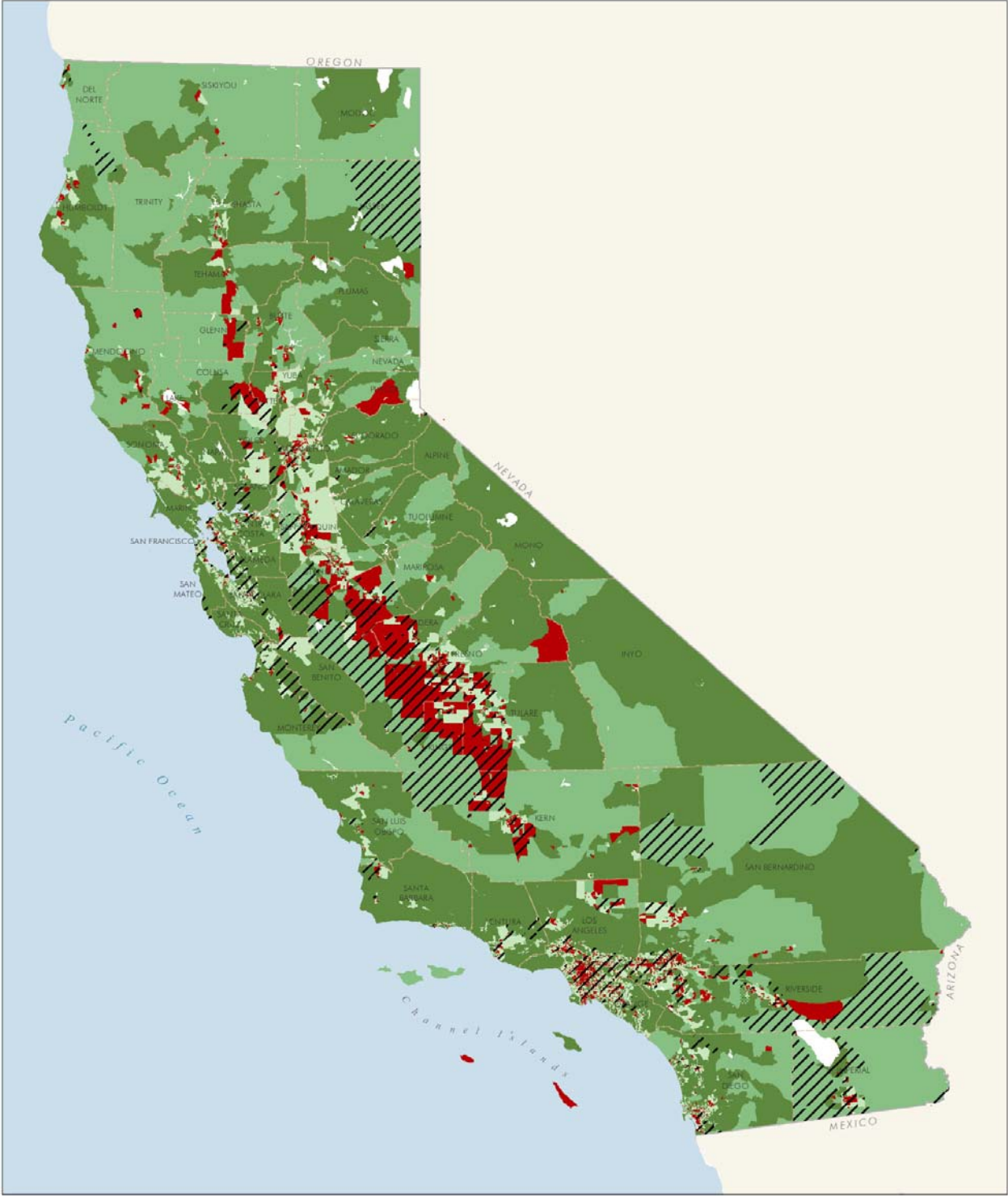


California Green Stimulus Coalition
Green Space and Equal Justice Recommendations
www.californiagreenstimulus.org



**California Green Stimulus Coalition
Recommendations to the Governor and the State Parks and Recreation Commission**

July 1, 2009

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger
State Capitol
Caryl Hart, Ph.D., Chair
California State Parks and Recreation Commission
Sacramento, CA

Dear Governor Schwarzenegger and Honorable Members of the Parks and Recreation Commission:

The California Green Stimulus Coalition respectfully presents the following recommendations on green space and equal justice. These recommendations are guided by the overarching California Green Stimulus Coalition principles and policy recommendations available on the web at www.californiagreenstimulus.org.

Economic Stimulus, Green Space, and Equal Justice

Even in the midst of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, people across the United States voted to tax themselves to provide billions of dollars for green space in November 2008. In its first hundred days, the Obama administration has launched a \$787 billion economic stimulus package to get the nation back to work, and additional funds have become available for green space from other federal, state, and local sources.

These funds offer an exceptional opportunity to promote economic vitality, environmental quality, and equal justice for all, particularly low income communities and communities of color. Such communities disproportionately suffer from a lack of green space, including parks and school fields, and the human health problems that stem in part from not having places for physical activity and recreation.

In addition to the federal, state, and local funds, a convergence of tools and opportunities is now available to promote equal access to green space for all:

- green space in parks and schools provides multiple benefits, including significant economic stimulus;
- new guidance by the United States Office of Budget and Management mandates that recipients of economic stimulus funds comply with equal protection laws;
- recent California legislation provides standards to measure progress and equity and hold public officials accountable, a best practice example to breathe substance into equal protection laws; and
- a diverse and growing alliance, including social justice, health, youth, job, and environmental advocates, supports equal access to green space to achieve healthy, livable communities for all.

