

State lawmakers condemn parks officials

By Kevin Yamamura, Sacramento Bee

In their first examination of state accounting problems, California lawmakers condemned parks officials Thursday for hiding nearly \$54 million from budget writers.

The revelation has damaged the integrity of state government and its budget process, lawmakers from both parties said at an Assembly budget subcommittee hearing.

“Many of us here today feel betrayed,” said Assemblyman Bob Blumenfield, D-Woodland Hills, chairman of the Assembly Budget Committee. “It’s our constitutional duty as state legislators to craft the state budget. And the credibility of this year’s budget has been tarnished.”

Officials from the Department of Finance and state controller’s office told legislators they will install new cross-checks to verify that figures for 560-plus special funds are consistent across their different sets of books. Previously, state departments were largely responsible for keeping their own special fund accounting in order.

Finance Director Ana Matosantos testified that her department has found no other instances where departments purposely shielded funds in the way that parks officials apparently had for years.

In a quick audit released last week, the Finance Department found \$268.5 million of accounting errors, both positive and negative, in a special fund universe that spent \$33.4 billion in 2010-11. The errors netted \$196.7 million more in state accounts than finance officials knew about in late 2011 as they crafted Gov. Jerry Brown’s January budget.

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