

Opinion: Needing to find another plan for state parks

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What next for California's struggling state parks system?

Fifty-eight percent of California voters Tuesday roundly rejected an initiative asking residents to pay an \$18 surcharge on their cars each year in exchange for free access to state parks.

Incoming Gov. Jerry Brown and lawmakers should not take Tuesday's vote as a statement on the value Californians place on their state parks. From redwoods to sea coast to mountains to historic sites, state parks draw 80 million visitors each year.

Yet state budget problems remain and Californians still feeling the bite of the economic downturn have signaled that they don't want new fees. What's needed now is bold vision by Brown and the Legislature, and a variety of old and new strategies. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's repeated threat to eliminate all general fund support for state parks is a non-starter.

Some have suggested raising park entrance fees to offset general fund cuts. This was tried four times in the past decade, and attendance declined. Caution should prevail. We don't want to price people out of their state parks.

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