

Summary: Investigation of Alleged Ethics Violation by USGS Employee

Report Date: February 3, 2017

OIG investigated allegations that a U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Research Ecologist, violated ethics and employment rules by working in paid positions at two universities located in China without USGS's permission. The complainant alleged the positions in China required the research ecologist to use USGS developed research technology and that the research ecologist's work was completed as part of China's Thousand Talents Plan.

Our investigation revealed the research ecologist traveled to China to collaborate and mentor students at Chinese educational institutions without USGS's permission. We could not show any of them paid the research ecologist as an employee; however, the research ecologist acknowledged some of those institutions paid his travel expenses, which violated ethics rules. We determined the research ecologist's current supervisor knew he held an honorary position at a Chinese university. His supervisor did not know the institution covered the research ecologist's travel expenses. We determined that the research ecologist completed annual ethics training and that he was informed during that training that off duty mentoring positions needed approval by USGS.

We could not substantiate the allegation that the research ecologist used USGS developed technology in China. He denied using any proprietary USGS research technology while mentoring in China and added the information he shared was available to the public. The research ecologist told us that he was formally recruited for China's One Thousand Talents program, but he said he never actually participated in the program.

This is a summary of a report of investigation that was issued to USGS.

