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## State-Parks Group Thrives in Recession

By [Jack Neff](#)

Published: [April 20, 2009](#)

BATAVIA, Ohio (AdAge.com) -- State budgets, state parks, nonprofit fundraising and media outlays all have taken severe hits from the recession, yet it's proving a boon for a marketing operation that packages all those things together, tied up with a green bow.

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Government Solutions Group of Pasadena, Calif., launched in 2003 by former Procter & Gamble Co. and Nestlé marketer Shari Boyer, creates marketer-sponsored visitor guides passed out by rangers in 1,200 parks in 11 states, including California, New York and Texas.

The parks get a 20% cut of revenue, plus visitor guides they otherwise probably wouldn't have, particularly given estimates that state parks will see budget cuts ranging from 10% to 15% nationally this year.

Ms. Boyer said she expects revenue to double this year. At least some of the momentum comes from marketers such as Coca-Cola, American Express, Nestlé's Juicy Juice, Canon, Geico, Toyota and Travelocity looking to shift marketing dollars to projects that do environmental or community good to better resonate with consumers in hard times, she said.

In a promotion launched earlier this month through GSG, the Coca-Cola Bottling Co. of Southern California is looking to raise \$500,000 to plant 1 million trees in state parks damaged by wildfires in recent years.

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### Better odds

Shoppers at Stater Bros. Supermarkets can donate \$1 at checkout, and Coke is donating \$1 for every \$10 worth of products purchased. In the first 10 days, the promo raised \$200,000, putting it on pace to easily exceed its five-week goal. "As we did our research and looked at what our consumers, customers and employees wanted, it's a lot more cause marketing vs. sweepstakes marketing," said Terence Fitch, the Coca-Cola Enterprises unit's VP-general manager. "It just made us feel really good about what we're doing."

He said the recession may actually be making consumers focus more on the environment, rather than less. "I think it's recalibrated people's thought process," he said, adding that the recession is fostering a sort of "nurturing" mind-set that's helping the Coke brand some, too. "We're somewhat of a comfort brand," he said, "and I think people are coming back to what they know."

State parks tend to be less expensive and closer to home than national parks, Ms. Boyer said, making them more attractive to consumers in a recession.

Marketing programs that fund local and state parks are likely to resonate with consumers right now, said Richard Luker, author of the recently published book "Simple Community," chief strategy officer of TBA Global and founder of the ESPN Sports Poll. He said in recent polls people have expressed an increased interest in community events and gatherings and are likely to have increased appreciation for marketers that fund them.

His surveys have found that 31% of adults ages 18 and up typically have visited a park within the past week, and 70% have visited one within six months, creating a potentially huge audience for marketers.