

Director of California Parks resigns

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

State Parks Director Ruth Coleman resigned this morning and her second in command has been fired after officials learned the department has been sitting on nearly \$54 million in surplus money for as long as 12 years.

The moves come in the wake of a scandal, revealed by The Bee on Sunday, in which a deputy director at State Parks carried out a secret vacation buyout program for employees at department headquarters last year. That buyout cost the state more than \$271,000.



California
Parks Director
Ruth Coleman
has resigned.
Photo/LTN file

The *Bee* began inquiring about rumors of a surplus when it learned about the buyout, and submitted a Public Records Act request for the fund data on Wednesday.

John Laird, secretary of the state Natural Resources Agency, which oversees State Parks, told the *Bee* that investigations have been launched by both the Attorney General's office and the Department of Finance to figure out how – and why – the

Department of Parks and Recreation squirreled away so much money for so long.

“Ruth has stepped up and taken personal responsibility,” Laird said of Coleman, who is the longest-serving director in the 150-year history of the department. “It’s an incredibly troubling discovery.”

Laird emphasized that it remains unclear who is to blame for the surplus, and whether it is linked to the vacation buyout, which sources told The Bee was carried out by Manuel Thomas Lopez, 45, of Granite Bay, who was demoted in October and then resigned in May.

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