Governor Jerry Brown gave California’s 278 state parks a two-year reprieve from closures Tuesday. The governor signed Assembly Bill 1478, which prohibits the state Department of Parks and Recreation from closing a park or proposing shutdowns until July 2014.

The legislation also provides $10 million to match future contributions from donors who help keep parks open, $10 million for operating costs and $10 million in bond funds for park improvements.

Brown had previously threatened to close 70 state parks because he said California could not afford to keep them open.

Supervising Ranger Don Schmidt reports that although the park remains on Caretaker Status, go-ahead has been received to plan for the Environmental Living Program, Field Guides and School Groups, beginning in Spring 2013. The campgrounds are still closed but there is movement to have them open May 1st.

Sierra District is looking at providing a Maint. Worker to reside in N. Bloomfield. The agreement whereby MDPA provided $22,000 to keep the park off the Closure List expires June 30, 2013. In addition, the Olmsted Park Fund has donated nearly $700 to keep the generators operating to provide power for essential buildings. All eyes are on the Governor and the Legislature to see if funding will be forthcoming.
The Caretaker Ranger, whether for Malakoff Diggins, Hendy Woods, Bodie, Standish Hickey, Manchester, Plumas Eureka, Castle Crags, etc., glances over the To-Do List on the ranger station wall. “Post Closure notices around campgrounds and patrol campgrounds for squattters or bear damage, Patrol east boundary for reported Deer Poachers, Fix spare tire on patrol truck, Check water tanks and pumps, Call alarm company for adjustments to alarms, Finish visitor accident report re. bicycle crash on main trail, Meet with volunteers to repair main trail, Call District Attorney per upcoming court case, Develop Patrol Outline for this park and other nearby parks you must routinely cover. Prepare End-of Month Reports, Board-up toilet ravaged by bear, Make up sign directing visitors to another toilet.” End of page 1.....

Enroute to the campground you encounter a school bus. The teacher alights. They “forgot” to have a School Group Reservation Form processed but came anyway and would like a ranger talk. Provide a ten minute Intro to the park and a self-guided brochure. Explain the park is on Caretaker Status and the Visitor’s Center and other official buildings are not available for them to visit.

Campground gate appears in-tact. Go on to water tanks. Stopping at that gate you notice a car at the side of the road, then a gunshot. A man emerges from the woods with a .22 rifle in one hand and a dead tree squirrel in the other hand. Upon seeing you he exclaims, “What???” He insists you show him, in his copy of the Hunting Regulations, where it says he can’t hunt squirrels in the state park. You show him the section, he claims the rules are difficult to understand. You point out that he should have asked or found out ahead of time. He wants to argue. Finally, the citation is issued, gun and squirrel confiscated, and you again head off to do the water tank checks.

Finishing with the tanks you get a radio call to phone a particular office at Park HQ in Sacramento. You return to the station and make the call. They want the Visitor Attendance Reports for 2009. You remind them that a copy was sent to them in 2009. They are not impressed and insist. You remind them that the park is on Caretaker Status and there is no one available to look up the report. They remind you that your superiors said you would be cooperative. You tell them you will look for it as time permits. They answer that a FAX by the end of the day will suffice. Computer balky. Hand search file boxes

Start for the campground again when you notice a number of cows in the picnic area. Walk over close enough to get the brand. Back to the office to phone the owner. He tells you that 7 animals got out during the night and that all his hands are are either away or too stove-up to work. Says he can’t get the cows for a few days. Tell him he’ll be invited to the Bar-B-Que, then hang up as he chuckles on the other end. Return to the picnic area and throw stones at the cows. Being cows, they ignore you.

Finally get to the campground and post notices. No squatters evident. Patrol East bounday, take photo of tire tracks. Head toward the office only to notice the kids from the school bus have the cows surrounded.
The teacher wants to know if they will attack. She is not amused when you respond, “The cows or the kids?” Take a few minutes to interpret to the kids, “Where we get our milk and meat.” The kids finally retreat to the bus but only after each one of them has taken a cell-phone picture of a cow. Wilderness indeed!

While organizing the volunteer trail crew the phone rings. Out of habit you pick it up, thinking you shouldn’t do so because of the Caretaker Status. The caller wants information about the campground since he has Reservations for Easter Week. You tell him that the campgrounds are closed and the park is in Caretaker Status indefinitely. He quotes the information from his reservation. For the next hour you are on the phone and computer with various park offices and the reservation company who happily announce that all your campsites are sold out for Easter Week. Exasperated, you tell them that it is their job, not the Caretaker’s, to cancel those reservations and refund the soon-to-be, unhappy campers.

