
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anna Caballero, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 616 (Caloza) - Department of Parks and Recreation: state parks: California State Library Parks Pass Program

Version: May 23, 2025

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: August 18, 2025

Policy Vote: N.R. & W. 7 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Ashley Ames

Bill Summary: This bill would authorize the Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks), upon appropriation by the Legislature, to provide vehicle day use annual passes, free of charge, to the California State Library.

Fiscal Impact:

- One-time or ongoing forgone revenue (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 State Library Parks Pass Program.

Background: According to State Parks, the State Park System consists of 280 state park units, over 340 miles of coastline, 970 miles of lake and river frontage, 15,000 campsites, 5,200 miles of trails, 3,195 historic buildings and more than 11,000 known prehistoric and historic archaeological sites; the largest and most diverse recreational, natural, and cultural heritage holdings of any state agency in the nation. More than 68 million people annually visit California's State Park System.

Reduced Rate or Free State Parks Passes: State Parks offers a number of annual passes to the general public for a fee. There are five passes offering free or discounted entry to State Park units on an annual or per-visit basis:

- Adventure Pass – offers free entry to 54 state parks to fourth graders and their families, valid for September 1 to August 31 of the child's fourth grade year.
- Disabled Discount Pass – for \$3.50, offers a lifetime pass to persons with permanent disabilities entitling the bearer to a 50% discount on vehicle day use, family camping, and boat-use fees at over 100 park units.
- Distinguished Veterans Pass – offers a free lifetime pass for vehicle day use, family camping, and boat use at over 100 park units to veterans meeting certain criteria.
 - Veterans and active duty military can also receive a reduced fee or free day use at state parks units operated by the state and accessible with a vehicle day use annual pass on Memorial Day and Veterans Day (Public Resources Code (PRC) §5011.6).
- Golden Bear Pass - offers social services recipients and low income seniors a pass for free vehicle day use access, valid for a calendar year.

- Senior Golden Bear Pass – for \$20, offers individuals 62 and over with free entry to many state parks during non-peak seasons, valid for a calendar year.

There are two “full price” annual state parks passes.

- The Explorer Vehicle Day Use Annual Pass is valid for one year and provides vehicle entrance to 134 state parks for \$195.
- The Golden Poppy Vehicle Day Use Annual Pass is valid for one year and provides vehicle entrance to 112 state parks for \$125.

California State Library Parks Pass. In partnership with the First Partner’s Office and the California State Library, State Parks provides free vehicle day use entry to over 200 participating state park units operated by State Parks for check out to library-card holders. The California State Library Parks Pass is valid for entry of one passenger vehicle with capacity of nine people or less or one highway licensed motorcycle.

Proposed Law: This bill would authorize State Parks, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to issue vehicle day use passes free of charge to the California State Library to support the California State Library Parks Pass Program.

Related Legislation:

AB 2713 (Hoover) of 2024 would have required State Parks to grant free access to state parks to a veteran or active duty or reserve military personal. AB 2713 was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 3163 (Mathis) of 2024 would have expanded the authority of State Parks to offer reduced fee or free day use of state parks operated by State Parks to veterans, active duty, or reserve military personnel to any additional days State Parks finds appropriate. AB 3163 was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 308 (Alanis) of 2023 would have required State Parks to grant free entry to state parks for eligible Gold Star Family members. AB 308 was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 2128 (Cooley) of 2022 would have required State Parks to grant 50% discounted admission to the general public to each unit of the state park system operated by State Parks every year on September 9th, California Admissions Day. AB 2128 was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 1358 (Cooley) of 2017 would have provided 50% discounted admission to California State Parks on California Admission Day. AB 1358 was vetoed by Governor Brown. The veto message stated: “While this bill is well-intentioned, [State Parks] already has the authority to offer discounted or free park admissions to the public. Furthermore, for the past few years [State Parks] has worked closely with the Parks Forward Commission to develop initiatives to expand visitations, increase access, and ensure the system's long-term sustainability. The public and our state parks are better served by allowing [State Parks] the flexibility to manage its operations without mandates that may harm its fiscal stability.”

AB 240 (Wilk) of 2015 would have allowed free day use entry to state park to vehicles with specialized license plates for veterans who are high military honor recipients and Gold Star families. AB 240 was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Staff Comments: For reference, the Governor's January budget for fiscal year (FY) 2025–26 proposes a one-time transfer of \$6.75 million from the General Fund to the SPRF for the State Library Parks Pass Program for one year. The Governor's budget proposal will provide 33,000 state 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 one-time 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.

According to the California State Parks Foundation, State Parks has a \$1 billion deferred maintenance backlog. Certain federal parks, facing staffing shortages, have closed or limited their operating hours, which will likely result in an increase in state parks visitation. This has the potential to result in a need for more funding to support additional staffing, maintenance, and capital improvements at state park units.

-- END --