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HEARING ON THE NOMINATION OF KEVIN LILLY TO BE ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

JUNE 24, 2026

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COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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HEARING ON THE NOMINATION OF KEVIN LILLY TO BE ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24, 2026

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:02 a.m. in room 406, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Shelley Moore Capito (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Present: Senators Capito, Whitehouse, Curtis, Husted, Merkley, Alsobrooks.

Also present: Senator Cruz.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO, U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA

Senator CAPITO. Good morning, everybody. And it is a pleasure to be here.

This morning we will hear from President Trump's nominee to be the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife at the U.S. Department of Interior, Mr. Kevin Lilly. Welcome, Mr. Lilly, to the Environment and Public Works Committee.

Mr. Lilly, I know you spent a considerable amount of time with the Energy and Resources Committee yesterday given the nature of this position and our split jurisdictions. We are very appreciative that you are here with us today.

Mr. Lilly brings decades of leadership with experience gained from his time in the private sector State government, the military, and most recently at the Department of Interior in the role as Assistant Secretary. He has been nominated to be the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife where he will provide senior leadership and policy leadership for both U.S. Fish and Wildlife and the National Park Service.

This role includes oversight of the implementation of the Endangered Species Act, ESA, conservation, and funding partnerships with States and landowners and stewardship of our national parks. The Fish and Wildlife Service also participate in the Federal permitting process to the ESA consultation process. This process has been long, inefficient and costly for projects and communities across the Country. Any assistant secretary confirmed to this position must believe that Federal agencies can protect threatened and endangered species while also providing timely consultation, habi-

tat and incidental take decisions to ensure that important infrastructure projects can responsibly and efficiently move forward.

These projects should not be held hostage because Federal agencies failed to coordinate early or establish clear schedules or make necessary determinations. Striking an appropriate balance between conservation and beneficial economic development is essential for our States, and that is no different than the State of West Virginia, my home.

Oversight of the National Park Service is equally important in West Virginia. We have the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve as part of West Virginia's great natural resources and an important economic driver through tourism and recreation. Highly recommend it.

The Park has defied the failing attendance trends facing other national parks. The New River Gorge posted a 9.5 increase in attendance in 2025, with visitor spending contributing over $100 million into the local economy in 2024.

However, the park only has now an acting superintendent instead of a permanent one. The New River Gorge National Park needs a permanent superintendent to focus on improving the visitor experience and park operations, as well as working with surrounding communities to leverage the opportunities presented by the park's increasing attendance.

I expect the Assistant Secretary to make filling this position a priority for the National Park Service.

West Virginians are proud conservationists, with a tradition of hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation throughout our beautiful State. The North American model of wildlife conservation has been a great success in this Country in ensuring we responsibly mange public resources for the future.

Unique in this model is the role our hunters, anglers and outdoor recreationists play, not only along with conservation work, but also in funding and helping to deliver conservation programs. This model supports recreation and tourism opportunities in local communities all across the Country.

Having leaders in Washington that appreciate these important partnerships is key to the continued success. I look forward to hearing from our nominee about his experience and issues he will prioritize if confirmed to this position.

With that, I would like to recognize Ranking Member Whitehouse for his opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

Senator WHITEHOUSE. Thank you very much, Chairman.

We just had Brian Nesvik before the committee to discuss the Fish and Wildlife Service budget. We are now here to discuss the nomination of Mr. Nesvik's boss.

There are a few things from our last hearing that I believe are worth raising with Mr. Lilly. First, the way that the Department of Interior and its bureaus in your jurisdiction have treated career staffers is unacceptable. You all have let the DOGE boys chase out nearly 1,800 employees, purging at least 530 biologists, I do not

know why the biologists deserved that treatment, and over 100 regional senior staff.

The Park Service is suffering, parks and wildlife refuges understaffed, and overburdened. I remind you that you would be overseeing two bureaus, the National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service, which have jurisdiction over some of God's greatest creations.

Last week, I displayed this chart of the biomass of mammals on earth. It is almost all humans, pets, and livestock. Five percent, 5 percent of animal biomass is all that remains on this planet that is still wild. We are living through a biodiversity crash, often called the Sixth Mass Extinction. This time, not brought on by an asteroid, but by human pollution, climate change, deforestation, habitat destruction, over-exploitation. In a word, greed.

