

# **Summary: Investigation of Regional and Local Management at Badlands National Park**

**Report Date: June 13, 2016**

An OIG investigation at Badlands National Park (BADL) in South Dakota found that management authorized the removal of a sickly buffalo calf from the park in violation of National Park Service (NPS) policy and Federal and State law. Our investigation at BADL also found that an NPS Deputy Regional Director went against NPS standard personnel procedure in directing the involuntary transfer of a district ranger to the park.

We received allegations that an NPS supervisory natural resource specialist violated NPS policy in May 2010 when he took the sickly buffalo calf from BADL to his home, where it later died. We discovered, however, that the former BADL deputy superintendent, who was the acting BADL superintendent at the time, authorized the buffalo's removal. We determined that removing the buffalo from the park violated NPS policy and Federal and State law. The local police chief chose not to cite the supervisory natural resource specialist for the misdemeanor violation and the U.S. Attorney's Office declined prosecution.

We also received an allegation that the Deputy Regional Director of the NPS Midwest Region improperly directed the transfer of a former district ranger from Minute Man Missile National Historic Site (MIMI) to BADL. Our investigation found that the Deputy Regional Director, after talking with other supervisory personnel, ordered the ranger's involuntary move, an action that went against NPS standard procedure of using performance appraisals, verbal or written warnings, and progressive discipline to address poor work performance or misconduct.

The ranger's personnel file did not contain any documentation of disciplinary issues, and the Deputy Regional Director's testimony regarding her involvement in the ranger's transfer evolved during her interviews, from first claiming not to remember, to then asserting that she did not direct or order the transfer. She finally agreed that she indicated the ranger should be moved and admitted that she essentially directed the transfer. We determined that the ranger's transfer was within supervisor discretion, especially because BADL is less than 4 miles from MIMI, but the personnel action created a perception that the transferred employee was treated unfairly.

This is a summary of an investigative report that was issued to the NPS Director for review and action.

