



LUCY LANG
Inspector General

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December 20, 2023

Basil Seggos
Commissioner
New York State Department of
Environmental Conservation
625 Broadway, 14th Floor
Albany, New York 12233-1010

Re: NYSIG 3740-001-2022

Dear Commissioner Seggos:

On November 30, 2022, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) referred a complaint to the Offices of the New York State Inspector General alleging that a store in Keene Valley was selling DEC State Boundary signs to the public. The metal signs, which had been mounted on wooden frames, sold for up to \$168. The complaint also alleged that a DEC employee had provided the signs to the store, and that other stores in the Adirondacks were selling similar signs. DEC, which conducted a preliminary review of the allegation before referring the matter to the Inspector General, advised that it had confirmed the sale of such signs at the store mentioned in the complaint and that another store might also be selling DEC signs. The following is a summary of the Inspector General's investigation of this allegation, findings, and recommendations.

By way of background, the Inspector General learned that the signs, which cost approximately 75¢ each to make, are fabricated in two regional DEC sign shops. After receiving a written request for signs from DEC's central office in Albany, signs are made and sent to DEC facilities by mail or retrieved by facility personnel. The signs are installed at trail heads and other locations to mark sites and the boundaries of State lands including "Wild Forest" and "Forest Preserve" areas, among other uses. According to the sign fabrication trades supervisor at DEC's Northville Regional Sub-Office sign shop, the shop usually destroys old signs by cutting them up before disposing of them. The supervisor further noted that there is a great demand for Adirondack signs by the general public, which has resulted in sign theft from DEC trails, and the sale of imitation DEC signs in Adirondack stores and online.

The investigation found that DEC Forester [REDACTED] who is assigned to DEC's [REDACTED] [REDACTED] took several DEC signs for her personal use. [REDACTED] stated to the Inspector General that on an unknown date, she removed five or six trail signs "that were just kicking around" in a facility truck and hung the signs in her boyfriend's barn as decorations. Subsequently, her boyfriend mounted some of the signs on wood and brought them to the Keene Valley store for resale on consignment. According to the boyfriend, he believed that the signs had been discarded by DEC. The manager of the store in Keene Valley confirmed that she had

received four such signs from the boyfriend, of which three had been sold and one remained in inventory. According to the manager, she believed the signs had been decommissioned by DEC.

DEC advised that although the signs sold at the Keene Valley store have been updated with newer versions, it was uncertain if, in fact, the signs at issue had been removed and replaced with newer signs by DEC staff, as many of its facilities continue to use older stockpiles until they are exhausted. The [REDACTED] forester assigned to DEC Region [REDACTED] which includes the [REDACTED] Office, stated that [REDACTED] does not keep a record reflecting its inventory of old, removed, and new signs. He noted that [REDACTED] and other DEC offices have locked sign storage rooms where currently used signs are maintained. However, all facility staff at the [REDACTED] Office have access to its storage room key and therefore, may access the room at any time. After learning from Inspector General investigators of the one remaining DEC sign on inventory at the Keene Valley store, the regional forester had the sign retrieved in July 2023.

A review of the sign inventory maintained by the other Adirondack store mentioned in the complaint revealed that the trail signs sold at that store are replicas that are fabricated onsite using non-State materials. Additionally, the investigation found no indications of other sign theft by State employees for personal use or resale.

Given the above, I recommend that DEC take any action it deems appropriate with respect to [REDACTED]. I also recommend that DEC review its sign storage inventory controls, process decommissioned/surplus signs when necessary pursuant to DEC policy,¹ and remind employees during periodic training that unused and surplus agency property is not to be misappropriated for personal use.

Please advise me of any action taken by DEC in response to these recommendations within 45 days of the date of this letter. If you require further information, please contact Deputy Inspector General James R. Davis at [REDACTED].

Sincerely,



Lucy Lang
Inspector General

cc: Thomas Berkman, Esq.
Deputy Commissioner and General Counsel

¹ DEC's Property Management Guidance (Surplus and Disposal of Property, File # 150) provides a process for determining if surplus personal property should be disposed of locally or transferred to the New York State Office of General Services for distribution to other State agencies or sale to the public.