



CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS FOUNDATION

July 25, 2012

Dear Governor Brown, President Pro Tem Steinberg, and Speaker Perez:

On behalf of the California State Parks Foundation (CSPF), our 130,000 members statewide, and our 43 year history of enhancing, protecting and advocating for California's state parks, I cannot convey enough how deeply shocked and dismayed we have been to learn of the irregularities that have surfaced from the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) in the last several days. The news of the unauthorized vacation buyout program, coupled with the discovery of more than \$50 million in 12 year fund balances that should have been disclosed and directed to parks and recreation operations, has affected our members, our partners, and the public's trust in our state park system.

Our state parks have been used as a political football in recent years and have been repeatedly held hostage to broader budget and policy fights. That context is neither justification nor an excuse for the scandals that have come out but contributes in part to the current state of affairs affecting our state parks.

Our state park system – the 279 parks themselves, the legacy they protect, and the promise they bestow to the future – is and always has been bigger than any governmental bureaucracy. Since the first park closures were proposed in January 2008, CSPF has worked tirelessly to build a network across the state of individuals, organizations, businesses, local governments, and countless others to take on the cause of saving our state parks on as their own. Following the budget decisions last spring that enacted a significant, permanent cut to the park system's General Fund, and the resulting announcement in May 2011 of the 70 specific state parks that would close, we more than redoubled our efforts to activate Californians to speak up for their parks.

For the last fourteen months, we have publicly and repeatedly made the urgent case for citizen volunteerism, activism, and, most critically, financial contributions to keep our parks open. In every forum available, we informed the public that their time, talent, and dollars were vitally needed to keep our parks open and accessible for future generations. Our efforts, and the efforts of dozens of community organizations that scrambled to get up to speed, build capacity, and conduct outreach to their communities to raise funds in these recent months, is the reason why there is a temporary but real safety net for parks as was announced by DPR just days before parks were slated to close.

That case for the public's attention and support for our state parks remains. Yet the recent news has damaged the public's confidence and undermined the urgency and necessity that we and park partners across the state so clearly and vehemently articulated.

Headquarters

50 Francisco Street
Suite 110
San Francisco, CA 94133
OFFICE 415-262-4400
FAX 415-772-8969
EMAIL members@calparks.org

Southern California Office

448 South Hill Street
Suite 610
Los Angeles, CA 90013
OFFICE 213-542-2450
FAX 213-542-2457

Sacramento Office

1510 J Street
Suite 220
Sacramento, CA 95814
OFFICE 916-442-2119
FAX 916-442-2809

www.calparks.org

Your Voice for **Parks**

An erosion of the public's confidence in our state park system is heartbreaking. There are few other symbols in California of our state's greatness, our collective history, and our very identity as the Golden State.

It would be easy for us and all partners and supporters of our state park system to remain angry. It would be understandable to do so.

But we at CSPF feel a commitment and duty to all park visitors to ensure that these scandals do not define our state park system. You, as leaders of our state, have an obligation and an opportunity to restore confidence and rebuild this system for California.

We support all efforts to legitimately obtain answers as to how and why these irregularities occurred, and ensure they never happen again. As those inquiries begin, we offer the four points below as a framework for the near-term proceedings and legislative actions:

1. We urge that an independent audit be conducted by the State Auditor. Other investigations underway should continue, but it is critical that an autonomous and unimpeded audit be conducted. The State Auditor's office has no role as either an existing control agency or fiscal overseer of DPR and is in a unique position to have an outside viewpoint during their thorough audit process.
2. The more than \$50 million in "found" funds must be dedicated and appropriated to state parks and recreation purposes as originally intended. To contemplate that those funds could be siphoned and directed to another state budget purpose would add insult to injury. In particular, the monies in the State Park & Recreation Fund (SPRF) are funds that came entirely from park users and visitors, as the SPRF is the repository for day use fees, camping fees, concessions proceeds, and other earned revenues.
3. Funds that will be appropriated to the state park system's operations should be used specifically to: (1) keep parks open now in a way that matches or leverages the investments and contributions of communities across the state, and (2) provide seed funding for enterprise projects and proposals that will generate revenues and make the state park system more self-sufficient where that is possible.
4. A qualified, independent body of dedicated and skilled citizens that ensures transparency, public engagement, and participation must be empowered to oversee and guide DPR. The existing State Park and Recreation Commission might be strengthened to serve this role. Californians need to have confidence in a standing body made up of dedicated citizen volunteers whose responsibility it is to ensure that DPR is maintaining fidelity with its public trust requirements, protecting our park resources, maintaining public access to parks, and fulfilling its fiduciary responsibilities. This body or the Commission needs specific qualifications for its members, including, at a minimum, individuals with expertise in park management, finance and accounting, natural, cultural & historic resource protection, and more.

CSPF Letter to Governor & Legislative Leadership
July 25, 2012
Page 3

In the days, weeks and months to come, we stand ready, as we have for 43 years, to work as a partner on behalf of our members and the millions of Californians and tourists who enjoy our state parks. We look forward to working with you, the rest of the Legislature, and all park partners to ensure that our state parks remain available, accessible and enjoyable to all park users – now and into the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Elizabeth Goldstein', followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Elizabeth Goldstein
President

Cc: Members of the California State Legislature
John Laird, Secretary of Natural Resources
Janelle Beland, Acting Director, Department of Parks and Recreation