

California vehicle owners may be asked to pay for state parks

By Paul Rogers, San Jose Mercury News

With the Schwarzenegger administration preparing to announce Sept. 18 the closure of up to 100 state parks, California's top environmental groups are quietly putting together a ballot campaign they hope will turn the bad news into a renaissance for the state's long-struggling park system.

The Nature Conservancy, National Audubon Society, Trust for Public Land, Save-the-Redwoods League and others have raised nearly \$1 million and conducted months of polling toward a November 2010 ballot measure that would increase vehicle license fees by \$15 a year to fund parks.

If voters approve the measure "which needs a simple majority to pass" it would raise roughly \$400 million a year, doubling the parks' budget and making it no longer dependent on the state's fluctuating general fund.

In exchange, all California motorists would get free admission to all state parks, which now charge up to \$14 for entrance fees.

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