

Summary: Former Non-Profit Research Archeologist Embezzled BOR Cooperative Funds for Personal Use

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We investigated allegations that a former Research Archeologist at the Institute of the Great Plains (IGP) in Lawton, Oklahoma, embezzled funds the IGP received through Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) Cooperative Agreements. We substantiated the allegations.

From 2003 to March 2020, Debra Baker worked at IGP; she cataloged artifacts and served as the project manager for several BOR Cooperative Agreements. On August 21, 2018, BOR awarded IGP a five-year, \$244,000 Cooperative Agreement to support artifact curation, archival supplies, shelving, computer equipment, two interns, and professional archaeological services in Oklahoma.

Baker was an authorized signatory on IGP's checking account and had access to a debit card. She admitted to using the IGP debit card to make unauthorized personal purchases, including groceries, pet supplies, travel, and cash withdrawals. We found evidence confirming this admission. Between July 2019 and February 2020, Baker made personal purchases on the IGP debit card totaling at least \$35,535.97.

On January 7, 2025, Baker pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma to one count of violating 18 U.S.C. § 666(a)(1)(A), Theft Concerning a Program Receiving Federal Funds. On May 21, 2025, she was sentenced to five years of probation and ordered to pay \$35,535.97 in restitution.

We referred our findings to our Administrative Remedies Division.

This is a summary of an investigative report we issued to the Acting Commissioner of BOR.

