



NATIONAL ARCHIVES *and* RECORDS ADMINISTRATION  
8601 ADELPHI ROAD COLLEGE PARK, MD 20740-6001  
[www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov)

***Sent Via Email. No Hard Copy to Follow.***

January 5, 2021

Mr. David Alspach  
Department of the Interior  
Departmental Records Officer  
MS 7145A  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240  
[david\\_alspach@ios.doi.gov](mailto:david_alspach@ios.doi.gov)

Dear Mr. Alspach,

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) has received an allegation of unauthorized disposition of Department of Interior (DOI) records. NARA received a letter (attached) from Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) alleging, in a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) case brought by CREW, that Federal records from former Secretary Zinke's government-issued mobile phones had been destroyed or deemed irretrievable.

In accordance with 36 CFR 1230.16(b), NARA is requesting that you provide us with a response within 30 calendar days that includes, as applicable: a complete description of the records affected; a statement of what safeguards have been put into place (or will be put into place) to prevent any future unauthorized disposition of records; exact details of the circumstances surrounding this incident and any actions taken to attempt to retrieve or restore the records.

Your attention to this matter is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

LAURENCE BREWER  
Chief Records Officer  
for the U.S. Government

Enclosure

cc: Nikhel Sus. Senior Counsel, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)



Office of the Chief  
Records Officer for the  
U.S. Government

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June 26, 2023

David Alspach  
Department of the Interior  
Department Records Officer  
MS 7145A  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear David Alspach,

The National Archives Records Administration (NARA) received your final report responding to the allegations of unauthorized disposition of Department of Interior (DOI) records from former Secretary Ryan Zinke's government-issued mobile phones.

NARA understands that former Secretary Zinke was issued three cell phones during his tenure at DOI: one phone for international travel, one domestic phone, and one replacement phone that was issued for his original domestic phone that was lost. During his offboarding at DOI, the former Secretary was informed that text messages sent to and from his mobile phones would not be automatically archived, and that he should switch to email for substantive communications because all emails are automatically archived into DOI's electronic records management system.

Upon his departure, former Secretary Zinke found his original domestic phone and indicated on his records management clearance form that there were no official records on his cell phones. All three phones were processed by the Office of the Chief Information Office (OCIO), resulting in the following:

- The travel phone had been wiped inadvertently. It was at this point that it was determined that the wipe command issued when the phone was reported lost in December was inadvertently issued to the travel phone and not the Secretary's original mobile phone. Because of this issue, no data was retrievable from the Secretary's travel phone.

- The original mobile phone was unlocked and photographs were retrieved, but the iTunes backup password provided did not work and additional data, including text messages, could not be accessed.
- The replacement mobile phone was fully unlocked, but there was no additional data (including text messages) to retrieve.
- Apart from OCIO, the DOI Office of the Inspector General indicated that their Computer Crimes Unit was able to retrieve a small number of text messages from former Secretary Zinke's mobile phone and these messages are waiting to be evaluated.
- In December 2022, DOI initiated a review of different new technologies to ascertain whether these technologies could recover any backed up contents associated with the device or accounts related to the device. This review did not provide any usable recovery solutions.
- Finally, on April 12, 2023, DOI contacted former Secretary Zinke's congressional office and requested any additional passwords related to his DOI mobile device and backups. On April 23, 2023, the office responded that Congressman Zinke did not know of any other passwords for the device or any accounts associated with the device.

Based on the information provided, NARA is unable to confirm whether or not there was an unauthorized disposition of federal records, since data from former Secretary's Zinke's cell phones was irretrievable and DOI cannot verify with certainty the types of data that was lost. NARA accepts the reported account of this matter and the safeguards established to prevent potential losses of this type in the future. All reporting requirements of 36 CFR 1230.14(a) have been met and this matter is now closed. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact me at [laurence.brewer@nara.gov](mailto:laurence.brewer@nara.gov).

Sincerely,



LAURENCE BREWER  
Chief Records Officer  
for the U.S. Government