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**FLORIDA STATE PARKS ENCOURAGE FAMILY, FRIENDS AND OUTDOOR FUN,
ANNOUNCES FREE ADMISSION TO ALL PARKS ON JULY 13**

-Nature-based activities highlighted during the month of July-

FLORIDA – To celebrate July as Recreation and Parks Month, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection’s Division of Recreation & Parks is encouraging family-friendly, outdoor recreation with the launch of its *Family. Friends. Fun.* Campaign to reconnect children and families with nature. Since 1985, the National Recreation and Park Association has designated July as Recreation and Parks Month. To celebrate this designation, Florida is waiving admission to all state parks on July 13.

“Recreation and Parks Month is an excellent time for family and friends to visit a state park and experience *...the Real FloridaSM*,” said DEP Secretary Michael W. Sole, who himself started his career as a marine biologist working in one of Florida’s state parks. “State parks provide a multitude of activities that promote mental and physical well being.”

The *Family. Friends. Fun.* Campaign is hosting events in state parks that appeal to individuals and families of all ages and interests this July during Recreation and Parks Month. On Sunday, July 13, entry into all 161 state parks will be free, providing an opportunity for everyone to head outdoors and experience Florida State Parks.

The National Park Service and the National Association of State Park Directors encourage the nation’s state park systems to endorse the national initiative to connect children and nature, and influence the decline of nature-deficit disorder. The ongoing movement to promote outdoor activity began with Richard Louv’s book, *The Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* which highlighted the benefits of outdoor recreation. Studies show that young people between the ages eight and 18 average almost seven hours per day playing indoors on computers, video games and watching television, resulting in increased cases of obesity, Attention Deficit Disorder and depression.

“Without the encouragement of parents and friends, children are less likely to play outdoors and gain exposure to natural resources and nature-based recreation,” said Florida State Parks Director Mike Bullock. “Establishing a healthy relationship with nature during childhood is a valuable habit that will benefit individuals and society as a whole for years.”

The first two-time Gold Medal winner honoring the nation’s best state park service, Florida’s state park system is one of the largest in the country with 161 parks spanning almost 700,000 acres and 100 miles of sandy white beach. From swimming and diving in Florida’s rivers and springs to birding and fishing or hiking and riding on natural scenic trails, Florida’s state parks offer year-around outdoor activities for all ages. Battle re-enactments and Native American festivals celebrate Florida’s unique history, while art shows, museums and lighthouses offer a window into Florida’s cultural heritage. Florida’s state parks are also home to the 2008 Best Beach in the nation, Caladesi Island State Park, located off the coast of Southwest Florida in Pinellas County

For more information about Florida State Parks and activities scheduled for July 13 and throughout Recreation and Parks Month, visit www.FloridaStateParks.org. For more information on the national initiative to connect children and nature, visit <http://www.childrenandnature.org/>.