

Summary: Investigation of Improper Meetings Regarding a Conservation Plan for the American Burying Beetle

Report Date: April 29, 2015

OIG investigated several allegations against U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) employees involved in efforts to create a general conservation plan for the endangered American burying beetle. The anonymous complainant alleged that the FWS employees met with representatives from the oil and gas (O&G) industry, who would be using the plan to apply for “incidental take” permits when operating in the beetle’s habitat, but the employees did not involve other interest groups or stakeholders in the meetings. The complainant believed that FWS’ exclusion of the other groups and stakeholders might have constituted undue influence, violating Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) and Administrative Procedure Act (APA) regulations. The complainant also alleged that the FWS employees provided draft copies of the conservation plan to the O&G representatives for feedback.

We investigated the allegations and consulted with the U.S. Department of the Interior’s Office of the Solicitor. Our investigation did not reveal any evidence that FWS employees improperly met with O&G representatives, violated FACA or APA regulations, or inappropriately shared draft conservation plan documents. We provided a copy of our report on the investigation to the Director of FWS but did not require a response.

This is a summary of an investigative report that was issued internally to the Department of the Interior. This summary was posted to the web on August 20, 2015.

