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## New boss vows to keep Utah's state parks open

Outdoors • Fred Hayes says the agency is looking for ways to generate revenue.

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As a 30-year employee of Utah State Parks, Fred Hayes has done everything from cleaning restrooms to managing a nature center and teaching off-roader classes.

Now, he'll be running the agency's 43 parks and overseeing the state's off-highway vehicle, boating and trails programs — all on the heels of dramatic budget cuts ordered by the Legislature the past three years.

Hayes, a native of Duchesne, was named Tuesday as director of Utah State Parks after serving four months as acting director and vowed to “fight with our dying breath” to keep every park open.

“This is very exciting. We are in such a good position with a great staff and a new, fresh season before us,” Hayes said after Department of Natural Resources Executive Director Michael Styler introduced him to parks employees Tuesday morning without the “interim” attached to his title. “We have had a warm spring and we have plenty of water in the reservoirs. We couldn't ask for anything more.”

That enthusiasm for the parks and its programs, along with an intimate knowledge of the system, helped the 52-year-old Hayes rise to the top of the 96 applicants for the job.

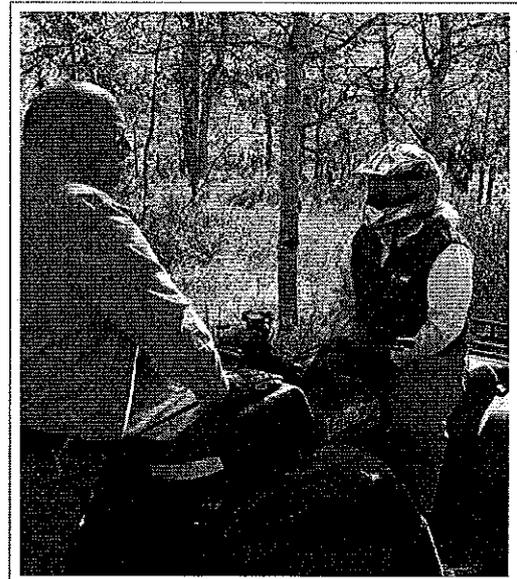
“Fred had a little bit better handle on what is going on out there in the communities and with the employees, but, most importantly, he understands the park system and has been involved in it long enough to know what the priorities are,” said Sen. Ralph Okerlund, R-Monroe, who serves on a natural resources appropriations subcommittee and was part of the selection panel that picked Hayes. “Fred knows what people expect and how to deliver on that.”

A shrinking budget and staff, coupled with low morale for those remaining employees, are likely to pose the biggest challenges. Hayes plans to embrace the positives rather than focus on the losses.

“We have no layoffs scheduled and no intention to close any parks,” he said. “It is our commitment to fight with our dying breath to not close a facility.”

Utah State Parks has seen its general tax-fund dollars shrivel from \$12.3 million several years ago to \$4 million for the next fiscal year, which starts July 1. The rest of the agency's annual budget of \$28.2 million comes from various fees, including off-highway-vehicle and boat registrations.

Hayes, whose predecessor, Mary Tullius, retired in December, said the agency is working to generate more revenue by



Fred Hayes, a 30-year employee of the agency who once worked as a off-highway vehicle education specialist, was named director of Utah State Parks April 24, 2012. Courtesy Utah State Parks

giving people recreational and educational opportunities outside of the obvious, and already existing, reasons to visit state parks. He also expects to do it without an increase in day-use and camping fees.

"Our motto for the year is more — more people having more fun in more parks more often," he said. "We are working to find ways to draw more people by offering a greater diversity of ways to enjoy the parks."

He pointed to Starvation State Park, where he took his first job as a seasonal worker.

"If you are not an angler or a boater, there is not a lot of reason to come to a water park," Hayes said. "What if, for example, we had an archery 3-D target shooting area as well? We are also seeking more private partners to run portions of our parks where it makes sense."

Utah legislators have told state parks officials to find ways to generate revenue to deal with the cuts, and Styler is confident Hayes can do just that.

"We considered many excellent candidates," Styler said. "Fred was chosen because of his vision for the future of state parks in a market-driven world and for his ability to inspire those he leads."

Hayes' first stints with the state came as a seasonal employee at three reservoir-based parks close to his hometown of Duchesne: Starvation, Steinaker and Red Fleet.

He experienced the historical side of Utah's parks as a ranger at the Territorial Statehouse in Fillmore and then worked as a naturalist at the Rock Cliff Nature Center at Jordanelle State Park. His career turned in a different direction as an off-highway-vehicle education specialist. Hayes eventually become the OHV program coordinator. More recently he has served as a deputy director to Tullius.

"I've been through most of the levels of state parks and that means the learning curves as the director may not be quite as vertical," Hayes said. "I'm just excited to get going."

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#### About Fred Hayes

Born and raised in Duchesne.

Earned a bachelor's degree in botany at Brigham Young University and completed graduate school at the University of Wyoming in recreation management.

Served an LDS Church mission in Japan.

Took a short break from his career with the state to work as a biology teacher at Vernal Junior High and Union High.

Lives in Heber City with his wife, Serena. He has five children and two grandchildren.

Will get an annual base salary of \$104,000, benefits not included.

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