

From: [Cindy Schulz](#)
To: [Phifer, Paul](#)
Cc: troy_andersen@fws.gov
Subject: Re: From Greenwire -- INTERIOR: Questions hover over Zinke's defense of helicopter trip
Date: Thursday, December 14, 2017 6:58:03 PM

ACP was the project where TNC was helping us determine migratory bird mitigation impacts. I believe TNC was also going to assist us with determining migratory bird mitigation for MVP but we never got to that point.

Sent from my iPhone

On Dec 14, 2017, at 5:16 PM, Phifer, Paul <paul_phifer@fws.gov> wrote:

I didn't think so, but Wendi was asking if this is the one where TNC helped and we discussed possible mitigation. I told her that was MVP.

Paul Phifer, PhD
Assistant Regional Director - Ecological Services
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US Fish and Wildlife Service
413.253.8698 work
413.687.4764 cell

On Thu, Dec 14, 2017 at 5:12 PM, Cindy Schulz <cindy_schulz@fws.gov> wrote:

Paul - we reviewed this project a while ago. However the majority of concerns are related to historic resources and viewshed impacts vs natural resources impacts. We did not recommend mitigation at any point during our review of the proposed action.

Troy- please clarify/provide any details I left out.

Cindy

Sent from my iPhone

On Dec 14, 2017, at 4:32 PM, Paul Phifer <paul_phifer@fws.gov> wrote:

Is this the project we were discussing with the state and TNC?

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: Paul_phifer <email_this@eenews.net>

Date: December 14, 2017 at 4:29:45 PM EST
To: <Paul_phifer@fws.gov>
Subject: From Greenwire -- INTERIOR: Questions hover over Zinke's defense of helicopter trip
Reply-To: <Paul_phifer@fws.gov>

This Greenwire story was sent to you by:
Paul_phifer@fws.gov



AN E&E NEWS PUBLICATION

INTERIOR

Questions hover over Zinke's defense of helicopter trip

Michael Doyle, E&E News reporter

Published: Tuesday, December 12, 2017



Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke is defending his use of government helicopters for travel. Lance Cheung/U.S. Department of Agriculture

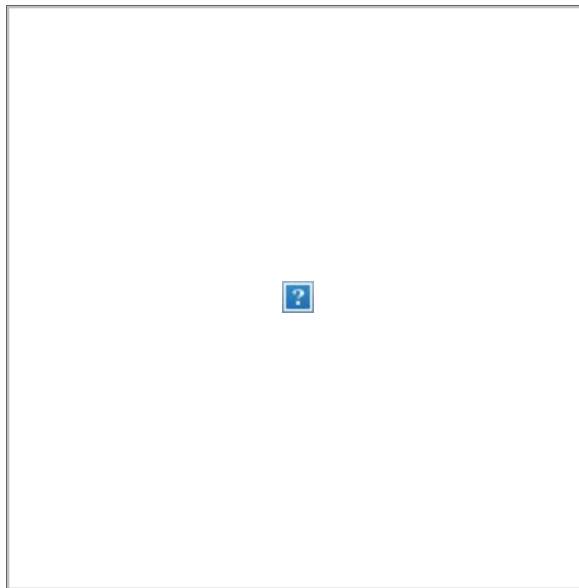
Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke's defense of his helicopter travel raises questions about a big Virginia power line project and about what he meant by his explanation of a flight.

In a combative Saturday statement posted on

Twitter, Zinke justified his helicopter usage that included, he wrote, an "aerial survey of power line project which was under scrutiny for possible compensatory mitigation corruption from the previous administration."

Zinke's statement, while making a mistyped reference to the Obama administration, did not elaborate on the power project overflight or what was meant by a "possible compensatory mitigation corruption" inquiry.

The Interior Department did not provide an explanation, despite multiple follow-up questions yesterday and today.



@SecretaryZinke/Twitter

The ambiguity comes as Zinke faces scrutiny over travel reports that have seemingly accelerated in recent days.

The specific trip and secretarial explanation in question relate to Dominion Energy's plans to construct a power line across a 4.1-mile section of the James River, as part of a larger project ([*Greenwire*](#), July 25).

On July 6, the Army Corps of Engineers issued a permit for the Surry-Skiffes Creek Transmission Line. The permit includes mitigation designed to protect James River shorelines, water quality and

area views, with the company providing about \$90 million for the work.

"We received all the permits and have begun building this urgently needed transmission project in the best interest of bringing cleaner, more reliable energy to the Peninsula and the people who depend on it," Dominion Energy spokeswoman Bonita Billingsley Harris said in an email yesterday.

The National Parks Conservation Association and other groups have sued the Army Corps to block the project, citing its potential impact on historic sites including Jamestown and the Yorktown battlefield. Both are part of the Colonial National Historical Park.

In a December 2015 [letter](#), the then-head of the National Park Service warned that the project would "seriously impact irreplaceable, nationally significant resources" and added that "no amount of mitigation" could offset the harm.

Neither supporters nor opponents of the project, however, would venture an opinion yesterday as to what Zinke's reference to "possible compensatory mitigation corruption" might mean. Interior's Office of Inspector General said today it is not aware of any inquiry related to the project.

Instead of providing details, Zinke in his Saturday statement cast his July 7 power project overflight as one of several helicopter trips that he said were "thoroughly vetted and scrutinized before being approved by the Department's career ethics officers and solicitors."

"Recent articles about official Interior Department usage are total fabrications and a wild departure from reality," Zinke wrote.

Reports by *Politico* and the Associated Press, citing documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, first revealed that Zinke took three helicopter trips last summer at a cost of more than \$53,000.

The reported travel expenses included more than \$39,000 for a helicopter tour above two national monuments in Nevada, about \$8,000 for a round trip to an emergency management exercise in West Virginia and \$6,200 for the round trip to Yorktown, Va., that included the power project overflight.

"We were informed about Secretary Zinke's helicopter tour over the Surry-Skiffes Creek transmission line project as a courtesy, but we were not involved in coordinating the visit," Billingsley Harris, the Dominion Energy spokeswoman, said yesterday.

Zinke's statement did not itemize any inaccuracies in the news accounts. Rather, his rebuttal appeared as more a general rejection of a broader news narrative concerning his official travel practices.

That potential Zinke narrative continued yesterday, with a *Washington Post* report that Zinke's decision in April to change his travel plans for a fact-finding trip to Channel Islands National Park in California added nearly \$2,000 in costs when he left from Santa Barbara, Calif., where his wife owns a second home.

The *Post*'s account was based on Interior Department emails, obtained by the Western Values Project under the Freedom of Information Act and provided to the paper.

The internal documents depict National Park Service officials scrambling to accommodate Zinke during the two-day trip. Interior spokeswoman Heather Swift countered in a statement to the paper that "no costs were incurred due to Mrs. Zinke's presence" on the trip.

"Having been a subject of #fake news frequently, I don't think I can ever trust #CNN & #FakeNewsMedia," Zinke's wife, Lolita Zinke, wrote on Twitter yesterday, while retweeting criticism of CNN's coverage of other issues.

The Interior Department's IG is currently reviewing Ryan Zinke's travel ([Greenwire](#), Nov. 21). Democrats have asked that the examination include the helicopter trips.

Nancy DiPaolo, a spokeswoman for the IG's office, said yesterday that she is "unable to comment on an ongoing investigation."

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