The Department of Interior seems not to care. In March, the Secretary, your boss, saw fit to exempt all Gulf of Mexico oil and gas activities from our foremost wildlife protection law, the Endangered Species Act, careless that the Gulf is home to the Rice's Whale, a species so endangered that there are only around 50 left.

This administration will happily sacrifice an entire species on its altar of oil and gas interests. Meanwhile, you all pretend to care about the North Atlantic Right Whale. Rice's Whale, Right Whale, what is the difference? Well, Rice's Whale inhabits offshore oil and gas territory and so can die. The Right Whale inhabits offshore wind territory. It is a useful tool to attack clean energy.

You will use fake concern about one whale to suppress oil and gas's clean energy rival, while sacrificing the other whale to fossil fuel. It is yet another example of corruption to help Trump's fossil fuel donors.

Right now, after losing every case on your offshore wind shenanigans, you are using billions of taxpayer money to buy out fossil fuel's lower-cost competition. Anything to prop up Trump's oil and gas donors. That should not be the primary mission of the Department of Interior.

I very much doubt you are equipped to be successful in the position for which you have been nominated, based on your background and experience. You say you have a tremendous appreciation of the land, rivers and wildlife management at the National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service. Appreciating things as you sacrifice them does not pass the test.

Your predecessors, including from the first Trump administration, had decades of specialized experience. You cannot replace decades of expertise with 1 year as Acting, particularly when you have run out 530 of your biologists, and particularly not after a year like we have had. To eliminate an entire species, to sell wildlife refuges to private interests, to decrease enforcement of out-of-season hunting on federally owned lands, poaching, for Pete's sake. This past year, each of these things has happened with a stroke of a pen.

Mr. Lilly, if you are confirmed, the decisions you make in this role will affect our Country's remaining wildlife for years to come. You should manage our wildlife refuges and parks for the good of all Americans and the species who call them home, not for deep-pocketed and politically connected polluters. I give you about a 2 percent shot. I hope I am wrong.

Thank you, Chairman.

Senator CAPITO. Thank you.

Senator Cruz is on his way to introduce the witness. If we could wait just a minute or two. And if he doesn't come, we will move forward.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. Ah, the Senate. Which Senators are on their way?

[Laughter.]

Senator CAPITO. On their way from—when was that that Senator Kennedy was on his way, but he was at the Boston Airport?

[Laughter.]

Senator WHITEHOUSE. Wrong airport.

[Pause.]

Senator CAPITO. Welcome, Senator Cruz, to the EPW Committee. How do you like our new hearing room? This is our first year back in it.

Senator CRUZ. It is lovely.

Senator CAPITO. Trying to be as good as Commerce.

I am going to turn it over to Senator Cruz to introduce our witness, Kevin Lilly. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF HON. TED CRUZ,
U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF TEXAS

Senator CRUZ. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for the leniency. I had to get out of a Land and Commerce before running down here. Thank you for that flexibility.

Good morning, Madam Chair, Ranking Member Whitehouse, distinguished members of this committee. It is my privilege to introduce my friend, Kevin Lilly, President Trump's nominee to serve as the next Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife at the Department of the Interior.

Kevin is a Texas native who attended the University of Texas at Austin for his undergraduate studies, and later earned his MBA from Southern Methodist University.

During his time at the University of Texas, Kevin participated in ROTC, where he received a commission as a tank commander in the United States Army, and later rose to the rank of captain. His service to Texas and our Nation continued in the Texas State Guard, where he led the Eighth Regiment as a colonel during Hurricane Harvey.

The Eighth Regiment, I would like to note, is known as "Terry's Texas Rangers," and was first led by Sam Houston. This regiment in particular is very meaningful to the Lone Star State.

Kevin later served as the Chairman of the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission where he oversaw agents responsible for public safety and law enforcement, and licensed establishments across Texas. In that role, he oversaw efforts to monitor and investigate human trafficking, money laundering, and narcotics trafficking activities.

He also founded Avalon Advisors, LLC, the largest privately owned wealth management firm in Texas. And I would note that Kevin spent many, many years as business partners with one of my closest friends on Planet Earth.

Today, Kevin serves as the Acting Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife. His experience serving both the State of Texas and our Nation has made him a steady and reliable leader who understands the importance of cooperation among local, State and Federal Governments.

