

Dear Commissioners,

The Washoe County Open Space and Regional Parks Commission, in its advisory capacity to the Commission, have voted (unanimously) to recommend that the Commission consider increasing the budget allocation to the County Regional Parks and Open Spaces in the 2016-2017 fiscal year.

Starting in 2008, the Parks budget has been cut by two thirds, from 9 million dollars to 3 million dollars; accounting for the largest budget reduction of all County Departments. Furthermore, the reduction seen to the County's Regional Parks and Open Space budget has placed great strain on staff resources and general maintenance obligations; requiring management and staff to reactive, rather than proactive.

In the seven years since 2008, visitation at Regional Parks has gone from 3.6 million visits to 5 million. Washoe County Parks and Open Space supervise 13,000 acres; stretching from parks in Washoe Valley to the Sheldon Antelope Refuge at the Oregon border. Additionally the Parks system has more buildings than the Library system; however the Library system has more than twice the staff and three times the funding.

With less than half the employees it had in 2008, the Parks staff has managed to keep the system functioning, but the lack of funds and manpower is obvious in many areas. For example:

1. Mowers and other equipment are worn out and need replacement. Staff vehicles are in similar condition and in short supply; requiring seasonal employees to be stranded at times.
2. Playing fields have not been fertilized regularly for five years; creating an unhealthy root system with the potential of failing, and thus increasing the capital cost to the County.
3. During these lean years there has been no weed abatement. This is a fire hazard, is unsightly, and leads to weed explosion.
4. There are no portable rest rooms, no gates opened or closed, and minimal trash collection.

Public sentiment places culture and recreation high on the priority list. Examples of public sentiment for culture and recreation resources include the community takeover of the Sun Valley Swimming Pool, and the more recent public outcry for the recommended closure of the Traner Pool; forcing the Commission to reverse its initial decision.

Your mission statement says you are "working together to provide and sustain a *safe, secure, and healthy* community." Parks and Open Spaces, by their very nature, are very much part of community health.

The Washoe County Open Space and Regional Parks Commission asks our Commissioners to consider increasing funding to the budget and help maintain and exploit our wonderful public resources.