

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING
AB 1804 (Hart)
As Introduced February 10, 2026
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Authorizes the Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) to work with the California State Library and individual library systems to provide park passes. Further, makes findings and declarations regarding equitable and inclusive access to the state park system.

Major Provisions

COMMENTS

There are 280 park units (beaches, historic sites, museums, off-highway vehicle recreation areas, parks, etc.) in the state park system. State Parks fully operates 189 of those park units. The remaining 91 park units are either fully operated or co-managed by park partners; of these, public agencies operate 44 park units, concessionaires operate one park unit, and 45 units are either fully operated or co-managed by nonprofit entities. Currently, 19 of the 91 park units operated by nonprofits, public agencies, or concessionaires do not accept passes. At most parks, day use fees are charged for vehicle day use only with no charge to walk or bike into the parks. These charges are generally \$10 per vehicle, but may increase on certain holidays or during peak season. Most historical parks and museums charge a day use fee per person.

State Parks offers several forms of discounted pass. These include a Disabled Discount Pass (\$3.50), a California State Parks Golden Bear Pass for low-income individuals (no cost), a California State Parks Limited Use Golden Bear Pass (\$20), and a Distinguished Veteran Pass (no cost). Distinguished veterans are defined as those who have been honorably discharged with a 50% or greater service-connected disability, individuals held as prisoners of war, or recipients of the Medal of Honor. There are also two free entry pilot programs including the (1) California State Parks Adventure Pass that provides free entry for fourth graders and their families at 19 state parks throughout the state and (2) the California State Parks Library Pass that provides free passes to every public library throughout the state. All free and discounted entries are generally provided by a pass, with the exception being active duty and reserve military personnel and veterans receive free entry to most park units upon proof of service on Memorial Day and Veterans Day.

In 2021, State Parks received funding to create a pilot Library Pass Program, which has grown into today's Program. According to the March 19, 2025 agenda for Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 4, data that State Parks has collected from surveys of Program users indicate that the Program serves participants across a range of incomes, including those at the lower end. Specifically, the survey found that 23% of respondents earn \$30,000 or less; 19% earn between \$30,001 and \$60,000; 15% earn between \$60,001 and \$90,000; and 11% report earning between \$90,001 and \$120,000. Among survey respondents, 64% identified costs as a factor for not previously visiting state parks. State Parks notes that while the Program is available throughout the state, State Parks has taken steps to increase access within lower-income communities by providing a larger proportion of passes to library branches located in areas with high poverty index percentages.

The Governor's 2025–26 budget (AB 102, 2025) approved a one-time transfer of \$6.75 million from the General Fund to the State Park Recreation Fund for the Program. This year, State Parks has put forth a budget change proposal for another \$6.75 million to maintain the Program for an additional year. This proposal will provide 33,000 State Library Parks Passes to more than 1,100 library branch locations throughout the state. A single pass is valued at \$195, so this one-time transfer covers the market value of the passes and at least some of the costs to operate the Program.

According to the Author

"[This bill] builds on California's commitment to expanding equitable access to our state parks and ensuring all families can enjoy the health, recreation, and community benefits that parks provide. The [Program] is a proven, community-based model that helps reduce cost barriers, support mental health, and increase physical activity. Despite its clear benefits, the Program has relied on annual budget decisions and must be reconsidered year after year, creating uncertainty for a Program that many low-income families depend on. [This bill] helps protect and strengthen the [Program] and keeps a practical, no-cost pathway to the outdoors available for Californians who might otherwise be priced out."

Arguments in Support

California State Parks Foundation, the sponsor of this bill, writes in support. They extol the benefits of the Program indicating that the library pass is one of the most sought-after library items. They write that "[this bill] seeks to expand on the ongoing success of the program by codifying it in [state law], making it more likely that passes will be funded on an ongoing basis, while still maintaining budget flexibility for the state."

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, this bill has the following fiscal impact:

One-time or ongoing revenue loss [State Park and Recreation Fund (SPRF)] and cost pressure (General Fund or special fund) of an unknown but significant amount, likely in the low millions of dollars, for State Parks to provide vehicle day-use annual passes to support the [Program].

For reference, the Governor's January budget for fiscal year (FY) 2026–27 proposes an ongoing transfer of \$6.75 million from the General Fund to the SPRF for the Program to continue providing 33,000 library park passes to more than 1,100 library branch locations throughout the state. A single vehicle day-use annual pass is valued at \$195, so this proposed transfer covers the market value of the passes and at least some of the costs to operate the program.

According to a February 2024 Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) report, the SPRF is projected to have an annual gap of approximately \$15 million between its estimated revenues and projected expenditures in each of the next few years. This structural deficit would cause SPRF to become insolvent by FY 2028-29.

The LAO recently warned of General Fund structural deficits of around \$35 billion per year in the 2027-28 fiscal year and ongoing.

VOTES

ASM WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE: 12-0-1

YES: Papan, Jeff Gonzalez, Alanis, Alvarez, Bains, Bennett, Boerner, Caloza, Gallagher, Hart, Ward, Rogers

ABS, ABST OR NV: Ávila Farías

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 15-0-0

YES: Wicks, Hoover, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

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CONSULTANT: Stephanie Mitchell / W., P., & W. / (916) 319-2096

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