



Campaign to Save L.A. Parks
Draft – Strategic Organizing Plan

February 2010

Need

Despite some real improvements, Los Angeles still ranks last among U.S. cities for access to green space, with only a third of young people living within walking distance of a park. And now a new Great Recession is reversing 20 years of progress. Hundreds of parks and recreation jobs have been lost and many more reductions are expected. The City has cut 25% from its park budget. It could close 20 local parks and lose up to 1,400 related jobs by the end of 2011. The County has shaved 5% from its budget. These cuts will ratchet up the stress on tens of thousands of families in L.A.'s poorest neighborhoods, especially children who rely on public parks for recreation.

In October 2009, 80 leading recreation stakeholders from a diverse spectrum of government agencies, labor unions, non-profits, businesses and others held a Summit to Save L.A. Parks. The Summit was not a protest but designed to promote creative partnerships and entrepreneurial methods for maintaining services, and to urge political leaders to give local park agencies a fair share of public dollars. The primary result was consensus on the need for a broad Campaign to Save L.A. Parks from pending state, county and local budget cuts, and to preserve recreation services for those families in greatest need.

The Campaign to Save L.A. Parks

The purpose of the campaign is to unite Summit participants and other stakeholders, including the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, Trust for Public Lands, Sierra Club, Verde Coalition, Metropolitan YMCA, Coalition for an Active South L.A., American Youth Soccer Organization, Anahuac Soccer, and California South Soccer Federation. We are actively seeking support from other public-interest groups, including park users, neighborhood and school-site councils and community organizations.

The campaign's basic message must tackle the inaccurate impression that public recreation is a discretionary expense. Parks programs have a long history as a cost-effective force for community stability, and contribute greatly to personal health and civic development.

We want to encourage elected and political leaders to think through the problem and preserve the hard earned gains for parks. The campaign will serve as a united voice for low-income residents and public employees who may not be able to speak out against the structural inequity around recreation and parks. The campaign will serve as catalyst for short-term victories and long-term strategies.

Vision

Within five years, the Coalition to Save L.A. Parks will develop a capacity to effectively represent public recreation and parks. Initially, we want to prevent, minimize and mitigate damage by the fiscal crisis and budget cuts, especially affecting seniors, youth, and low-income communities. Although today's service

cuts, as during the 1990s, affect needy Angelinos the most, this campaign, as during the '90s, will address the park needs for all residents.

Mission

To build a diverse coalition of stakeholders to address fiscal and equity issues for public recreation and parks in L.A. County; to create shared goals and objectives for developing resources and raising funds; to coordinate a political campaign that transforms public practice and policy.

Goals for Save L.A. Parks Campaign

- To initiate a public campaign to address the fiscal and service needs of recreation and parks agencies
- To preserve recreation programs for high impact (low income and high density) urban communities;
- To advocate for a fair share of the City and County budgets;
- To determine the feasibility of revenue initiatives for recreation and park services;
- To promote the idea that parks provide an effective mix of social services, including gang reduction, academic achievement, obesity prevention, childcare, and social services for seniors;
- To organize a program of civic engagement to shape public policy and practice;
- To develop a communication strategy using traditional and new media.

Campaign Organizing Framework

The provisional name of the campaign is Save L.A. Parks. People for Parks is the principal sponsor, although general policy guidance is provided through a Leadership Team of key recreation and environmental organizations with strategic input from affected public agencies. The Leadership Team will facilitate policy and grassroots input. PFP, the Verde Coalition, Community Health Councils, Green L.A., the Sierra Club, American Youth Soccer Organization, the YMCA of Metropolitan Los Angeles, the Trust for Public Land and others will provide existing resources to the campaign. A communication strategy will be developed to create an identity for the campaign. PFP is joining with the Verde Coalition and Community Health Councils to submit a joint grant proposal to Liberty Hill Foundation for outreach and organizing activities during the first year. A campaign budget is being prepared. An advisory team will also be formed to provide advocacy and private resources for the campaign. The Leadership

Team is meeting every three to four weeks to set policy and direction for the campaign, develop work plans, recruit new members and review progress.

Tenets

The campaign values:

- Team approaches, such as public-public, public-private and public-nonprofit collaborations.
- A broad human-services definition of recreation.
- A focus on community action in high impact urban areas to support parks and recreation services.
- Recreation and parks are important components of a livable L.A.
- Parks beautify and build neighborhoods, and address social problems.
- Youth-development approach to working with children and families.
- Programs that integrate academic, recreation, schools, parks and neighborhoods, especially in high impact urban areas.
- Active participation by all coalition members.

History

During the 1960s and '70s, land was relatively inexpensive and middle-class Angelinos enjoyed large living spaces and backyards, often with their own swimming pools. However, by the late 1980s a series of news reports on Los Angeles' underfunded, neglected, gang-ridden parks focused on a new problem: "dead parks" had inadequate funding to upgrade and operate, and they were concentrated in the poorest neighborhoods.

The Safe Neighborhood Park Acts approved by voters in 1992 and '96 have since raised nearly \$900 million for capital improvements and park development across Los Angeles County. Word of the ballot initiatives spread and California voters soon passed a number of statewide park propositions. Yet while the *Los Angeles Times* recently noted that L.A. County had received about \$4 billion for "the greening of Los Angeles," funding to operate and maintain our current park system continues to decline. Therefore, one of the long-term goals of the Campaign to Save Los Angeles parks is to seek public support for a steady source of new revenue to fund the operation and maintenance of parks and greenways, which are of critical importance to all Angelinos, especially the neediest.