

Proposals in the works to keep California parks open

By Torey Van Oot, Sacramento Bee

Democratic Sens. Joe Simitian and Noreen Evans have rolled out a proposal aimed at keeping gates open at more than 50 California state parks set to close this summer.

The proposal, which will be heard by a Senate budget subcommittee this afternoon, includes shifting as much as \$40 million from existing accounts for road maintenance, septic system repairs and trails and off-highway vehicle funds to cover parks' costs.

Other recommendations include facilitating operating agreements with nonprofits, improving entry fee collection and exploring other funding.

State parks officials announced last year that 70 of the state's 278 parks would be closed, projected to save about \$22 million. The department has been able to form partnerships with nonprofits and local governments to keep 16 of those parks open. Richard Stapler, spokesman for Natural Resources Secretary John Laird, said officials are involved in talks involving about a dozen more parks.

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