

Summary: Investigation of a FWS Regional Staff

Report Date: September 9, 2015

OIG investigated allegations of misconduct by a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Regional Director, a FWS Regional Deputy Director, and a regional wildlife biologist regarding a decision not to include the dunes sagebrush lizard on the endangered species list. Specifically, the complainants alleged that the Regional Deputy Director—

- misused her FWS position to financially and politically benefit friends outside the Federal Government;
- improperly changed a private company's permit to financially benefit a friend;
- provided her subordinate, a wildlife biologist, with preferential treatment because of their personal relationship and assigned her to the listing decision to ensure approval of the Texas Conservation Plan; and
- in concert with the Regional Director, approved the Texas Conservation Plan, a tool developed between FWS and the Texas Comptroller's Office to mediate the potential listing in Texas, even though they knew the plan to be legally insufficient and flawed.

Witnesses also suggested that the listing decision had been predetermined and politically motivated, that oil and gas companies had been coerced into joining the Texas Conservation Plan, that the plan did not follow FWS policy for evaluating conservation efforts, and that lawsuits initiated by two environmental groups suggested that the listing decision constituted scientific misconduct.

We found that the Deputy Regional Director's recommendation of her subordinate to the listing team and subsequent approval of an award may have violated ethical standards; and that her subordinate may have made false statements when asked about their personal relationship.

We found no evidence to substantiate the remaining allegations against the Regional Director or the Deputy Regional Director.

This is a summary of an investigative report that was issued to FWS for action.

