

Criteria for closing state parks murky

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

Leaders of the California parks department on Tuesday were unable to explain to lawmakers the full list of criteria they used to pick 70 state parks for closure.

One-fourth of the state's 278 parks are set to be shuttered by next July, a move required by budget cutbacks. The parks agency must trim \$11 million in the current fiscal year, and another \$11 million in the next.

Some of the parks slated for closure by July 1 are encumbered by legal restrictions that could result in lawsuits. Others are defined by the state as "outstanding" resources that require special protection.

Some house a wealth of historical artifacts that must be carefully packed, shipped and stored to protect them from vandals and thieves.

Parks officials said at an Assembly oversight hearing that the closure list was assembled by a dozen park executives who met for three weeks.

They looked at park revenue, visitation, maintenance needs and historical value – criteria approved by the Legislature in Assembly Bill 95 in March.

But they otherwise used largely subjective criteria and used no formal ranking method, said Bill Herms, deputy director of the department.

Read the whole story