

STATE OF OHIO
OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

RANDALL J. MEYER, INSPECTOR GENERAL

REPORT OF
INVESTIGATION



AGENCY: OHIO DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
FILE ID NO.: 2017-CA00044
DATE OF REPORT: OCTOBER 9, 2018

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General ... The State Watchdog

“Safeguarding integrity in state government”

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Randall J. Meyer
Ohio Inspector General



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REPORT OF INVESTIGATION

FILE ID NUMBER: 2017-CA00044

SUBJECT NAME: Tammy Knisley

POSITION: Park Manager 5

AGENCY: Ohio Department of Natural Resources

BASIS FOR INVESTIGATION: Agency Referral

ALLEGATIONS: Abuse of Position

INITIATED: October 10, 2017

DATE OF REPORT: October 9, 2018

INITIAL ALLEGATION AND COMPLAINT SUMMARY

On October 5, 2017, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General received a report of potential employee misconduct from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) involving ODNR Park Manager 5 Tammy Knisley. The complaint alleged that sometime in the spring of 2017, Knisley instructed her staff to hold several campsites for her family members at the Pike Lake State Park for the Harvest Moon Campout¹ scheduled October 6-7, 2017. Knisley allegedly did not pay the reservation fees for the use of the campsites. Additionally, ODNR believed Knisley may not have paid other reservation fees for the use of campsites in previous years.

The complaint was originally included as a part of another referral from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources but later separated from that investigation because two separate issues were involved. On December 7, 2017, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General initiated an investigation concerning the allegations against Knisley.

BACKGROUND

Ohio Department of Natural Resources

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) is responsible for the state's wildlife, forests, natural areas, state parks, geological and mineral resources, inland lakes and waterways, regulation of the issuance of hunting and fishing licenses, watercraft registrations, the Lake Erie coastline; and enforces state law in regard to natural resources and conservation. ODNR is also responsible for more than 590,000 acres of land, including 74 state parks, 21 state forests, 136 state nature preserves, and 117 designated wildlife areas. In addition, ODNR oversees more than 120,000 acres of inland waters, 7,000 miles of streams, 481 miles of the Ohio River, and 2.25 million acres of Lake Erie. ODNR has 10 operating divisions to carry out these functions, as well as central administrative offices that oversee their day-to-day operations. The director of ODNR is appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Ohio Senate. Funding for ODNR is provided through general revenue funds, federal funds, and licenses and fees for those they regulate.²

¹ The Harvest Moon Campout is a yearly family centric event at Pike Lake State Park.

² Source: Biennial budget documents and ODNR website.

ODNR Reservation Software Banner

ODNR camping reservation policies³ state, “when you make a reservation for a campsite, unique overnight rental or a day-use-facility, full payment for the reservation is due at the time of reservation. This includes your nightly fees, the reservation fee and any applicable taxes.” The ODNR internal reservation website contains a policy directive listed under “Employee Camping Transactions” informing employees that they are required to make all personal reservations through the call center or public website.

INVESTIGATIVE SUMMARY

Along with the complaint, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General received additional documentation from ODNR. The documents included reservation records and email statements requested by ODNR investigators from three employees as part of the agency’s internal investigation into Knisley’s activities.

In an email dated September 4, 2017, Natural Resource Officer Adam Somerville wrote that while working at Pike Lake State Park, he discussed the reservation system with other employees. Somerville stated Pike Lake Campground Coordinator Johnnie Irvin told him Knisley had previously ordered another employee, Clerk Lori Beekman, to “close”⁴ eight campsites for the Harvest Moon Campout in October so Knisley’s friends and family members could use the sites during the event. Somerville noted in his email that the campout was a popular event, and typically, campsites sold out months in advance. Somerville said Irvin told him by closing the sites to reservations, Knisley had avoided the online reservation fee⁵ paid by the public. According to Somerville, Irvin said she spoke to Beekman about Knisley closing the sites and subsequently she opened the sites for reservations. Somerville wrote that, after the sites were opened, Irvin said Knisley again ordered Beekman to close the sites. Somerville said Irvin then contacted the people in the reservation system for which Knisley had secured the campsites and informed them they would be required to pay the cost

³ Reservation polices are listed on the ODNR website.

