

**Remarks by Bonny Hawley, Exec. Dir. of Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks
Parks Forward Workshop, Santa Cruz
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I'm Bonny Hawley, Executive Director of Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks.

Welcome to the Central Coast, where *we love our state parks and beaches!*

Santa Cruz County has more state parks and beaches than any other county in California and Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks is proud to support them.

Our parks feature redwood forests, windswept beaches, a monarch butterfly preserve, Native American archeological resources, historic adobes, a Victorian Dairy Ranch and even a World War one-era cement ship that now serves as a bird sanctuary.

Our parks enjoy tremendous public support, with Proposition 21, the State Parks Initiative, garnering a staggering 68% "Yes" vote - the highest in California.

This public support finds voice in a rich community of non-profit organizations partnering with State Parks to sustain our local parks and beaches, including:

- The Mountain Parks Foundation
- Waddell Creek Association
- Advocates for the Forest of Nisene Marks
- Coastside State Parks Association
- Trailworkers.com
- The Portola/Castle Rock Foundation
- The Sempervirens Fund, as well as Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks.

Friends is an entrepreneurial nonprofit that's been working to sustain the legacy of our state parks and beaches since 1976.

Through an innovative partnership with California State Parks, and by leveraging local community support, Friends has provided millions of dollars of funding for educational programs, visitor services and capital projects.

Throughout decades of declining funding from the state and increasing visitor attendance, Friends has developed a unique and highly successful partnership model with State Parks that enables us to provide visitor service staffing and fee collection at park entrance kiosks.

We've been in this partnership with State Parks for the past 26 years, investing 100% of our net proceeds back into our local parks.

We call it the Friends Model.

The Friends Model significantly extends the reach of State Parks in the areas of education and interpretation, capital improvements, park maintenance and public safety.

We leverage strong local support from business partners and Friends members to fund programs and projects. Our 5,746 Friends on Facebook are an engaged, active community in

support of our mission.

And proceeds from sales at 5 Friends ParkStores that reflect each park's educational and interpretive themes, and an online store, also support park programs and improvements.

As the fortunes of State Parks have declined, the legislature has indicated a desire for more entrepreneurial practices and the development of incentive-based strategies at the local level.

The Friends Model has been proven over the past 26 years and is consistent with the concepts expressed by the Little Hoover Commission and others for innovation, enterprise-driven, truly incentive-based models.

Working with State Parks, Friends has developed cutting edge on-line tools that balance great customer service with maximum revenue generation.

The Friends Model keeps funds local, adds to them through our various enterprises, and enables us to fund:

- Education and interpretive services provided by state employees;
- Improve the physical condition of the parks;
- Provide 100% of the funding for operation of an online learning program for public school students across California;
- Support one of the largest volunteer operations in the state; and
- Drive key projects on behalf of State Parks, such a restoration of the historic Castro Adobe.

Our strong partnership with State Parks has enabled another recent notable success.

Less than a mile from where we're meeting here today sits the Santa Cruz Mission State Historic Park.

A little over a year ago the park, which features the oldest building in Santa Cruz, was faced with outright closure.

But the community rallied and Friends saved the park from closure. We entered into an early donor agreement with the state and Friends is now funding state park rangers and maintenance in addition to the State Parks interpretive staff we were already funding.

But we went beyond just keeping the doors open.

Not only do thousands of school kids continue to learn about CA history while visiting the park, but also due to strong local support Friends has funded an extra open day at the park to accommodate even more school field trips.

And due to local creativity, initiative and our outstanding partnership with State Parks, the Santa Cruz Mission State Historic Park has been transformed into a vibrant community event venue and cultural asset.

The park now hosts outside community events such as local business mixers and non-profit fundraisers.

And we're just now wrapping up our Mission Summer Series, which featured outdoor movie screenings, First Friday Art & Music Events. And we're culminating the season with a *Mole & Mariachi* Festival on October 5. I invite you all to attend.

Our partnership is real and it works. It's based on mutual respect that's born from a state agency and a nonprofit each doing what they do best with the shared goal of making our local parks and beaches the best they can be.

Our partnership is nimble, responsive and is continuously improved -- with new innovations being developed every year.

My fervent hope for the Parks Forward process is that all of the creative, locally relevant initiatives and partnerships happening across California will get the support and authority they need to continue to flourish and be replicated when possible.

This will be a challenge in these times, where the understandable reaction by the department and the legislature would be to regiment, standardize and homogenize to gain further control of park operations in the hope of avoiding any hint of future scandal.

As State Parks continues to struggle with long-term funding and seeks to develop new ways to deliver on its mission to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California, the Friends Model provides a successful, local example of innovation, partnership and stewardship on behalf of State Parks.

We look forward to continuing to work together to build the foundation for a sustainable future for State Parks!