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Friday, Nov 14, 2003

Science & Environment

Posted on Tue, Nov. 11, 2003

National parks provide economic boon and beauty

By Tim Molloy
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES - A new study of the country's national parks concludes that they aren't just rich in natural beauty, they're also an economic boon.

The National Parks Conservation Association, which released the study, said it shows that visitors to the nation's national parks spent \$10.6 billion a year, directly supporting 212,000 jobs.

Visitors to California parks spent \$1.1 billion, the most of any state, said Daniel J. Stynes, the Michigan State economics professor who conducted the research.

The association said the study underlined the importance of federal funding to preserve parks.

"These places are the soul of America, and the heart of many local economies," said NPCA Pacific Regional Director Courtney Cuff. "If they are to stay that way we must invest in protecting them."

The study used National Park Service 2001 annual visitation numbers at the nation's 348 national parks, and visitor surveys conducted by Stynes and the Park Service.

It measured spending on hotel and lodge reservations, campground fees, restaurants, gas, groceries, souvenirs and other expenses related to visiting the parks, but did not

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include admission fees.

The findings of the study weren't news to people who work near national parks, including LouAnn King, the property manager at Bear Creek Cabins near Yosemite.

The study found that visitors to Yosemite spend \$320 million annually, directly supporting 7,527 jobs.

King said everyone she knows in the community of Midpines has a job tied to Yosemite, and that the federal government should spend enough to maintain it.

"Yosemite needs to be kept going and well-maintained," she said. "That way everyone keeps their job and everyone's happy."

The only park in the country where people spend more money is Great Smoky Mountains National Park, where annual spending totals \$574 million, enough to support 9,629 jobs.

The study's findings were released as President Bush signed an interior appropriations bill that Cuff said "doesn't even cover the cost of inflation for care of these national parks."

The federal government budgeted \$1.6 billion this year for operating expenses including staffing, monitoring species, maintaining trails, and interpreting cultural and historic sites at parks nationwide, according to the Park Service.

The bill Bush signed would add \$55 million for the next fiscal year, but the group had sought an additional \$170 million, Cuff said.

Park Service spokeswoman Elaine Sevy said the agency gets help from outside sources including state and local governments, individuals, conservation and recreation groups, businesses and Indian tribes.

Several federal agencies are holding a conference next week in Los Angeles to talk about ways of attracting more money and volunteers for parks and programs.

Win ballet tickets or lessons!

Two lucky winners will receive 4 tickets to the opening performance of the Contra Costa Ballet's production of The Story of the Nutcracker, at the Dean Leshner Center for Performing Arts in Walnut Creek on Dec. 4, '03 at 7:30pm. The third winner will receive enrollment for 8 ballet classes for either children ages 3 1/2 to 8, or adults ages 13 and older. Winners will be selected by a random drawing and notified by phone no later than 11/28/03. Winners will then be contacted by CC Ballet for further instructions. [Register here!](#)

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"Partnerships are essential in providing support financially and through volunteerism to help the National Park Service accomplish its mission of stewardship ... and providing recreation and conservation," Sevy said.



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