

National Parks Traveler

National Park Service Director Apologizes For Ethics Lapse

By [Kurt Repanshek](#) on May 29th, 2016

National Park Service Director Jon Jarvis, who earlier this year was [reprimanded for failing to follow ethics regulations](#) for Interior Department employees, has apologized in writing to the agency's field staff and urged them to remain mindful of those regulations.

Back in February the department's Office of Inspector General determined that Director Jarvis had intentionally skirted the Ethics Office to write a book, a **Guidebook to American Values and Our National Parks**, for a cooperating association contractually tied to the Park Service.

OIG investigators began looking into the matter last June after being alerted to the book published by Eastern National, a cooperating association that has been working with national parks for 50 years. At issue was "whether Jarvis used his public office for private gain by seeking a book deal with Eastern National and whether he misused any U.S. Government resources in the process."

Ethics Office guidelines specifically state that government employees who want to do outside work with any business or organization seeking to do business with the Interior Department must first gain approval from the Ethics Office, regardless of whether there's payment involved. Additionally, an attorney in the Ethics Office said "that even if Jarvis was not personally receiving money from the sale of the book, having his name associated with it could create the appearance that he was using his official position for personal gain."

The investigation also showed that Director Jarvis approached Eastern National with the idea, but that he had told Interior Secretary Sally Jewell that Eastern National had asked him to write the book. It also showed that Eastern National Chief Executive Officer George Minnucci, after discussing the project on the phone with the director, later wrote him an email worded as if the idea was his. In his interview with OIG staff, Mr. Minnucci said Director Jarvis had not asked him to word his email in such a way, but rather he did so because "he wanted his staff to think the book was his idea and that it was 'a CEO decision.'"

The OIG report stated that Director Jarvis said he "did not consult with the Ethics Office on the book because doing so would have taken too long, and with NPS' centennial approaching, the book would be 'really powerful.'"

On Friday the director sent out an email to all Park Service employees that said:

As employees of the National Park Service, we all have a responsibility to hold ourselves to the highest standards of ethical behavior every day, and we have an obligation to hold each other responsible for the public trust we enjoy. I made an error in judgment for which I want to apologize. I wrote a book to celebrate the National Park Service's Centennial without appropriate appreciation and regard for my responsibility to follow established processes, including consulting the Department of the Interior's Ethics Office, before it was

published. I have been held accountable and I have learned a valuable lesson.

I wanted to write something, in my personal capacity, to inspire and engage more Americans in our national parks and share my great love and admiration for the amazing places you protect and promote each day. I directed that any book proceeds benefit the NPS through Eastern National and the National Park Foundation. I will receive no personal benefit from the sales of the book and I have donated the copyright to the National Park Foundation.

However, I did not submit my book for review by the Department, and specifically the Ethics Office, before it was published in order to obtain guidance on how to proceed in accordance with laws, policies, and regulations. Moreover, I failed to initially understand and accept my mistake. That was wrong. I regret that I did not seek guidance on the appropriate path forward to publish this book. Again, I have learned a valuable lesson. It is important that each and every National Park Service employee, including me, understand, remember, and adhere to our ethics training and requirements. I write this note as a reminder to all of us to think actively about consulting with appropriate ethics officials or attorneys in the Solicitor's Office before taking actions that could have ethical or legal implications.

As a result of my actions, which were found to violate ethics standards, I received a formal reprimand and I am receiving, and actively participating in, monthly ethics training. Additionally, my duties as the National Park Service's ethics officer were removed. Deputy Assistant Secretary Karen Hyun in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks has replaced me in that role through the end of the Administration. We all should support her and all of the other hard working ethics officials who are here to assist us.

I understand if you are disappointed in my actions in this situation, and for good reason. I am sorry that I let you down. I have also apologized to the Secretary. I hope that my error serves as a reminder of the importance of seeking ethics guidance, and that we are all responsible and accountable for upholding a high standard of ethical behavior.