Later, while parked under a shade tree preparing the illegal hunting report, a motorcyclist roars up and blurts out that one of their party has crashed and is injured about a mile away on a USFS dirt road. You radio for medical assistance then follow back to the scene to help stabilize the victim. Two more hours and you’re back in the park. You advise your supervisor via phone that the end-of-month reports will have to wait until tomorrow as it is now past quitting time. Passing the picnic area you ease up behind the cows and give them a blast with your siren.

Watching them amble away, you pull out a soda and a bag of chips and sit down at a picnic table, contemplating the conflicting aromas of Cheddar-Chips versus Cow-Chips.

One of the motorcyclists appears and asks you why there seems to be no one in the park. You explain the Caretaker Status. As he saddles-up he comments, “You sure got an easy job.”

That evening at home, you work on a presentation for an upcoming Concerned Citizen’s Forum. Your concentration is broken by a phone call from Dispatch. “There’s an alarm sounding at the ranger station.” On the way out the door you grab a handful of confiscated firecrackers, just in case it’s the cows, rubbing up against the ranger station.

**CARETAKER STATUS**

A nonoperating condition in which the installations, material, and facilities are in a care and limited preservation status. Only a minimum of personnel is required to safeguard against fire, theft, and damage from the elements.
Leaves rustle upon abandoned pathways
and doors are padlocked tight-

the wind howls 'round the old ghost town
where the past assembles at night.

but listen close outside the saloon
an’ you’ll hear a rickety tune
as dancehall girls swing an’ twirl,
an’ gamblers bid to the moon.
If you pause awhile in dark alleys, pressed close to the buildings of old,

you’ll hear the sidewalks creak 'neath invisible feet -

it’s the truth.....or so I am told.

As you gaze upon stoical structures with trappings and gear all around,

it’s hard to believe they’re gone now, those folks who once dwelt 'ntown.

So hush and embrace the aura, history and heritage abound.

somewhere in the middle of nowhere, a wonderous, enchanting Ghost Town!

edited from:
Ghost Towns, by Tamara and Ghost Town, by Marilyn Lott
Arrests at Mitchell Caverns State Park
by Chris Clark KCET TV

On February 5, San Bernardino County sheriff’s deputies arrested Christopher Alvarado, 48, of Azusa and Trisha Sutton, 36, of Covina at a desert campsite near the park after responding to a call that trespassers were on the grounds. Officers reported the pair had stolen property and burglary tools in their campsite. The two were booked on suspicion of burglary and related charges, as well as possession of illegal drugs. Whether it was Alvarado and Sutton who vandalized the SRA or someone else, at least $100,000 in repairs will be necessary to restore the park’s facilities to the point where they were before the vandalism.

At that point the state would still need to budget for a new water supply and continued staffing before the public can enjoy the caves or the park’s small but improbably scenic, Mojave Desert campground. The park remains on the closure list.

While state park officials cast about for ways to protect this vast preserve and especially the caverns, we may reflect on one of the late occupants of these underground mazes. ed.

Close your eyes, and imagine a sloth. What do you see? You’re probably picturing a cute mammal moving ever so slowly through the rainforest, using its long claws to cling to tree branches while it lazily munches on twigs and leaves. Now, imagine your sloth growing the size of a cow or even an elephant, and you have one of the now-extinct giant ground sloths of North America.

As their name suggests, giant ground sloths weren’t arboreal like their present-day, tree-dwelling cousins. They were better adapted to terrestrial life. Several species lumbered across our continent during the past twenty-million years. But it was only in the last million that the desert southwest was populated by one of the more common species, Nothrotheriops shastense, known as the Shasta ground sloth. This species went extinct about 10,000 years ago, along with other Ice Age mammals unable to adapt to change in climates.

Shastas were fairly small by ground-sloth standards, weighing only 400 to 500 pounds and standing about nine-feet tall. In comparison, Megatherium, a contemporaneous South American ground sloth, weighed eight tons and stood 20-feet tall. Like all sloths, Shastas had very large
claws on all four feet, and due to the size of their rear claws especially, walked on the outsides of their paws, as if club-footed.

As ground-dwellers, their large claws weren’t used to maneuver around tree branches. Instead, it appears the claws were used for defense. Although Shastas were giant, they shared their habitats with equally large and fearsome predators, such as the dire wolf and the saber-toothed cat, who were probably no strangers to slow-moving sloth dinners. If their claws were in fact used for defense, they would have had to move their limbs with much greater speed than normally attributed to present-day sloth, lest they do nothing more than tickle their attackers’ chins. Like modern giraffes, Shastas also had prehensile lips, a specialized adaptation to folivory, or leaf-eating. Their skulls and teeth also show specialized adaptations to eating woody or tough plant foods.

