

Summary: Investigation of Ethical Misconduct at Ozark National Scenic Riverways

Report Date: December 14, 2016

The OIG recently concluded an investigation into allegations that an official at Ozark National Scenic Riverways (ONSR), in Van Buren, MO, made a decision at the park that affected their own personal finances, a potential violation of 18 U.S.C. 208, “Acts Affecting a Personal Financial Interest.”

We initiated our investigation after a National Park Service ethics employee provided information that the official made the decision to close the Big Spring Lodge and surrounding cabins at ONSR when the official purchased land in 2015 adjacent to ONSR to build rental cabins.

We found that in 2014, the official played a prominent role in the decision to close the lodge and cabins at the park, operated via a concession contract, but the superintendent at the time ultimately made the decision. We interviewed the former superintendent who stated that he relied upon the official’s background knowledge about the lodge and cabins before deciding to close them. He also stated the official never mentioned an interest in purchasing property adjacent to the park and building cabins there.

The official denied that it was planned to purchase the land when the official provided input into the decision to close the lodge and cabins, and we did not find any evidence to refute this. The official stated that in light of our investigation, cabins would not be built on the land.

This is a summary of a report of investigation that was issued to the National Park Service.

