

CDC says October soonest for swine flu shots

by MIKE STOBBE
AP Medical Writer

ATLANTA—A US health official said a swine flu vaccine could be available as early as October, but only if vaccine production and testing run smoothly this summer.

Dr. Anne Schuchat (Shook-it) of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the agency began shipping virus samples to manufacturers in the past several days. The government will have to review the safety and effectiveness of what's produced, and decide if a vaccination campaign is warranted. October is about the time seasonal flu vaccine campaigns generally get rolling.

CDC officials reported more than 8,500 probable and confirmed cases in the US, including 12 deaths and more than 500 hospitalizations.

Schwarzenegger plan would close 220 Calif. parks

by SAMANTHA YOUNG
AP Writer

SACRAMENTO—Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's budget cuts could mean the closing of up to 220 state parks, among them the home of the world's tallest tree and other attractions that draw millions of visitors.

Schwarzenegger this week recommended eliminating \$70 million in parks spending through June 30, 2010. An additional \$143.4 million would be saved in the following fiscal year by keeping the parks closed.

"This is a worst-case scenario," said Roy Sterns, a spokesman at the state parks department. "If we can do less than this, we will try. But under the present proposal, this is it."

Among the parks that could be closed, the parks department said Thursday, are Lake Tahoe's Emerald Bay, Will Rogers' Southern California ranch and Humboldt Redwoods State Park, which boasts the world's tallest tree, a giant that tops 370 feet. Even the Governor's Mansion in Sacra-

mento is on the list.

The Legislature last year rejected the governor's proposal to close 48 state parks. But lawmakers said that with California's budget deficit now at \$24.3 billion, the situation is so dire that it is likely some parks will close.

"Things that were previously dead on arrival are a lot more viable in a crisis like this," said Democrat Jared Huffman, chairman of the Assembly's parks and wildlife committee. "I think some cuts are coming to the parks, and they'll be cuts I won't like and the public won't like."

The state parks department said a \$70 million cut would leave it with enough money to run just 59 of California's 279 state parks.

The state's famed park system attracts nearly 80 million visitors a year. William Randolph Hearst's Castle on the Central Coast and a dozen other so-called money-makers would remain open, as would many Southern California beaches that attract millions of visitors year round.

But others that could close include: Fort Ross State Historic Park, the southernmost Russian settlement in North America; Bodie State Historic Park, one of the best-preserved Old West ghost towns; and Big Basin Redwoods, the oldest state park.

The proposal has angered conservationists and some Democrats in the Legislature, who say California's parks are treasured spots that help the state and local economy.

"State parks draw tourism to California," State Parks Foundation president Elizabeth Goldstein said. "This proposal makes the budget situation worse."

The foundation estimates the state gets a \$2.35 return for every dollar it spends on parks.

California spends roughly \$400 million a year running 279 state parks and beaches, with roughly a third of the money coming from the state general fund. The rest comes from user fees, which account for slightly more than a quarter of the revenue; bond

funds; gasoline taxes; federal money; and other sources.

Assembly Minority Leader Mike Villines said the state cannot afford to subsidize state parks when lawmakers are being asked to make severe cuts in even more vital areas.

"Parks are just not going to be a priority over public safety and education, as much as we hate to see them close," Villines said.

At least 2,000 park rangers, biologists, lifeguards, interpreters, architects and maintenance workers would be laid off if the proposal is adopted, said Sterns, the parks spokesman.

The layoffs would be in addition to 5,000 state positions the governor has already recommended cutting.

"When you cut that much, you have to let go highly trained teams of biologists that you can't get back in a year or two," Huffman said. "It's a myth to think you can mothball the entire system. These cuts will cripple the park system for a decade or more."

Gov't allows short-term loans for tax credit

by ALAN ZIBEL,
AP Real Estate Writer

WASHINGTON—Thousands of first-time homebuyers will be able to get short-term loans so they can quickly make use of a new \$8,000 tax credit that was designed to boost the battered US housing market.

The Federal Housing Administration on May 29 released details of a plan in which borrowers who use FHA loans can get advances from lenders that effectively let them receive the credit before they complete their taxes.

The FHA had no estimate of how many borrowers would qualify. But the agency, which backs about a quarter of new home loans, is projected to guarantee about 2.2 million loans in the next budget year.

Borrowers can claim the credit by filing an amended 2008 tax return or can wait for their 2009 return.

The change "will present an enormous benefit for communities struggling to deal with an oversupply of housing," Housing Secretary Shaun Donovan said in a statement.

Borrowers will still have to come up with the FHA's required 3.5 percent down payment, unless they work through a state or local housing program. But officials say the money can still be used for closing costs or a larger down payment.

The tax credit was included in the economic stimulus package signed by President Barack Obama in February.

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