

Opinion: Find a way to keep state parks open

By Noreen Evans

California's state park system was established in 1926. Ranging from San Onofre State Beach in Southern California to Del Norte Redwoods in the north, California's 270 state parks include historic treasures such as California's missions, Fort Ross and our first state Capitol, as well as natural wonders like Lake Tahoe, the redwood forests and Castle Crags. Our parks provide summer vacation sites for families, as well as destinations for tourists from all over the world.

Our parks belong to the people, and the people have loved them and invested time and money in them. While I applaud the *Press Democrat's* support for keeping our state parks open ("State parks need allies not rivalries," Sunday), I am dismayed that the *Press Democrat* fails to recognize the real problem: the state is actively undermining ongoing negotiations with local nonprofits.

Nonprofit supporters were in the process of developing operating agreements for several beloved North Coast parks – Hendy Woods, Russian Gulch, Standish-Hickey, Westport Union Landing, Austin Creek and Sugarloaf Ridge. Local citizens were actively engaged in developing these operating agreements to save their local parks. However, the state has delayed its negotiations with these nonprofits, while at the same time developing requests for proposals aimed at private, for-profit companies.

Fortunately, the state backed off its proposal to privatize 11 parks in their entirety after being faced with stiff opposition from myself and others and with increased media scrutiny. However, the state is proceeding to seek bids for

concessions from for-profit companies to take over some operations in these parks.

State Sen. Noreen Evans, D-Santa Rosa, represents the 2nd Senatorial District, which includes all or portions of Humboldt, Lake, Mendocino, Napa, Solano and Sonoma counties. She chairs the Legislative Women's Caucus and the Senate Judiciary Committee.

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