

# Lake Tahoe's state parks open, but with fewer amenities

By Kathryn Reed

By the time Fourth of July rolls around, all campsites in the Lake Tahoe Basin that are in a California state park will be open.

It's not the case now. At least one loop of each campground is open. But state budget cuts have forced superintendents at the various units to be creative with their resources – including personnel and recreational.



Tours of Vikingsholm run through Labor Day. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Pam Armas runs the Sierra District, which includes the basin and goes from Donner Lake to Mono Lake.

“We have not gotten any complaints and we expected to get some over Memorial Day,” Armas said of the closures. “It was so cold most people didn’t show up.”

She did get complaints in the winter when Sugar Pine was

closed to snow campers.

Just last year Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger was threatening to close some of the 279 state parks. Public outcry foiled that plan. In his May budget revise he is funding the state parks. But what the Legislature will propose is anyone's guess.

Still, there will be noticeable differences this summer up and down the state at the parks. Fewer interpretive programs are a given.

"The bathrooms might not be as clean as normal years. There will be a delayed response if someone calls (for a ranger)," Armas said.

This is because she and other superintendents are not allowed to fill vacancies when they arise. People are doing multiple jobs.



Pam Armas

Furlough days will end next month, but Schwarzenegger is proposing a pay cut of 15 percent for most state employees. Armas realizes many people are hurting financially, but she is noticing morale diminishing among her staff as they keep being asked to do more for less.

"I think this will be a really hard summer for all of us," Armas said of state parks workers.

Another obvious change the public will notice is the elimination of campfire programs and few, if any, junior ranger programs throughout the Sierra District.

“We don’t have enough rangers for public safety and campfire programs,” Armas said. “That is a big loss because people expect to see a campfire program. None are planned, but that doesn’t mean we won’t be able to do something as the summer goes along.”

She said all the parks are in the same boat when it comes to having to make choices about what to offer the public.

Vikingsholm and Ehrman mansions opened Memorial Day weekend and will stay open through Labor Day. Campgrounds will be open that long as well.



Vikingsholm is full of stories about old Tahoe.

Campground reservations in the Sierra District are tracking typical years, with expectations for them to be full once school is out the weather feels more like summer than winter in the mountains.