It seems likely that the Shasta ground sloths were solitary animals, except at breeding times when they would have had to come together to mate. What little evidence there is suggests that ground sloths produced just a single young. This is based on the fossilised find of a similar species in Brazil in which the foetus was still preserved in the body cavity. As with tree sloths, a young ground sloth was probably carried by its mother, possibly clinging on to her back. The youngster would have stayed with its mother for several months until it was large and experienced enough to fend for itself.

Skeletal remains are occasionally found in the desert southwest’s rockshelters and caves. Many individuals have been recovered from Grand Canyon, the Guadalupe and the Hueco Mountains in northern Texas. One specimen, from Aden Crater near Las Cruces, New Mexico, was found partially mummified, with some skin and fur preserved. The preserved fur was long, brown and coarse, very much like the coats of modern tree sloths.

Why are remains found so commonly in caves? Some scientists theorize that ground sloths were—like some living sloths—solitary and nocturnal, using caves as shelter from the heat of the day. Leaving their caves at night, they would forage for food under the cover of darkness. They also tended to use their rocky homes as litter boxes. Many cave floors today feature hardened, preserved layers of ground sloth dung-balls —also called boluses—that have proven quite important to reconstructing Ice Age climates and environments of the desert southwest. By studying plants found within these boluses, we know Shastas were especially fond of eating yucca, Mormon tea, four-wing saltbush and globemallow. Pollen grains preserved in sloth dung suggest they inhabited a landscape covered in sage, in addition to grasses and desert flora.

So, although our region’s environment during the Ice Age was certainly different than today’s, it may not have been profoundly so, as Shastas ate many of the same types of plants living around us now. *(Tommy-knockers would not recommend them as house-pets. ed.)*

**source:** John Seebach, archeologist, Southern Methodist University.
Mormon tea refers to several plants in the Ephedraceae family — Ephedra torreyana, Ephedra viridis, and Ephedra navadensis (found extensively in California)— that are commonly found in the American Southwest and Mexico. A beverage brewed from the twig-like stems of the plant is called Mormon tea and was used as a folk remedy by indigenous groups and early American settlers. The herbal concoction was primarily used as a decongestant to relieve respiratory ailments such as asthma. In addition, the tea was used to treat urinary tract disorders and hypotension, and the stems of the plant were chewed as a remedy for sunburned lips. Also known as Brigham tea, desert tea, and popotillo, the tea is described as having an astringent but not unpleasant taste.

Generally, Mormon tea plants are medium-sized woody shrubs that grow to a height of 2 to 5 feet (about .61 to 1.54 m). The plant is sometimes called a joint fir due to the jointed, needle-shaped stems that give a similar appearance to a small fir tree. It is a non-flowering plant that instead reproduces through spores, with each plant bearing either male or female cones. These cones are produced in March and April.

There are various accounts about how the name Mormon tea came into usage. The most commonly accepted version is that early Mormon settlers used the beverage as a way to comply with the religion’s rules prohibiting caffeine consumption. (Tommy-knockers say it’s better than caffeine!) Another, more colorful story is that because the tea was believed to prevent syphilis, it was often served in brothels. The drink was allegedly named Mormon’s tea after John Mormon, a frequent patron.

Mormon tea is related to Ma huang, or Ephedra sinica, an herb that has been used in Chinese medicine for several thousand years. Ma huang contains the alkaloids ephedrine and pseudo-ephedrine. These alkaloids have been shown to be an effective treatment for asthma and other bronchial disorders. Ephedrine has strong diuretic and stimulant properties and the alkaloid was used as a weight loss aid. Due to serious health risks of elevated blood pressure and increased heart rate, dietary supplements containing ephedrine have been banned in the United States since 2006.

There are conflicting reports as to whether or not Mormon tea plants actually contain the ephedrine and pseudo-ephedrines found in Ma huang. Clinical studies on the effectiveness of Mormon tea have produced no concrete results other than the tea is a mild diuretic. In spite of a long history as a folk remedy, the medicinal benefits of Mormon tea remain anecdotal.

