bryan, Calderon, Wendy Carrillo, Mike Fong, Hart, Lowenthal, Papan, Pellerin, Weber, Ortega

ABS, ABST OR NV: Megan Dahle, Dixon, Mathis, Robert Rivas, Sanchez

UPDATED

VERSION: May 18, 2023

CONSULTANT: Keith Cialino / W., P., & W. / (916) 319-2096

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