

Summary of 10-3-12 interview of Mary Wright

Interview and summary by Thomas M. Patton, Deputy Attorney General

Mary Wright served 25 years with the Department of Parks and Recreation, starting in 1976 as director of the Asilomar training center. Wright holds a master's degree in public health administration and previously managed county welfare and public health training programs.

In 1981 Wright became superintendent of the Monterey district. In 1992, then-Governor Wilson appointed Wright to be a deputy director, and in 1999 then-Governor Davis appointed Wright to be chief deputy director. Wright served in that position under then-director Rusty Areias until retiring in 2001. During her time as chief deputy, Denzil Verardo was chief deputy director of administrative services, and Verardo reported directly to Areias rather than to Wright. (Mary Wright October 3, 2012 interview transcript (MWtr), pp. 2-11.)

Wright regularly sat in on executive-level meetings where budgets, visitation numbers, and revenues were discussed. (MWtr, p. 7.) Wright stated that during her tenure at the Parks Department no one ever mentioned anything about discrepancies in the financial reports submitted to the Controller's Office and the Department of Finance, and no one advised her that such disparity had begun growing significantly beginning in 1997. (MWtr, pp. 12-14.)

After the news stories concerning financial reporting disparities came out, Wright spoke with former administrative services chief deputy director Denzil Verardo, former San Diego district superintendent Dave Van Cleve, and retired division chief Lynn Rhodes. Wright reports that everyone she spoke with expressed surprise and disbelief, and an inability to understand why a reserve of undisclosed funds would have existed. (MWtr, pp. 6-9.)

During their recent conversation, Verardo reminded Wright that the Department ran a pilot program for performance-based budgeting, and Verardo wondered whether that program could have had something to do with disparities in finance reports, which news reports erroneously indicate began approximately twelve years ago in 2000.¹ (MWtr, pp. 14-16.)

¹ Records provided by the Department of Finance and attached hereto as Exhibit A show that a relatively small disparity existed in the early 1990s, and began to grow significantly in 1997.