

# **Summary: Questioned Costs and Disputed Property Ownership at BLM's Walking Box Ranch**

**Report Date: June 29, 2017**

OIG investigated allegations that the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), violated financial assistance agreements by using Federal funds to purchase unnecessary equipment and submitting questionable reimbursement claims for the maintenance and management of the Walking Box Ranch (WBR), a historic property in Nevada owned by BLM and managed with Federal funding by UNLV. Additionally, we investigated whether UNLV had improperly acquired WBR antiquities and artifacts after BLM had purchased the ranch.

Prior to our investigation, UNLV claims for expenditures for items such as smartphones, a weather station, and student tuition payments prompted BLM to audit UNLV's expenditures under the agreement, which identified \$197,118 in questioned costs. UNLV's representatives claimed the WBR expenditures were in accordance with general accounting standards and principles or as described in the financial assistance agreements with BLM. BLM subsequently requested that the Department's Office of the Solicitor, Pacific Southwest Region, render an opinion regarding UNLV's use of Federal funds.

The questions surrounding the ownership of the antiquities and artifacts remain the subject of a civil legal dispute. Our investigation revealed that WBR's seller donated the items to UNLV after BLM purchased the ranch in 2005, and BLM officials believe the items should have been donated to BLM. BLM also requested that the regional solicitor determine whether the seller could legally donate the items to UNLV after BLM had purchased the ranch.

Due to the ongoing civil and administrative actions by BLM and because the regional solicitor's review of the issues described above was still pending, we decided to close our investigation.

We issued this report to BLM for any action deemed appropriate.

