

Summary: Allegations of Negligence and Impropriety Regarding the Death of a USGS Employee Unfounded

Report Date: May 9, 2017

OIG initiated an investigation after receiving a hotline complaint that the death of a U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) research ecologist in August 2015 was the result of criminal negligence by a USGS trip leader who led a research river trip in Grand Canyon National Park (GRCA) . The complainant asserted that the trip leader failed to use reasonable care and act upon foreseeable circumstances when the ecologist displayed signs of heat exhaustion while hiking in GRCA backcountry. The complainant further alleged that USGS, National Park Service (NPS), and the DOI Office of the Solicitor (SOL) conspired to alter facts when preparing their final reports related to the matter.

Our investigation found no evidence of criminal conduct by the trip leader, or evidence that suggested SOL conspired with NPS and USGS to alter the factual representation of their fatality reports. We did not re-investigate the death of the ecologist, but did review all investigative and safety reports and concurred with the findings from NPS, USGS, and the Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). We concluded that NPS, USGS, and OSHA conducted thorough investigations and that USGS took appropriate actions regarding recommended improvements to USGS policies and procedures.

This is a summary of a report of investigation we provided to the Director of the USGS.

