

Essay on big basin state park history and future

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Big Basin State Park in Santa Cruz County is the first state park that was established in California. It has a long history, with more than a century of preservation of large redwood forests. However, recent budget downfalls are leading to dramatic changes to the park, requiring significant alterations to the way the park is run, and possibly endangering the future of these redwood forests. In this essay, the history of the park and the recent budget cuts, as well as their implications, will be explored.

HISTORY OF PARK

Before the existence of the park, California Indians of many tribes resided in the Big Basin – it was a large resource for them, the old growth forests providing material for making baskets, and plenty of flora and fauna to consume and hunt for. The rivers and watercourses which run along the park were perfect for drinking and washing, as well. Sayante, Cotoni, Quiroste and Achistaca were just some of the Ohlone tribes that took up residence along the watercourses of Big Basin (Milliken, 1996).

These Indian tribes encountered significant resistance when the Spanish began to occupy the area in the late 1700s. Quiroste tribes often led attacks against conquistadors in the Big Basin and Bay Areas in the 1790s, as a result of continued interference in the Basin, and the penetration of Spanish missions in these areas interfering with their way of life. This eternal conflict between Franciscan missions and the Indians would last throughout the 17th and 18th centuries (Milliken, 1996).

The park was established in 1902, and has grown from nearly 4, 000 acres back then to 18, 000 acres today. The park consists of old-growth forest,

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recovering redwood forest, and the like, all contained within the titular ‘big basin,’ known as the Waddell Creek watershed. It is a large depression in the ground, shaped like a bowl (or basin), which was created by streams and erosion. There are more than 80 miles of trail in the park, and large populations of deer and raccoons, as well as some species of big cat (Verado, 1975).

The 19th century saw a newfound appreciation for redwood forests, which were still suffering from deforestation even then. At this time, a movement was sprung, led by conservationists such as Andrew P Hill, to save them, leading eventually to the 1902 creation of the California Redwood Park, which comprises Big Basin. The Great Depression saw the assignment of a company to Big Basin by the Civilian Conservation Corps in order to renovate the park, creating a lot of the buildings and trails that are still in use – including the amphitheater at the heart of the park (Verado, 1975).

BUDGET CUTS

In 2009, it was determined that 220 of the 279 state parks in California had to be closed, in order to save California some money. However, what the governor and other officials fail to realize is that “ California’s state parks generate more money than they cost to operate, and local park advocates assure that tourism in Santa Cruz County will suffer if the parks go off-limits” (Bland, 2009). It has also affected efforts to restore the Campfire Circle in Big Basin, an important landmark for the site.

The effect of these budget cuts on Big Basin and other state parks are dramatic, with massive implications for the ecosystem of California. There is

a limited number of redwood forest still available in the state, and reduced funding for its protection can leave it open to possible development, or at the very least diminished protection for its wildlife and patrons of the park. If funding continues to lower for these state parks, the state of California will be less equipped to maintain them or protect them – as they are the last bastion of ecosystems like the redwood forest, it is more vital than ever to make sure that they stay around. What's more, the closing of the parks may be illegal – the Land and Water Conservation Fund allows California the budget money to spend on parks, but they must remain open to the public. If these parks (like Big Basin) are closed, this breaks that law, and risks removal of federal support (Bland, 2009). Therefore, budget cuts like these could cost them far more than they believe they could save.

In conclusion, the Big Basin State Park's budget cuts are a concern for conservationists and environmentalists throughout the state. The reduced capacity of the state to care for the park is the first step in what could be the death knell of Big Basin – what's more, the closing of the park would not save the money that economists believe it would. Unless more funding is made available, or the state's resources are allocated more effectively, the state park will be left to the devices of the local wildlife or developers. For the sake of the future of the redwood forest, this cannot come to pass.

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