

State parks cope with cuts



Chris Barraza, foreman carpenter for the state of California, shows how holes and cracks are being repaired in a wall at the Castro Adobe house on Old Adobe Road Tuesday.

Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Castro Adobe bricks still available for 'adoption'

By TODD GUILD

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

For years, the Castro Adobe house in Watsonville has been crumbling under the baking sun, driving rain and wind and the weight of 160 years.

It's nestled in a small rural neighborhood near Larkin Valley Road. The home was built in 1848.

After the structure was damaged in the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake, owner Edna Kimbro tried for years to get it restored before selling it to the state in 2002. It's now a national historic site and a California Historical Landmark. State plans call for its complete restoration.

For nearly a year, a team of state experts adept in restoring historic buildings have been busy at work on the structure, bringing it back to life.

Now, walls once crumbling to dust are fully restored, smoothed with adobe mud by craftsmen whose knowledge runs back generations.

Workers at the site have spent the past few

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Laird's new proposal attempts to increase funding

By ERIC ANDERSON

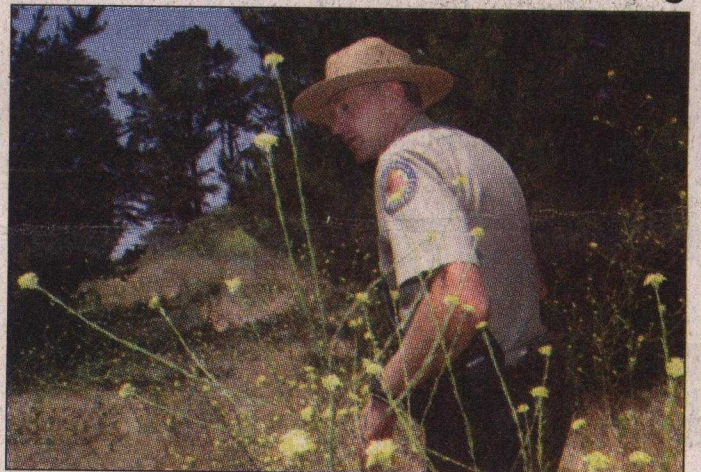
OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

Bill Wolcott walked down an overgrown path, at times having to pick his way through the coastal scrub, to reach the Van Laanen farm complex Tuesday.

Wolcott, the supervising state park ranger at Sunset State Beach, stopped momentarily as he viewed the complex's dilapidated barn, marked with "structure unsafe, keep out" signs, then walked a few yards more to a house that, until the late 1980s, was home to Agnes Van Laanen.

The house — paint peeling, boards separating, roof in shambles, boarded up and "not in the best of shape on the inside," according to Wolcott — is now home for a colony of paper wasps.

And with the state parks system struggling to maintain



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Bill Wolcott, supervising California State Park Ranger at Sunset State Beach, tours the Van Laanen farm complex which has been awaiting funds for development.

itself under its current budget, ideas like turning the Van Laanen farm complex — a former dairy purchased by the state in 1983 — into a visitors'

center for Sunset State Beach are put on the back burner, if not thrown out. Another

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Watsonville site that has been affected is Castro Adobe, a historic adobe house being restored in Watsonville, said Randy Widera of the Friends of Santa Cruz County State Parks.

"It's a perfect example of how state parks doesn't have any money to fix or repair these historic sites to get these parks in good shape," said Widera, director of Strategic Development and Partnerships with Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks, a nonprofit group that supports the county's coastal state parks.

California's state parks system is listed as one of 2008's "11 Most Endangered Places" by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which cites deterioration, neglect and poor public policy as threats to the system. Current general fund ap-



The Van Laanen farm complex is situated near the entrance to Sunset State Beach.

Tarmo Hannula
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propriations cover only 40 percent of actual maintenance and operating needs, according to the NTHP, part of a long-term funding shortage that has led to a \$1.2 billion backlog of deferred maintenance, according to the Save Our State Parks

Campaign.

"There's this long list that they don't have any funding for," Widera said.

