

**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

September 5, 2017

The Honorable Ryan Zinke  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

On August 2, 2017, the Department of the Interior (DOI) Office of the Inspector General (OIG) released a report titled, "Evaluation of DOI's Ability to Track Data for Land Purchases Made With Grant Funds."<sup>1</sup> The DOI OIG's evaluation identified 16 programs, which "awarded a total of 701 grants for land purchases in fiscal years 2014 and 2015, with a total land value of nearly \$815 million."<sup>2</sup> The DOI OIG concluded that DOI does not centrally track information about such grants and that grantees are failing to regularly report land inventories in which the federal government retains an interest per 2 C.F.R. § 200.329.<sup>3</sup> The lack of information and oversight for such an extensive amount and value of grants puts DOI at significant risk for misuse of grant funding.

The DOI OIG's evaluation report also reveals a particularly troubling statistic. Only 44 percent of grantees receiving these funds reported to DOI as required.<sup>4</sup> For instance, DOI OIG identified one grant program, the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund, which received \$241,119,061 over a two-year period.<sup>5</sup> In another example, Land and Water Conservation Fund grants were used to purchase land valuing at a total of \$27,904,140 within the same time period.<sup>6</sup> Grantees in these programs acquired some of the highest values of land of all programs surveyed by DOI OIG for its evaluation, yet none of these grantees properly reported back to the awarding agency.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GEN., U.S. DEP'T OF THE INTERIOR, EVALUATION OF DOI'S TRACKING OF DATA FOR LAND PURCHASES MADE WITH GRANT FUNDS, (2017), *available at*

[https://www.doiig.gov/sites/doiig.gov/files/FinalEvaluation\\_LandAppraisals\\_Public.pdf](https://www.doiig.gov/sites/doiig.gov/files/FinalEvaluation_LandAppraisals_Public.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>*Id.* at 4.

<sup>3</sup>*Id.*

<sup>4</sup>*Id.* at 5.

<sup>5</sup>*Id.* at 11; *See*, CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE, North American Wetlands Conservation Fund, *available at*

<https://www.cfda.gov/index?s=program&mode=form&tab=step1&id=f196d6a682051a606c12648680bf8fb4>.

<sup>6</sup>*Id.*

<sup>7</sup>*Id.*

The inadequate reporting and oversight of grants with such massive taxpayer funding raises serious concerns of fraud and abuse vulnerabilities. Previous DOI OIG audits found similar monitoring problems with certain Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) grants awarded to obtain land. In some of those cases, DOI OIG found grants being used for purposes contrary to the grant's purpose, such as for building "swimming pools or a bar" on conservation land.<sup>8</sup>

It is also important to note that the grants analyzed by DOI OIG in its August 2, 2017 evaluation report were only a sampling, as DOI does not have any centrally tracked information about grants used for land purchases.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the actual number of grants and amount of taxpayer money used to purchase land may be substantially greater than reported, further increasing DOI's risk for abuse of its grant programs.

The Committee seeks to better understand DOI's land purchase grants, and ensure their proper oversight. Therefore, in order to assist the Committee in its oversight, please produce the following documents and information as soon as possible, but no later than 5:00 p.m. on September 19, 2017:

1. Documents sufficient to show a complete list of Department of the Interior grant programs, which are used for the purpose of acquiring land;
2. Documents sufficient to show the total amount of grant money awarded by year for the purpose of acquiring land from fiscal years 2008 through 2016;
3. Documents sufficient to show the conditions under which land purchased with grant funds may be used;
4. All documents and communications, including but not limited to, correspondence from the Department of the Interior or its subordinate agencies to grantees, referring or relating to grantees' failures to adequately report land inventories for land purchased with grant funds; and
5. A sortable document, or convertible to Microsoft Excel, that is sufficient to show all DOI grants and cooperative agreements awarded for the purpose of acquiring land from fiscal years 2014 through 2016 which includes separate columns identifying:
  - a. The name of the prime recipient organization;
  - b. The accompanying Dun & Bradstreet DUNS number for the prime recipient;
  - c. The address of the prime recipient organization;
  - d. If available, the name of subrecipient organizations;
  - e. The accompanying DUNS number(s) for subrecipient(s) identified in "d";
  - f. Designation of the award as a grant agreement or cooperative agreement;

---

<sup>8</sup>*Id.* at 5.

<sup>9</sup>*Id.* at 3.

- g. The award number;
- h. The name and Catalogue of Federal Domestic Assistance number of the program under which the award was made;
- i. The date of the award;
- j. The amount awarded;
- k. The number of times a grantee has reported to the agency regarding land purchased with awarded funds from such grant or cooperative agreement; and
- l. Any copies of reports submitted from a grantee to the agency concerning land purchased with awarded funds from such grants or cooperative agreement.

Please deliver your response to room 1324 of the Longworth House Office Building. The Committee prefers, if possible, to receive your response in electronic format. An attachment contains additional instructions for responding to the Committee's request.

Please contact Melissa Beaumont and Sang Yi of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee staff at (202) 225-7107 with any questions about this request. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Rob Bishop  
Chairman  
Committee on Natural Resources



Bruce Westerman  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Oversight and  
Investigations

Cc: The Hon. Raul Grijalva, Ranking Member, Committee on Natural Resources