Kevin and his family share a deep love of the outdoors, including fishing and hunting, which has fostered a strong appreciation for our public lands. Kevin is a proud Texan, I am not sure there is any other kind, a proud American, a well-respected leader and a lifelong conservative Republican who has dedicated himself to serving the people of Texas.

His love for God, family, and country is evident through his continued public service. I have no doubt that he will continue to lead with conviction and integrity as the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife of the Department of the Interior.

Kevin is a good man, and he will do an excellent job. I strongly encourage my colleagues to support his nomination. Thank you.

Senator CAPITO. Thank you, Senator Cruz. We appreciate your coming. I know you have a Commerce Committee meeting, because I am on your committee as well.

As the Senator leaves, I will now ask the nominee, Mr. Lilly, to come forward to the witness table. If you will just remain standing, Mr. Lilly. Before we move to an opening statement, I will now administer the oath for you to receive your sworn testimony. If you would raise your right hand.

Do you swear the testimony you are about to give to this committee is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you, God?

Mr. LILLY. I do.

Senator CAPITO. Thank you.

Let the record show that the witness has answered in the affirmative, and we will now hear from the nominee. Mr. Lilly, when you are ready, you are recognized for 5 minutes, and thank you for being here.

STATEMENT OF KEVIN LILLY, NOMINATED TO BE ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE, UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Mr. LILLY. Good morning, Chairman Capito, Ranking Member Whitehouse, and members of the Committee. I am both honored and humbled that President Trump has nominated me, and for Secretary Burgum's trust in me, to serve as Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks at the Department of the Interior.

I am joined here today by my wife, Lesley, both of my sons, John and James, although James seems to be dealing with D.C. parking and is trying to find a place. We will expect him shortly, as well as several friends.

Senator CAPITO. Apparently, he is here.

Mr. LILLY. Oh, is he?

Senator CAPITO. Yes.

Mr. LILLY. OK. Sorry.

I am grateful for the unwavering support of my wife, Lesley. Throughout our many years together, her faith and resilience have always been my north star.

I am also proud to be the father of two Eagle Scouts, who now are both here, and of a remarkable daughter who has made us doting grandparents and a son-in-law who is proudly serving in the U.S. military at the present time. Their commitment to service, leadership, and family has inspired me as much as I have tried to inspire them.

Much of my life has been devoted to encouraging young people to grow in character and confidence, whether through my work as an assistant Scout Master or as a youth baseball and softball coach. These experiences reinforced my belief in mentorship, responsibility, and community.

Our family's love of hunting, fishing, and camping has carried me across some of the most beautiful and diverse landscapes in our Nation. Experiencing these places firsthand has deepened my appreciation for the public lands entrusted to us, and strengthened my desire to expand access to them so that more Americans can share in the same sense of wonder, peace, and connection to the land.

My faith has always guided my respect for creation, grounding my belief that natural resources are gifts to be cared for with humility and gratitude.

The values that guide me today were shaped early in my life. Growing up in Federal housing, military, as the youngest of five taught me resilience, gratitude, and the importance of hard work. My maternal grandparents immigrated from Sicily in search of opportunity. My grandfather was poor and uneducated, and he found work only as a street cleaner in New York City. My father, whose Irish ancestors immigrated to Boston, served in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and as a police officer. My older brother served honorably in Vietnam before losing his life to the long-term effects of Agent Orange exposure.

These experiences gave me a deep understanding of hardship, strengthened my empathy for others, and instilling in me a profound respect for the strength of families and communities. These foundations have shaped my approach to service throughout my life, as Senator Cruz mentioned, first as a commissioned U.S. Army Cavalry officer and tank commander, then as a Texas State police commissioner, and now in my work at the Department of the Interior.

Over the past year, serving as a steward of America's natural resources has been more than a professional opportunity; it has been a calling. My faith, rooted in care, responsibility, and respect for creation, aligns naturally with work that protects public lands and wildlife.

I carry into this mission a sense of purpose rooted in humility and gratitude.

I am also grateful for the dedicated career men and women that serve faithfully in the Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service. I am inspired each day by their public service.

I am grateful for the opportunity to work with our tribal, State, local, and external partners, as well as our gateway communities, and the hundreds of friends groups. This is a collaborative effort.