⁴ Marking a campsite “closed” in the reservation system removes the campsite from being able to be booked, effectively placing it on hold.

⁵ An added \$8 convenience fee is charged for reservations to help cover the costs of the reservation system.

of the sites. Irvin stated that most of the people who were contacted paid their reservation fees. However, Irvin noted that Knisley did not pay the fees to reserve her sites.

In an email dated September 29, 2017, Campground Coordinator Johnnie Irvin wrote about her conversations with Lori Beekman and later with Knisley, regarding Knisley ordering Beekman to close campsites to reservations for the Harvest Moon Campout. Irvin wrote that on May 16, 2017, she had a conversation with another ODNR employee who commented about the number of campsites closed to reservations at the Pike Lake campground. Irvin wrote that she later spoke to Beekman and learned Knisley had ordered the sites closed to reservations and had not paid the fees to hold the sites. Irvin stated she checked the reservation system in August of 2017, and discovered the sites were still closed to reservations and the fees had not been paid. Irvin said she told Beekman she was going to release the sites and open them to reservations, to which Beekman suggested she (Irvin) contact Knisley's friends and family members, and request they pay the reservation fees. According to Irvin's email statement, she contacted four people Knisley had closed sites for and explained they would have to pay the reservation fee and Irvin said she took their payment information over the phone. Irvin informed Beekman that Knisley still had two sites "closed" in the system and Irvin was going to release the two sites and open them to reservations if Knisley did not pay for them. Irvin said Beekman contacted Knisley about what had transpired and informed her that the sites were going to be released. However, Knisley ordered Beekman not to release the sites and leave them closed. Irvin wrote that in September, she and Beekman learned that the fees for the sites had still not been paid, so they released the sites and opened them to reservations which, according to Irvin, upset Knisley.

In her email statement dated October 2, 2017, ODNR Clerk Lori Beekman (Purdin) recounted a conversation she had with Irvin in April 2017. In the email, Beekman stated Irvin approached her and asked about closed campsites for the Harvest Moon Campout weekend. Beekman wrote that Irvin said one of the closed sites had a comment that read "Per Tammy Knisley" in the comment box. Following her conversation with Irvin, Beekman wrote that she recalled placing the sites on hold (closed to reservations) at Knisley's request in February or March of 2017. Beekman wrote that after her conversation with Irvin, she contacted

Knisley and told her the reservation fees for the sites needed to be paid. Beekman stated Irvin again approached her about the closed campsites sometime in July. Beekman wrote that Irvin told her the status of the sites in the reservation system needed to be changed from a closed status to an open status for new reservations. Beekman provided the following email chain between her and Knisley:

From: [Purdin, Lori](#)
To: [Smith, Randy](#)
Subject: FW: Site Closure Release
Date: Monday, October 02, 2017 8:50:10 AM
Importance: High

Here is the emailed that I sent Tammy along with her response.

Lori B. (Beekman) Purdin, Admin Prof 1
CDNR Parks & Watercraft
Paint Creek, Rocky Fork, Pike Lake and Lake White State Parks
740-493-2212 (Phone)
740-493-3221 (Fax)

From: Purdin, Lori
Sent: Monday, August 07, 2017 8:52 AM
To: Knisley, Tammy <Tammy.Knisley@dnr.state.oh.us>
Subject: RE: Site Closure Release
Importance: High

Can't do it Tam....Chris told Johnnie to release the sites months ago (he had questioned why so many were on hold)...sites have to be paid for by 9:00am today or they have to be released. If you want you can go under your name and put them back on hold.

Lori B. (Beekman) Purdin, Clerk 3
CDNR Parks & Watercraft
Paint Creek, Rocky Fork, Pike Lake and Lake White State Parks
740-493-2212 (Phone)
740-493-3221 (Fax)

From: Knisley, Tammy
Sent: Sunday, August 06, 2017 4:28 PM
To: Purdin, Lori <Lori.Purdin@dnr.state.oh.us>
Subject: Re: Site Closure Release

Please put back on hold.

Tammy

Sent from my iPhone

On Aug 4, 2017, at 5:42 PM, Purdin, Lori <Lori.Purdin@dnr.state.oh.us> wrote:

The sites you have closed for Oct 6 & 7 will be released at 9:00am on Monday, August 7, 2017.

