

NATIONAL PARKS

Top NPS official under internal investigation

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The acting head of the National Park Service faces an internal investigation after a female employee charged that she saw him make a crude gesture in a hallway at the Interior Department headquarters.

Interior's Office of Inspector General says it will examine the allegation against P. Daniel Smith, who's led the Park Service since January.

The woman, who did not identify herself for fear of retaliation, said she looked outside her office when she heard Smith and another NPS official engaged in a loud conversation in the hallway.

She said that while Smith was relaying a story to his colleague, he "grabbed his crotch and his penis and acted out as though he was urinating on the wall."

"That is how it appeared, or it could have been a sexual act," she said. "Regardless, he grabbed his crotch and penis in a public place."

"I really could not believe what I was seeing or hearing just outside of my office," the woman said. "I found it so vile and disgusting."

Smith and the National Park Service had no comment today.

The alleged incident, first reported by *The Washington Post*, happened in January, shortly after Smith began his job. He replaced acting Director Michael Reynolds and has become a regular on Capitol Hill, serving as Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke's point man in selling a plan to increase spending on park maintenance projects.

The woman wrote a [letter](#) of complaint to Zinke and the Office of Inspector General on March

described herself only as a mother and a single parent who works hard and is "dedicated to the NPS mission."

Zinke's office referred the matter to the inspector general's office.

"A letter was referred to the OIG late last week from the secretary's office, alleging inappropriate actions by the acting director of NPS," Nancy DiPaolo, a spokeswoman for Interior's inspector general, said today. "We will be investigating the complaint."

The woman also sent a copy of her letter to the advocacy group Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility.

Jeff Ruch, the group's executive director, said the incident will be a test of Zinke's promise of having "zero tolerance" for sexual harassment, saying it "has no credibility if it exempts his inner circle."

"It is increasingly difficult for the Trump administration to claim moral leadership on any issue," Ruch said.

It's the second time Smith has found himself in the crosshairs of the inspector general's office.

In 2004, Smith got into trouble when he helped Washington Redskins owner Daniel Snyder in his bid to cut down more than 130 trees on a Park Service-protected easement near his property so he could get a better view of the Potomac River ([Greenwire](#), Jan. 5).

At the time, Smith worked as a special assistant to then-National Park Service Director Fran Mainella. The IG's office said Smith "unduly influenced" deliberations by officials at the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park "by inserting himself in the process through personal communications" with Snyder, Snyder's attorneys and park officials.

Sexual harassment has been a persistent issue for the Park Service.

In October, Zinke released a survey that showed 39 percent of the NPS workforce had suffered some form of harassment over a 12-month period.

Zinke vowed an immediate crackdown on harassment, pledging to add a team of 14 investigators to handle employee complaints and saying he's ready to dismiss any worker who violates his "zero-tolerance" policy ([E&E News PM](#), Oct. 13, 2017).

"First things first: I want you to know I'm willing to fire anyone who sexually harasses a co-worker, intimidates an employee or discriminates against a colleague," Zinke said in a meeting with employees at Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona.

Zinke said a culture that tolerates harassment and discrimination is "absolutely unacceptable to me and to the president."

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