As Assistant Secretary, my focus will be straightforward: keeping our national parks open, safe, and properly staffed for the families

who visit them; supporting the men and women of the Fish and Wildlife Service in their work to recover species and sustain healthy habitat; and confronting the deferred-maintenance backlog that affects both visitor safety and the condition of these treasured places.

I will work hand in hand with our State, tribal, and local partners and with the gateway communities whose livelihoods depend on these lands to advance both conservation and access.

In closing, I want to share a moment that defines this vision. After this year's Artemis II mission, the first time Americans flew around the Moon in more than 50 years, the mission's commander, who by his own account is not a religious man, described being so overwhelmed by the vision from space, our Earth illuminated by the sun, that back aboard the recovery ship, he broke down in tears at the simple sight of a chaplain's cross.

Recently while at Yosemite National Park, I awoke to see the sun cresting above Half Dome and I was also overwhelmed with that same sense of awe and grace. It is that moment that I hope each American can share in some way and experience, that our Nation's children can find comfort not in the virtual world, but in the creator's world.

Our national parks and wildlife refuges are the salvation of the American soul.

I commit to you and the committee, I will remain an unwavering steward of the precious resources under my watch while ensuring Americans can enjoy public lands safely, responsibly, and fully, today and for generations to come.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I am prepared to answer your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Lilly follows:]

Statement of Kevin J. Lilly
Nominee for the Position of Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks
at the U.S. Department of the Interior
Before the Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate
June 24, 2026

Good morning, Chairman Capito, Ranking Member Whitehouse, and Members of the Committee. I am both honored and humbled that President Trump has nominated me, and for Secretary Burgum's trust in me, to serve as Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks at the Department of the Interior.

I am grateful for the unwavering support of my wife, Lesley. Throughout our many years together, her faith and resilience have always been my north star. I am also proud to be the father of two Eagle Scouts and of a remarkable daughter who has made us doting grandparents. Their commitment to service, leadership, and family has inspired me as much as I have tried to inspire them. Much of my life has been devoted to encouraging young people to grow in character and confidence — whether through my work as an Assistant Scout Master or as a youth baseball and softball coach. These experiences reinforced my belief in mentorship, responsibility, and community.

Our family's love of hunting, fishing, and camping has carried me across some of the most beautiful and diverse landscapes in our nation. Experiencing these places firsthand has deepened my appreciation for the public lands entrusted to us and strengthened my desire to expand access to them so that more Americans can share in the same sense of wonder, peace, and connection to the land. My faith has always guided my respect for creation, grounding my belief that natural resources are gifts to be cared for with humility and gratitude.

The values that guide me today were shaped early in life. Growing up in federal housing as the youngest of five taught me resilience, gratitude, and the importance of hard work. My maternal grandparents immigrated from Sicily in search of opportunity. My grandfather, poor and uneducated, found work as a street cleaner in New York City. My father, whose Irish ancestors immigrated to Boston, served in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and as a Police Officer. My older brother served honorably in Vietnam before losing his life to the long-term effects of Agent Orange exposure. These experiences gave me a deep understanding of hardship, strengthened my empathy for others, and instilled in me a profound respect for the strength families and communities can provide.

These foundations have shaped my approach to service throughout my life — first as a commissioned U.S. Army Cavalry Officer and Tank Commander, then as a Texas state police commissioner, and now in my work at the Department of the Interior. Over the past year, serving as a steward of America's natural resources has been more than a professional opportunity; it has been a calling. My faith, rooted in care, responsibility, and respect for creation, aligns naturally

with work that protects public lands and wildlife. I carry into this mission a sense of purpose rooted in humility and gratitude. I am also grateful for the dedicated career men and women who serve faithfully in the Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service. I am inspired each day by their public service.

I am grateful for the opportunity to work with our tribal, state, local, and external partners, as well as our gateway communities, and the hundreds of friends groups. This is a collaborative effort to serve the American people and conserve our public lands.

As Assistant Secretary, my focus will be straightforward: keeping our national parks open, safe, and properly staffed for the families who visit them; supporting the men and women of the Fish and Wildlife Service in their work to recover species and sustain healthy habitat; and confronting the deferred-maintenance backlog that affects both visitor safety and the condition of these treasured places. I will work hand in hand with our state, tribal, and local partners — and with the gateway communities whose livelihoods depend on these lands — to advance both conservation and access.