Courtesy: wiseGEEK

Ephedra nevadensis

**Scientific classification**
- **Kingdom:** Plantae
- **Division:** Gnetophyta
- **Class:** Gnetopsida
- **Order:** Ephedrales
- **Family:** Ephedraceae
- **Genus** Ephedra
- **Species:** E. nevadensis
- **Binomial name:** Ephedra nevadensis
Early in the 1850's Glenbrook Basin first became known as the site of county fairs, horse racing and other special events. Olympia Park, located at the south end of the basin opened in 1901. People would arrive by horse and buggy, the Nevada County Traction Company trolley, Nevada County Narrow Gauge Railroad and later by automobiles. Large grandstands located approximately where Safeway stands today would provide a great view of the nearly one mile long oval racetrack that stretched from the present day sites of McDonalds to The Union newspaper building. Trotting, pacing and running horse races were held at the track followed by motor car races in 1913.

Lake Olympia was formed when a dam was constructed just northeast of the electrical substation on Sutton Way. For over 50 years it was a major recreational destination in Northern California providing camping, boating, fishing and swimming. An island in the middle of the lake housed a dance pavilion complete with a coil spring mounted dance floor that swayed with the dancers rhythm. A multi-level diving platform standing 30 feet tall was a very popular feature. Olympia Park contained a bathhouse, a roller skating rink and bar. Canoes and bathing suits were available for rent. Families also rented cabins and picnicked in the shade of the large pine trees along the shores.

Olympia Park fell into disrepair in the 1950's and closed in 1958. Once the recreational center of Nevada County, Glenbrook Basin is now home to the county’s main commerce center.

Nevada County Historic Landmarks Commission
HERE’S YER SIGN!

Signs used to be simple:
Stop, Keep-Out, Lock the Gate, etc., ....if not prophetic:

Over the years, lawsuits and courts have ventured into the arena of public safety signage interpretation, and signs have become complicated.

Consider state parks on the coast. Signs atop the bluffs used to warn visitors about the drop-off:

No longer sufficient; now they must tell self-destructive people why they are falling through space: “Steep cliff. If you approach you may slip over, or the edge may crumble, or your spouse may shove you, causing death or serious injury.”
A bulletin board for attorney cards may be provided.

Wild life interactions are always a possibility. Some folks are frightened of animals or have good sense and do not require a sign to avoid approaching one. Others are less cautious or have their brain take leave upon the appearance of an exotic critter.
As usual, the beast is more perceptive than we are:
A simple sign existed for years in state parks, to mark out-of-bounds areas:

Then in the 70s the International Logo program was adopted. Parks were obliged to take down the faithful, “No Camping” signs and replace them with a Logo sign of a tent with a red slash through it. Now most would-be campers could usually figure out that the logo meant, No Camping. But, signs are interpreted in the eye of the beholder. An argument was made that RVs were not tents so the sign did not apply to them. Some courts bought that argument. So, parks were also obliged to come up with a logo of an RV with a red slash through it. Thus, appeared two Logo signs to re-place one useful No Camping sign.

A single sign now exists, for those parks with money for specialty logos, that will serve for both. But....what about car-campers? Are those folks entitled to their own logo?

Predictably, Logo signs mushroomed world-wide. (Yes, there is a mushroom logo.) Logos can be produced to depict most any service or rule but require a caution against, Info-run-amuk.

But logos do the job of providing international recognition and are much improved on some of the traditional attempts.

Providing sinage to inform and direct park visitors is an on-going joust of philosophys. Too many signs overwhelm the viewer and are unsightly, resulting in visual blight. Too few, and necessary information is not conveyed. The best attempt seems to be logos with minimum verbiage. Most visitors want to be informed and to know the park regulations. Others, may or may not comply with posted rules. A few....are beyond any convenient message that may be made available to them.
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**DOINS**

*Board Meetings 10/13, 11/17*

*Annual Meeting / Election of Directors 10/13*

*All Members Invited*

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**MDPA Funds Replacement of Weathered Directional Sign**

One of the casualties of hard times has been upkeep of signs. Although most signs throughout the park are in decent shape some, such as the weather side of the panel below, located at the S-W corner of North Bloomfield Road and Relief Hill Road have seen better days. A new sign is on order, thanks to a recent MDPA allocation.
Name: _______________________________________________________

Mailing Address; _______________________________________________

City, St., Zip: __________________________________________________

Email: ________________________________________________________

Phone: ________________________________________________________

Membership Fee: $10           New _____    Renewal  X

Please check the volunteer opportunities you may be interested in!

____ Docent        ____ Trail Work        ____ Sales Center / Museum

____ Humbug Day    ____ Publicity         ____ Fundraising / Donor

MDPA Membership
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Nevada City, CA 95959
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