Park and Open Space Policy Recommendations

1. Park Poor- Park projects in communities that are both park poor and economically poor should receive top priority over other projects.

The map on the cover of this Recommendations Report shows the communities throughout California that are park poor and income poor, as well as the communities that are disproportionately populated by people of color. The hatched red hot spots represent the most underserved communities in the state.

The California legislature explicitly recognized the need to address disparities in access to green space in 2008, when it enacted criteria for investing park funds in park poor and income poor communities. These criteria apply specifically to funds under a state-wide resource bond, Proposition 84, but the lessons for equal access to public resources are broader. Under the legislation, park poor is defined as three acres or less of parks per thousand residents. Income poor is defined as \$47,959 median household income or less. This legislation is a best practice example to establish standards to measure progress and equity, and to hold public officials accountable for infrastructure investments.

2. Multiple Benefits- Park projects that address physical, psychological and social health needs should receive priority.

Applying public health criteria to infrastructure investments could improve health and quality of life by providing opportunities for physical activity to reduce obesity and diabetes levels, improve academics, bring people together and provide positive alternatives to gangs, crime and violence.

The Los Angeles County health department, for example, has found that cities with fewer parks, recreation areas, and wilderness areas are more likely to have a higher prevalence of obesity. In Los Angeles County, children of color living in poverty with no access to a car have the least access to parks, and to schools with five acres or more of playing fields.

Parks and school fields should be accessible by foot, bicycle, transit, and other means. Parks and school fields should provide diverse programs to encourage use and bring people into the park. Programs should include physical activity to address health, obesity and diabetes for all age groups, from children and youth to seniors. Grass roots groups and other non-profits should be involved in community outreach and engagement and in helping to provide the programs, such as soccer and other sports.

3. Joint Use- Projects for the joint and shared use of parks, schools, and pools should receive priority, as they are important to expand open space opportunities in densely developed communities. Multi-benefit green spaces can clean the air and water, provide flood control, promote climate justice, and convert toxic sites and brownfields to green fields.

The economic stimulus package includes \$106 billion for the nation's schools. The federal government should prioritize projects that include the shared use of parks, schools and pools. The federal No Child Left Behind law should also require that quality physical education be taught in every public school, and that state physical education laws be enforced.

4. Environmental Benefits- The enormous environmental benefits of parks and natural open spaces should be highly valued, including clean air, clean water, habitat protection, shade, rain absorption and soil erosion reduction. Green spaces help reduce the carbon footprint by producing oxygen and absorbing carbon dioxide, which cuts down on global warming.

Global warming is fundamentally an issue of human rights and environmental justice that connects the local to the global. With rising temperatures, human lives—particularly in people of color, low-income, and indigenous communities—are affected by compromised health, financial burdens, and social and cultural disruptions. Moreover, those who are most affected are least responsible for the greenhouse gas emissions that cause the problem—both globally and within the United States. These communities are the least able to bear the burdens of correcting it absent appropriate conservation, economic, and equitable measures.

5. Conservation Corps- Conservation Corps job programs should be strengthened and expanded in order to keep young people in school, physically active and healthy, and out of gangs. The Corps also lead to permanent jobs and careers as stewards of the environment.

6. Public Art Projects- Public art projects should reflect diversity, democracy, and freedom. Studies such as Five Views published by the California Department of Parks and Recreation and the National Park Service offer guidelines on diversity and its manifestations on the land.¹ Native American sacred sites must be preserved.

7. Transit to Trails- Transportation funding should support transit to trails as alternatives to highway transportation in order to provide access to parks, mountains, and beaches.

8. Invest in Justice

Economic stimulus and green infrastructure programs should ensure equal protection of the laws covering access to public resources. Public infrastructure projects too often lead to “sacrifice zones” and “sacrifice communities” in ways that are both inequitable and illegal. Compliance with civil rights and environmental laws should be combined in the planning and enforcement process. Existing civil rights and environmental justice law should be strengthened and enforced, including:

- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its regulations prohibiting discrimination by recipients of federal funds, and parallel state laws (in California, Government Code 11135 and its regulations).
- The President’s Order on Environmental Justice, which directs federal agencies to identify and address disproportionate human health or environmental effects of their programs, policies and activities on minority populations and low-income populations.
- The right to sue to fight job discrimination.

9. Keep State Parks Open for All

Visitors to California’s state parks spend an average of \$4.32 billion per year in park-related expenditures, based on attendance estimates by State Parks and Recreation of about 74.9 million visitors a year, according to a recent study by the California State University at Sacramento. State officials have proposed cutting \$70 million from the State Parks budget this year, 87% of the budget, and \$73 million next year. This would result in the closing of 1,287,645 acres of state parks, which would undermine the federal government’s efforts to green California by acquiring 700,000 acres of green space. 87% of State Park employees would lose their jobs, undermining federal economic stimulus. *See generally* letter from the California Green Stimulus Coalition and diverse allies to Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, June 11, 2009 (updated); The City Project, Policy Report, *Economic Stimulus, Green Space, and Equal Justice* (April 2009).²

¹ *Five Views* is available at www.cityprojectca.org/blog/archives/708.

² The letter is available at <http://tinyurl.com/lgy2a>. The Policy Report is available at <http://tinyurl.com/lejwud>.