In closing, I want to share a moment that defines this vision. After this year's Artemis II mission — the first time Americans flew around the Moon in more than fifty years — the mission's commander, by his own account not a religious man, described being so overwhelmed by what he experienced that, back aboard the recovery ship, he broke down in tears at the simple sight of a chaplain's cross. Recently while at Yosemite National Park, I awoke to see the sun cresting above Half Dome and I was also overwhelmed with that sense of awe and grace. It is that moment that I hope each American can in some way experience, that our nation's children can find comfort not in the virtual world, but the creator's world. Our national parks and wildlife refuges are the salvation of the American soul.

I commit to you and the Committee, I will remain an unwavering steward of the precious resources under my watch while ensuring Americans can enjoy public lands safely, responsibly, and fully — today and for generations to come.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I am happy to answer any of your questions.

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Senator Lummis:

1. Mr. Lilly, if confirmed, you will oversee the Fish and Wildlife Service and help shape the Department's approach to ESA implementation. Do you support a cooperative federalism approach to wildlife management, and how would you ensure DOI decisions are made in collaboration with state game and fish agencies today and into the future?

Response: As a Texan, I believe collaboration with states is critically important. It is so important to this administration that the President selected Wyoming's state leader, Brian Nesvik to run the Fish and Wildlife Service. You have my commitment that states will always have a substantive seat at the table if I am confirmed.

2. As a specific example, state fish and wildlife agencies collect a wealth of on-the-ground data that should help inform federal decisions. However, these data can go overlooked in federal decisions, spurring the introduction of my bill, the Local Data for Conservation Act, to codify the use of state data in species listing or delisting decisions. If confirmed, what would you do to strengthen the use of state data in the Service's operations?

Response: I agree that states are a critical partner in conservation as they are doing much of the on-the-ground conservation work. If confirmed, I will ensure that we consider all state data in accordance with law.

3. The science on Greater Yellowstone grizzlies is clear — they've recovered, and both parties have known this for years. Keeping grizzlies listed isn't conservation; it is obstruction. Can I have your commitment to work with me to honor the science that shows that grizzlies have made a full recovery?

Response: Yes, and I look forward to working with you on this issue.

4. Invasive species such as cheatgrass can degrade habitat, increase wildfire risk, and negatively affect wildlife populations across the West. Mr. Lilly, would you say that effective cheatgrass mitigation can be balanced with sound environmental stewardship? If confirmed, I look forward working with you on solutions to address cheatgrass that actually reach the ground in Wyoming.

Response: Cheatgrass is a primary threat to the health of western rangelands, and the FWS is working on invasive-grass treatment, in coordination with states, ranchers and local agencies, to find an effective strategy. If confirmed, I look forward to working

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with you and keeping this issue locally driven.

5. The DOI has made key changes to public land management. Through proposed expansions of hunting and fishing as well as the bolstering of outdoor recreation, we are seeing Wyoming and Western States benefitting both economically and environmentally. Mr. Lilly can you speak to how your background in wealth management has set you up for a successful career in the public sector of the fish and wildlife service?

Response: My years founding and running the largest private wealth management firm in Texas taught me the financial discipline and long-term stewardship mindset that public service demands — managing complex budgets, safeguarding assets entrusted to my care, and building organizations built to last, all skills that translate directly to confronting challenges like the deferred maintenance backlog. As a Regent overseeing infrastructure projects across the Texas State university system, I put these skills to work managing large capital projects and public resources responsibly. And, as a hunter, fisherman, and former assistant Scoutmaster to two Eagle Scouts, I have a personal, lasting appreciation for the lands and wildlife entrusted to the National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. That combination of financial stewardship and passion for these places is what I would bring to this role every day, if confirmed.

