

Strapped states farm out upkeep of parks

By Jim Carlton, Wall Street Journal

California's cash-strapped parks system has a \$1.2 billion maintenance backlog. But many of its 279 parks are getting spruced up anyway thanks to a secret weapon: conservation groups that have stepped in to rebuild trails, renovate restrooms and even buy more land.

Park Champions, a program run by the California State Parks Foundation, a nonprofit umbrella group, has had 3,202 volunteers work 23,790 hours cleaning up tarnished facilities around the state during the past four years. In Mendocino County north of San Francisco, two nonprofits recently picked up half the \$160,000 tab to rebuild a dilapidated day-use area at Hendy Woods State Park that features a picturesque strand of towering, old-growth redwoods.

Similar public-private partnerships have formed in Florida, Pennsylvania and elsewhere. In Florida, the number of volunteer hours contributed to state parks by nonprofit workers in 2014 was up 33 percent from before the recession in 2008. Over the same period, full-time park staffing remained at about 1,060, according to the Friends of Florida State Parks nonprofit group.

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