In January, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger proposed closing 48 state parks, including Portola Redwoods State Park in

the Santa Cruz Mountains, and cutting lifeguards at 16 state beaches, including Sunset and Manresa state beaches in La Selva Beach. The state parks got a reprieve when Schwarzenegger, after an outcry by parks supporters, axed that idea and proposed to instead increase user fees \$1 to \$2 at more popular parks, which would provide enough funding for the next fiscal year, according to officials.

State parks supporters, however, support a new proposal brought forth by local state Assemblyman John Laird to provide sustainable funding for the parks. Under the proposal, called the California State Park Access Pass, a \$10 annual surcharge would be assessed on vehicles, raising \$282 million, according to Laird's office. That

would include a \$120 million increase for maintenance, according to Laird's office. In exchange, all California registered vehicles would get free day-use access to state parks and beaches.

The Assembly Budget Subcommittee on Resources approved Laird's proposal on May 28. The proposal is currently one of many proposals being evaluated by the six-member Budget Conference Committee, of which Laird is vice chairman, Laird spokesman Bill Maxfield said. Whether the proposal will be considered for the final conversation for the budget should be determined in the "next week or two," Maxfield added.

Widera supports Laird's proposal over Schwarzenegger's proposed user-fee increases. Initially, Widera thought Laird's proposal was a "long shot," but has been encouraged by favorable newspaper editorials and positive community feedback, he said.

"I think part of the reason (for the support) is it's a solution-oriented proposal as opposed to a temporary fix," Widera said. "Number two, the people get something out of it; they get to go to the parks for free."

Widera said there hasn't been any major opposition toward the proposal "other than a standard line of no new taxes."

"Even from that (group), I think people realize this is an elegant solution, a solution with promise," Widera said, adding that the proposal gives state parks a reliable funding stream,

which would allow them to plan for the long term, instead of merely applying "Band-Aids" to problems.

Wolcott, who also oversees Manresa State Beach and the Forest of Nisene Marks, said his office maintains a neutral position on Laird's proposal. Wolcott compared running a state park to running a city. Parks officials at Sunset State Beach, a couple hundred acres in size, are responsible for public works and public safety, and also provide educational opportunities, Wolcott said.

Over the last 12 months, Sunset State Beach officials have been securing water systems to provide safe, clear water for visitors, but haven't had money for other tasks. These put-off tasks include replacing several "out of date" bathrooms that haven't been changed since the 1960s and are showing "wear and tear," as well as replacing the aging kiosk at the park entrance, Wolcott said.

While there are some maintenance issues at the parks Wolcott oversees, they are popular; the campgrounds at both Sunset and Manresa were full Tuesday, and have become increasingly popular with RV users. Wolcott indicated that popularity is because the beaches themselves are the real attractions and, to a certain degree, take care of themselves.

"Generally our South County beaches are doing well," he said. "The beaches are one of the few areas that rejuvenate themselves every year."





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Ruben Sanguino (left) and Joseph Johnson of the California Conservation Corps keep a stack of redwood planks in order at the Castro Adobe house.

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weeks inserting long, large-bore bolts and steel cables, creating what will essentially be a giant rib cage around the building. This will protect it during earthquakes.

Organizers hope to have the roof installed over the structure by the end of summer.

The workers began with a team of volunteers who made more than 2,000 adobe bricks by hand to be used in the rebuilding, a process that took three weeks. These bricks

were put up for "adoption" for \$100, an idea borne to raise funds for future phases of the restoration.

A team of 150 volunteers was fully immersed in the brick-making process; shoveling soil, adding water and straw, and using wooden molds to form the 3-foot-long bricks. The bricks weighed about 75 pounds each.

The two-story house was one of four of its kind built in Santa Cruz County, and boasts one of only five Mexican-style *cocinas* left in the state.

The house also had the only fandango room — a large dance

hall — for hundreds of miles. Here, people would come for dances, weddings and quinceañeras. The view from the balcony stretched through the pastureland all the way to the ocean.

"To be able to save this heritage for the community — you're putting back what was," said Chris Barraza, the carpenter foreman working with the project.

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Castro Adobe bricks are still available for sponsorship. For information about the Castro Adobe, go to www.castroadobe.org or call 251-9331.



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Much-needed repair work is in order at the Castro Adobe.



Campers set up camp Tuesday at Sunset State Beach.

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