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Parks Talk!

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ASPF endorses Gov. Brewer's Proposed Budget Plan for ASP

The Governor's Proposed Budget Plan for Arizona State Parks enables the agency to keep what it earns and provides critical access to other funds for park operations.

[Link to the Executive Budget Summary FY2012-2013](#)

[50th Arizona State Legislature Link to House Members Roster](#)

[Link to Senate Members Roster](#)

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ASPF presents "Arizona State Parks Privatization and Efficiency Plan"

The State Park system should change its business model by expanding privatization opportunities and improving management efficiency, according to a new study by a team of nationally known experts on park operations.

Weaning Arizona State Parks from the state budget system is an attainable goal, said PROS Consulting of Indianapolis, Indiana, but will require maximum business creativity and flexibility. In order to achieve that, PROS recommended spinning of the Parks system to a quasi-governmental agency, such as an authority or special parks district.

The transition to a contemporary business model will take time - one or two years - according to PROS, who stressed that State Parks should be held harmless financially in the interim in order to survive.

The parks system currently is operating on an \$18.5 million budget. Of that, about \$11.5 million is earned revenue from Parks operations. The rest comes from a handful of agency funds administered by the State Parks Department, but none comes from the State General Fund.

PROS noted that "Arizona State Parks play a vital role in the economic vitality of numerous small and local communities around the state," although the total economic impact has shrunk 16% during the recession from \$266.4 million to \$222.8 million, plus state and federal taxes.

Arizona State Parks Foundation commissioned the study. "Our objectives were to identify the practical opportunities for Parks privatization and best practices for Parks administration," said Bill Meek, ASPF president.

He said PROS Consulting was chosen because the principals, Brian Trusty and Leon Younger, "have vast experience with recreation projects of every kind, including public operations and for-profit activities in many states."

Prior to its release, the Arizona study was reviewed by current or former parks directors at six agencies that have significant privatization experience, including California, New York, Texas, Georgia, Kentucky and the Lower Colorado River Authority.

According to PROS, there are major opportunities to expand privatization in Arizona parks through partnerships with for-profit, non-profit and public entities. New initiatives would help to move Arizona State Parks toward financial independence.

However, PROS asserted that it is not feasible to turn over most of the park system to private operators and they cautioned that privatization must be approached carefully because not all Arizona State Parks are right for privatization and some have capital needs and underlying ownership issues that would complicate the process.

A major management change recommended by the study is to shift State Parks to function-based management within groups of parks rather than site-based management, which tends to duplicate functions at each park.

The PROS consultant examined 28 of Arizona's 31 state parks, offering specific recommendations for each one for privatization initiatives, business development and improved management. The consultants obtained input and feedback from more than 50 persons, including State Parks staff, Governor Brewer's office, legislators, community leaders, park stakeholders and local elected officials.

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Meek said, "We believe the PROS study provides a solid planning framework to guide state leaders in building a stable and cost-effective State Parks system which has little or no reliance on state budgeting. To get to the next step, we propose that a task force or commission be created by the Governor to direct the process."

[LINK here to the Executive Summary](#)

[LINK here to the full 63-page Study](#)

Media Coverage of "Arizona State Parks Privatization and Efficiency Plan"

[Link here to The Arizona Republic Editorial of January 23, 2011 "Public-private plan will ensure parks' survival"](#)

[Link here to The Arizona Republic Op-Ed by Grady Gammage of January 22, 2011 "Taking state parks totally private a bad idea"](#)