Lori B. (Beekman) Purdin, Clerk 3
CDNR Parks & Watercraft
Paint Creek, Rocky Fork, Pike Lake and Lake White State Parks
740-493-2212 (Phone)
740-493-3221 (Fax)

On January 24, 2018, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General interviewed Park Manager 5 Tammy Knisley at the Pike Lake State Park office. In her position, Knisley oversees the administration of four state parks located in southern Ohio including Pike Lake State Park. Investigators asked Knisley about the campsites she reserved for the annual Harvest Moon Campout in 2017. Knisley acknowledged she directed Beekman to close several campsites for her friends and family members. She admitted that she had done this for several years for this particular event. She said, as employees, they had the ability to close campsites in the reservation system to ensure the availability for their use.

When asked about the process of a typical reservation made by the public, Knisley said when a member of the public reserves a campsite, ODNR currently collects the full cost, which includes the cost of the campsites and reservation fees, for the number of days the campsite is reserved. Knisley stated she did not pay the reservation fees at the time she closed the sites. ODNR camping reservation policies require full payment for the reservation at the time the reservation is made. The internal reservation system also informs employees they are required to make all personal reservations through the call center or public website. When investigators pointed out to Knisley the potential ethical issue with her holding campsites without paying the reservation fees at the time of reservation, Knisley said she did not believe her actions were wrong at that time but now realized her actions were wrong. Knisley noted that she and her friends and family members ultimately paid for the sites. At the conclusion of her interview, Knisley stated she would not reserve future campsites in this manner.

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General reviewed reports of fees paid for campground reservations made in Tammy Knisley's name to confirm she had a history of paying reservation fees for sites used during the annual Harvest Moon Campout. Based on reports provided by ODNR, Knisley paid \$46 for site #80 reserved from October 6-7, 2017. In 2015, Knisley paid \$48 for site #77 reserved from October 2-3, 2015.

CONCLUSION

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General received a referral from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) alleging Park Manager 5 Tammy Knisley had improperly used

her position to secure campsites at the Pike Lake Campground for an event (Harvest Moon Campout) in October 2017. ODNR initiated an internal investigation into Knisley's activities and provided statements from ODNR employees either involved or familiar with the situation to the Office of the Ohio Inspector General.

ODNR camping reservation policies state, "when you make a reservation for a campsite, unique overnight rental or day-use-facility, full payment for the reservation is due at the time of reservation. This includes your nightly fees, the reservation fee and any applicable taxes." Additionally, ODNR's internal reservation website contains a directive informing employees that they are required to make all personal reservations through the call center or public website.

During an interview with the Office of the Ohio Inspector General, Knisley admitted to reserving several campsites for friends and family members in early 2017 for their use during the Harvest Moon Campout to be held in October, 2017. Knisley acknowledged she did not follow, as specified by ODNR policy, the same reservation protocols the public would be required to follow when reserving these campsites. She also admitted to previously reserving campsites in this manner for the same event for several years prior to this investigation.

Accordingly, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General finds reasonable cause to believe a wrongful act or omission occurred in this instance.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General makes the following recommendations and asks the director of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources to respond within 60 days with a plan detailing how these recommendations will be implemented. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources should:

- 1) Review the actions of Park Manager Tammy Knisley and take any administrative action deemed appropriate.

- 2) Consider whether an internal policy should be implemented directing employees to follow the same process as the public when making personal campground reservations and obtain a written acknowledgement from all employees of their understanding of the policy.

- 3) Consider designating an employee to periodically review campsites that have been closed and ensure they are closed for a valid reason.

REFERRAL(S)

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General has determined that no referrals are warranted for this report of investigation.



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NAME OF REPORT: Ohio Department of Natural Resources

FILE ID #: 2017-CA00044

KEEPER OF RECORDS CERTIFICATION

This is a true and correct copy of the report which is required to be prepared by the Office of the Ohio Inspector General pursuant to Section 121.42 of the Ohio Revised Code.

Jill Jones
KEEPER OF RECORDS

CERTIFIED
October 9, 2018

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