

Summary: FWS Contractor Stole Government Funds for Personal Use

Report Date: October 9, 2025

Report Number: 24-0012

The OIG investigated allegations that Melissa Cole, an employee with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) National Conservation Training Center's (NCTC's) food service provider Aramark in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, had stolen funds from NCTC.

We found that Cole, an Aramark comptroller and manager, stole cash held in various safes at NCTC from both Aramark and FWS. As part of her job, Cole prepared the bank deposit tickets for cash deposits, which a security service then transported to the bank via armored truck. During the COVID-19 pandemic, only managers, including Cole, were working at NCTC. When employees began returning to the facility in July 2021, they discovered cash missing from some of the safes. They later found numerous bank deposit tickets in Cole's office that had been filled out to reflect cash deposits Cole never provided to the security service to transport to the bank. In total, Cole embezzled approximately \$30,600 in cash (more than \$25,000 from FWS and more than \$5,000 from Aramark).

Aramark terminated Cole from her position in August 2021.

On March 27, 2025, Cole pleaded guilty in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of West Virginia to Theft of Government Property, and, on September 16, 2025, she was sentenced to five years of probation and restitution totaling \$30,612.

This is a summary of an investigative report we issued to the Director of FWS.

