Prop. 40 critics, backers mull parks’ value

Measure would spend $2.6 billion on civic projects

By Douglas Fischer
STAFF WRITER

Two years ago California voters went to the polls and approved $2.1 billion for state parks, waterways, playgrounds and wildlife.

The money went fast — about $700 million is left today — and the state is now paying off the 25-year notes.

On March 5, voters get a chance to do it again. Proposition 40, the California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Act of 2002, directs $2.6 billion worth of state-backed bonds into virtually the same areas attended by Proposition 12 in 2000.

Supporters peg the measure as a badly needed sequel to a bond act that finally brought cash to conservation. State parks, wildlands and waterways were largely ignored through the 1990s, and supporters say approval would produce a “nice mosaic” of conservation and parks across California.

“Prop. 12 was basically catch-up,” said John Woodbury, director of the Bay Area Open Space Council. “We were dealing with stuff that we hadn’t dealt with for a decade. To not go back into shutdown mode, Prop. 40 is essential.”

Detractors question the decision to borrow, especially when the state faces a $1.7 billion budget gap and needs $830 billion-plus in the near future for school construction. They