



# Report Highlights

## Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism Office of State Parks

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### Why We Conducted This Audit

Office of State Parks (OSP) is responsible for operating and managing 22 state parks and 18 historic sites across the state. OSP, like other state park systems nationwide, is facing budget and staffing reductions. To address reductions, other state park systems have become increasingly focused on finding ways to generate additional revenue and reduce costs. We conducted this audit to evaluate how OSP has used visitation and cost data to manage state park and historic site operations.

### What We Found

OSP could better use visitation and cost data to make site-specific operational decisions and to compare the performance of individual parks. Because of budget and staffing issues, OSP reduced the hours of operation at state parks and historic sites and increased the entrance fee at historic sites. However, these decisions have generally been applied across the board without formal analysis of visitation or cost data. Additional use of data would help OSP make more informed decisions about operations and would help ensure that efforts to reduce costs and increase revenue are targeted to appropriate parks and historic sites. We analyzed OSP data and identified the following ways it could use data to manage operations:

- Calculating the cost per visitor (i.e., how much the state pays to bring one visitor to a park or historic site) based on visitation and cost data would help OSP evaluate and compare the efficiency of parks and historic sites. We found that in FY 2011, OSP expended a median of \$4.45 per visitor per visit at its parks, with a range of \$0.73 to \$20 per visitor. For the same year, OSP expended a median of \$31.52 per visitor per visit at its historic sites, with range of \$19.13 to \$49.58 per visitor.
- Parks that spend more on maintenance have more visitors. However, over the past four years, approximately \$13 million in funds dedicated to park improvement and maintenance projects have been transferred to the state general fund or used to fund operations at state parks and historic sites. As a result, the number of maintenance projects has decreased from 110 in FY 2009 to 42 in FY 2011.
- Adjusting its operations based on seasonal visitation at parks and historic sites would help OSP reduce costs and increase revenue. For example, OSP could increase entrance fees during peak seasons, such as summer, to increase revenue and could also use limited staff in winter months to reduce costs.
- Increased use of differential fees that better reflect the types of amenities offered at parks would help OSP manage costs. Unlike other states, OSP does not charge for certain amenities, such as water playgrounds and swimming pools, at all of its parks.
- Sharing staff among parks and historic sites in close proximity would help OSP reduce costs.

**OSP agreed with all of our recommendations. See management’s full response in report.**

