

Honorable Jason Chaffetz, Chairman, and Members  
House Oversight & Government Reform Committee

September 20, 2016

I have been a Program Manager (GS-12) within the Science and Resource Management Division (SRM) of Grand Canyon National Park (GRCA) since 2009 and a federal government employee since 2002. I am writing primarily to support Brian Healy's testimony to the House of Representatives Oversight Committee scheduled for September 22, 2016. I have personally known Brian since 2009. He is highly regarded at GRCA, and I am confident that his testimony is trustworthy, accurate, and representative of views within the SRM Division.

The abuses brought to light by the Office of the Inspector General's "Investigative Report of Misconduct at the Grand Canyon River District" (January 12, 2016) are unfortunately symptomatic of a larger problem and culture of abuse, harassment, a hostile work environment, and intimidation that extend well beyond the GRCA River District and have been entrenched in management at Grand Canyon National Park since before I arrived here in 2009.

During my first week on the job at GRCA, several SRM staff warned me not to end up on the wrong side of the SRM Division Chief, who was characterized as resenting dissention and who, once crossed, would never let go of a grudge. I had the audacity, early on, to raise technical questions about some aspects of the SRM data management system. It's a long story, but the essence is that my direct supervisor, an SRM Deputy Chief, engaged in an agenda of hostility, threats, humiliation, lies, and retribution to discredit me professionally and personally in an attempt to have me fail or quit my job. My attempts to seek even a discussion of issues with my supervisor, the Division Chief, Human Resources and others were rebuffed. I was labelled an incompetent problem employee, and I was ultimately left with no option but to file an EEO complaint. Shortly after my EEO filing, the supervisor was promoted and became the Superintendent at another Park. This experience was the worst of my professional life, and it came at a great cost to me financially, professionally, physically, and personally. It took years to re-establish my professional standing. I learned, the hard way, not to question anything about the GRCA status quo. Abuses throughout the Park were well-known internally, long before the OIG River District report revelations. In more than seven years at GRCA, I have witnessed numerous top-notch technical and program managers who have chosen to leave Park employment, rather than continue to tolerate this environment. I have seriously considered it myself. Many others have been involuntarily terminated. The exodus continues to this day.

Hollow lip service from the (former) GRCA Superintendent and his deputies regularly spoke to the value of GRCA employees. We were often reminded that there would be no tolerance for sexual harassment or a hostile work environment. But the chilling reality and actions were loud and clear: "If you report misconduct, you will be punished! You will be retaliated against. You will lose your job." Complainants were stigmatized as problem employees. This pattern inevitably led to the termination of [REDACTED], a well-respected, committed, enthusiastic, and loved colleague who poured her heart and soul into the Park every single day for over ten years. Her treatment was an outrage, and it brought morale in the Park and the SRM Division to an all-time low, from which it has not recovered.

The appalling behavior of Deputy Superintendent Diane Chalfant is documented in the OIG report. Despite numerous pleas from SRM staff and leadership to thoroughly investigate repeated allegations of abuse on the River District and elsewhere, and Ms. Chalfant's promises to do so, she completely failed to follow through. Instead, in a total disregard for the potential consequences, Ms. Chalfant illegally released sensitive confidential information about sexual assault complaints that quickly found its way to the perpetrators of the abuse. This literally put the welfare of the victims in the hands of the abusers, and retaliation predictably followed. Ms. Chalfant's superficial "investigation" ultimately resulted in the wrongful dismissal of valued colleagues who dared to report abuse, victimized once again by Park leadership.

Amazingly, eight months after the OIG report, Ms. Chalfant is unapologetic and still in a position of power at GRCA, exerting crucial influence that will affect the Grand Canyon long term, including the development of new

policies and codes of conduct, the hiring of a new SRM Division Chief, and the promotion of science positions that are not supported by GRCA Science staff.

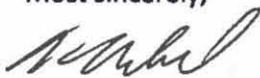
Another Deputy Superintendent, [REDACTED] also remains unapologetic and in a position of power. A highly-competent female SRM colleague confided that [REDACTED] refused to investigate her evidence of sexual harassment by a senior Trails Program Manager. Her Term appointment was subsequently terminated, but the Trails manager is still employed at GRCA. Multiple other SRM employees experienced problems with the Trails Program Manager and felt unsafe working with him, and it became an issue of discussion at an SRM senior staff meeting. SRM Division leadership advised staff to "avoid" the abusive Trails Program Manager if he made anyone "uncomfortable".

At an SRM senior staff meeting in March 2016, Mr. [REDACTED] intimated that (then) Superintendent Uberuaga expected to be held responsible for the River District sex abuse scandal but, in Mr. [REDACTED] view, SRM staff were ultimately complicit with the abusers and responsible for the attendant GRCA loss of public trust. In explaining actions the Park would be taking to "deal with" the scandal, he stated that he was "not interested in the details", but only that the Park "must show actions" with a good "title". Mr. [REDACTED] is currently in charge of making all "final" disciplinary decisions for the Park, and has promised that his office "will act on the information that we have." His past actions, however, indicate his reluctance to investigating allegations that might upset the status quo.

The ethics of any organization are a reflection of the standards and examples of senior leadership. At Grand Canyon, bad behavior has been tolerated without consequence, rewarded with promotions or, at best, "resolved" with a transfer or a retirement that benefits the perpetrator. We have been promised changes by our Park and regional leadership—even by the NPS Chief himself. But the reality is that, with the exception of a new Superintendent, "actions" have been primarily cosmetic. Public relations dictated the designation of a new Superintendent, so Mr. Uberuaga was offered a transfer. He chose to retire instead. A new Superintendent is an essential start, and we are hopeful for change, but culpable and untrusted senior staff members remain in positions of power. In spite of lip service to the contrary, their actions consistently show that they have no interest in fundamental change. They are, in fact, part of the problem and barriers to progress.

An environment of mistrust remains. Park employees are among the most dedicated, bright, optimistic, and resilient that I have ever worked with. There are many good people who wish to be agents of change within the organization, but they remain afraid of reprisal if they speak up, and they are certainly unwilling to do so with leaders that they do not trust. I am fearful and risking retaliation with this testimony, but I feel strongly that I must speak out—for my colleagues, for my own integrity, and for that of Grand Canyon and the National Park Service. The longer this situation remains unresolved, the less trust people have in the organization, and cynicism grows that real change will never happen. GRCA continues to lose exceptional employees and, with them, years of institutional knowledge. Potential new hires express concern for whether the Grand Canyon is a safe and functional place to work. The negative impacts will be felt for years to come. We are at a crossroads where decisions made now will profoundly impact Grand Canyon and the National Park Service for years to come. A great trust has been broken. Moving forward in a productive way will require new leadership willing and able to re-establish that trust and make real change from the long-standing culture of intimidation.

Most sincerely,



Mark L. Nebel