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## National Parks are booming in California and nation

WASHINGTON, D.C.

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- **Visitors up in most parks**
- **Great Recession gets the credit – or blame**

Ten million more Americans and foreign tourists visited the nation's national parks last year than in 2008, a 3.9 percent increase, despite or perhaps because of the Great Recession.

In all, more than 285 million people visited national parks and other units of the National Park System during 2009, up from just under 275 million in 2008.

This fell just short of the all-time visitation record of 287.2 million in 1987.

It marks the fifth busiest year ever for the National Park System.

"People both here and abroad know that our national parks are America's best idea, even during an economic downturn," says Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar. "They provide vacation bargains for families living on a tight budget. They offer priceless opportunities to inspire adults and children alike with our wonderful natural, cultural and historic heritage."

Possible reasons for the increase in visitation include three weekends last summer when the Park Service waived entrance fees, the visits by President Obama and his family to Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon, the publicity generated by Ken Burns' documentary on the history of the national parks, a decline in gasoline prices, and the continued strong exchange rate the Euro enjoys against the dollar, the National Park Service says.

Mr. Salazar points to a study that says the National Park System supports more than 223,000 jobs and nearly \$14 billion in economic activity across the country.

National Parks touching the Central Valley range from Lassen Volcanic National Park east of Chico to Kings Canyon and Sequoia National Parks east of Visalia.

Here's how they fared:

- Kings Canyon National Park saw 609,296 recreational visitors last year, up 34,426 from 2008.
- Sequoia National Park had 965,170 visitors in 2009, an increase of 35,159 people over the year before.
- Iconic Yosemite National Park hosted 3,737,472 visitors in 2009, an increase of 305,958 over 2008.
- Lassen Volcanic National Park, location of the last volcanic eruption in California, had an 11,722-person drop in visitors to 365,639 in 2009.

The federal park with the most visits in California last year was the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in the San Francisco Bay Area, with more than 15 million visitors, up by 481,622 over the year before. That's the biggest gain of any national park in the state.

The facility with the fewest visitors was Eugene O'Neil National Historic Site, which saw 3,783 visitors last year. But that was an increase of 1,239 over the previous year. The site requires reservations and visitors are bused from Danville. The site is Mr. O'Neill's home where he wrote such plays as "The Iceman Cometh," "Long Day's Journey Into Night," and "A Moon for the Misbegotten."

Joshua Tree National Park, near Twentynine Palms, had the biggest numerical loss – 87,975 – of any California national park, dropping the total in 2009 to just over 1.3 million visitors.

In all, California's NPS sites had an increase of 943,730 visitors last year, going from 34,374,981 visitors in 2008 to 35,318,711 last year.

Great Smoky Mountain National Park continued its reign as the most-visited national park in 2009, attracting 9.4 million visitors, while the Blue Ridge Parkway was the most visited unit of the system with nearly 16 million visitors.

The top 10 most visited national parks were:

- Great Smoky Mountains National Park, 9,491,437 visitors
- Grand Canyon National Park, 4,348,068
- Yosemite National Park, 3,737,472
- Yellowstone National Park, 3,295,187
- Olympic National Park, 3,276,459
- Rocky Mountain National Park, 2,822,325
- Zion National Park, 2,735,402
- Cuyahoga Valley National Park, 2,589,288
- Grand Teton National Park, 2,580,081
- Acadia National Park, 2,227,698

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