

Budget constraints taking toll on national parks

By Claire Veyriras, California News Service

WASHINGTON – Visitors to California’s national parks may notice more trash on the trails, longer lines at service booths and fewer rangers this summer as the pinch of the federal government’s budget problems grows increasingly difficult to overlook.

Unlike the state’s park system, which is scheduled to close 54 parks for lack of money this summer, the vast resources of the U.S. Park Service will prevent Yosemite or any of the state’s national parks from shutting their gates for now.

Still, park enthusiasts warn that Washington’s budget squeeze – after consecutive years of cuts – will be felt from Redwood’s old growth forests to Death Valley’s barren dunes.

“The cuts will significantly decrease the quality of the experience visitors have in the national parks,” said Ron Sundergill, Pacific Region director of the National Parks Conservation Association, an advocate for the parks in Washington.

President Obama’s proposed 2013 spending plan calls for no increase to National Park Service’s \$2.75 billion annual budget, which it uses to oversee its 397 parks, 582 natural landmarks and 2,461 historic landmarks.

To meet growing demand and prior obligations, some programs will need to be cut. For instance, the newest budget strips \$3 million from the funds that pay for visitor centers, information booth, cleaning and safety.

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