

Summary: Alleged Retaliation at Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge

Report Date: June 13, 2016

The OIG investigated allegations that U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) management officials had retaliated against an FWS employee at Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge (MNWR) in Baring, ME.

The office of U.S. Senator Susan M. Collins (R-ME) forwarded allegations that FWS management officials had retaliated against the employee, who worked in FWS' fire management program, by directing that he be reassigned to Acadia National Park (ANP) in Bar Harbor, ME, about 100 miles away from MNWR. The employee alleged that the officials were directing him to relocate to ANP because he had vocally objected to certain FWS policies and authored "blunt" emails during his tenure with FWS. The employee also alleged that having to commute each day to ANP would cause him financial difficulty and that he was the only fire program employee being directed to relocate.

We found no evidence indicating that any actions taken by FWS officials were retaliatory or taken in response to the employee's past communications. We found that FWS and the National Park Service had planned for 2 years to consolidate their fire management programs and that the employee was notified several months in advance that his position would be relocated from MNWR to ANP as part of the consolidation. Based on our review, FWS followed proper notification procedures for the employee's directed reassignment to ANP. In addition, we found that while the employee would have to commute to ANP more often than he had commuted to MNWR, ANP was only about half the distance from his home. We also found that although the employee's position was the only one reassigned to ANP, other FWS employees were affected by the consolidation.

The employee declined the directed reassignment and refused to report to his new duty station at ANP. Despite this, he was not placed in absent-without-leave status; rather, FWS managers placed him on administrative leave—with pay—pending a decision about his employment. He was removed from Federal service 3 months later.

This is a summary of an investigative report that was issued to the FWS Director for information. We did not require a response.

