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Historic Outdoor Equity Wins in 2019 Legislative Session

Governor's signatures on AB 1680, AB 209 round out year that brings \$5.3M in youth access programs

SACRAMENTO—Gov. Newsom's signatures on AB 1680 and AB 209, both authored by Assemblymember Monique Limón, mark important wins in improving equitable access to California's natural resources and creating meaningful opportunities for communities that have historically faced barriers to enjoying the outdoors.

"California is home to over 280 State Parks and millions of acres of public lands that exhibit the natural beauty and history of our state," said Assemblymember Limón. "However, access to outdoor experiences is often out of reach for communities and students of low-income communities. AB 209 brings equity to the accessibility of our parks to these students."

AB 209 establishes the Outdoor Equity Grants Program at the Department of Parks and Recreation to provide funding for outdoor recreation and environmental education opportunities, particularly for youth in under-resourced communities, and focuses on providing transportation and programming.

"California is a leader in championing access to outdoor recreation for all communities. Expanding outdoor recreational opportunities for underserved and at-risk populations is essential. This new program sets the stage for additional grant funds that would expand access to the outdoors across the state—transforming communities along the way," said Lisa Mangat, Director of California State Parks.

"Research has shown that students that participate in these programs do better in science, and are more adept at problem solving and conflict resolution. The outcomes are even more pronounced in disadvantaged communities, with these programs often leading to healthier lifestyles and better educational outcomes," said Assemblymember Limón.

AB 1680 is the culmination of a decades-long push to allow public access to the coastline at Hollister Ranch, where wealthy landowners had barred access to an exclusive beach that had only been accessible via kayak.

Governor Newsom's signature on the two bills capped off a legislative session that also brought a commitment to appropriate 5 percent from Proposition 64 funds to the California Natural Resources Agency for youth community access grants each year. The first year will see up to \$5.3 million in funding, which will support programs that promote access to natural and cultural resources.

The funding was a hard-fought compromise that resulted from Parks Now members' negotiations with state leaders to implement the community access funding provisions in Proposition 68.



Parks Now members are now working with the Natural Resources Agency staff to gather ideas and feedback from youth and community members, via listening sessions across the state, about the types of projects they would like to see in the Youth Community Access Grant Program.

“Forty years after the Coastal Act, we can finally say all beaches in California will be open to all Californians, regardless of race, zip code, wealth or other status,” said Parks Now member Marce Gutiérrez-Graudiņš, who founded Azul. “When we pass bills like AB 1680 and meaningfully support youth access programs, we’re not just sending a strong message that everyone has a right to enjoy the outdoors. We’re going one step further to make sure these places are actually welcoming and accessible for all.”

About Parks Now

Parks Now represents a coalition of California-based organizations committed to public health and social and environmental justice, who share a belief that access to parks, the coast, and public land is fundamental to healthy, vibrant communities. For more information, visit <http://www.caparksnow.com/>

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