Senator Whitehouse:

1. When Brian Nesvik was before the committee, we discussed Fish and Wildlife Service ("FWS") permitting for solar and wind projects. He told us that the Service anticipates reducing informal ESA section 7 consultation timeframes from 30 to 14 days and formal consultation timeframes from 135 days to no more than 30 days for projects covered under the programmatic tools and implemented through the Service's Information for Planning and Consultation ("IPaC"). When specifically asked about applications to solar and wind projects, he clarified "Any project that was submitted through IPaC and working its way through this process would have the same timelines under IPaC."

    a. Are you committed to applying the new abbreviated timelines for informal and formal ESA Section 7 consultations to all types of energy projects covered by IPaC, including wind and solar?

    b. Do the FWS field offices have uniform direction from leadership on how to proceed on solar and wind ESA reviews given the April 21, 2026, preliminary injunction in *RENEW Northeast* v. *U.S. Dept. of the Interior*, Case No. 25-cv-13961 (D. Mass. Apr. 21, 2026)?

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c. Are FWS staff allowed to begin ESA technical assistance review without direct approval from the White House or political appointees?

d. This administration declared a national energy emergency on January 20, 2025, that directed federal agencies to use statutory emergency powers to accelerate the leasing, permitting, and construction of certain energy projects. And yet, the Interior Department has actively sought to cancel all wind permit applications and have made IPaC unavailable to renewable energy projects. Please explain why IPaC is unavailable to wind and solar projects during a declared energy emergency.

Response: In support of the President's energy dominance objectives, we have streamlined compliance timelines across the Department, including shortening the timelines for FWS consultations, while fulfilling our statutory obligations. After completing an initial review, we have improved the IPaC system to ensure timely, consistent information on potential impacts to listed species, and are committed to following the law. I understand that FWS staff are operating with clear direction under E.O. 14315 and S.O. 3438 and that permits for wind and solar projects are continuing to be processed under elevated review to ensure efficient and environmentally appropriate use of federal lands and waters. If confirmed, I will continue to work with Secretary Burgum and Director Nesvik to ensure that FWS' implementation of its responsibilities is completed in a timely manner in accordance with law.

2. The Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks is not a member of the Endangered Species Committee, also known as the "God Squad." However, the Secretary of the Interior is. As you know, the God Squad recently decided to exempt endangered species in the Gulf of Mexico/America from Endangered Species Act protections to allow for oil and gas extraction. This includes the Rice's whale, of which there are only around 50 left. In your role, you will oversee wildlife conservation efforts and habitats that are integral to species survival.

   a. Before the convening of the March 31, 2026, God Squad meeting, did you personally review the exemption request from the Department of Defense?
   b. Did you review the God Squad's national security findings before the Committee voted?
   c. Did you provide advice and expertise to the Secretary of the Interior on the God Squad decision?
   d. What role, if any, did you have in the God Squad decision?

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Response: With respect to the Endangered Species Committee's decision, section 7(j) of the ESA directs the Committee to grant an exemption for agency action if the Secretary of War finds the exemption necessary for reasons of national security. As you noted, I do not sit on the Committee and was not a decision-maker in this process. I cannot comment further on the Committee's action as this matter is currently the subject of pending litigation.

3. Has the Assistant Secretary's office paused or delayed grants under the Multinational Species Conservation Fund, the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act Fund, or other international conservation funds appropriated to FWS?

    a. If so, please explain why and identify when funds will be released.

Response: I am not aware of international conservation funds being singled out for a pause specific to the office of the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. Across the Department generally, the Administration is reviewing grant funding to ensure that federal grant dollars are being spent efficiently, are free of fraud and abuse, and align with Administration priorities before obligation.

4. Americans buy Tiger Stamps under the Semipostal Authorization Act, expecting the funds to go overseas to the Multinational Species Conservation Fund. Yet those funds—which do not depend on Congressional appropriations and for which the US Postal Service writes checks to the FWS—have also been held up by your office alongside the appropriated funds. Please explain why these postal funds for conservation have been withheld.

Response: Again, I am not aware of funds being singled out for a pause specific to the office of the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks.

5. During the June 24, 2026, hearing, we spoke about issues with the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool renovations resulting from President Trump seeking to paint the bottom of the pool "American flag blue." Paint scraps are currently floating on the surface and algae is prevalent throughout the pool. The federal government originally estimated this project would cost approximately $1.8 million. Its current cost is now $14 million.

    a. Are you aware that the Department of the Interior awarded the Reflecting Pool renovation contract via a sole-source, no-bid process instead of a full and open competitive process? If so, please explain in detail your involvement in the

review and selection of the contractor.

b. The average federal construction contract profit margin is 6-12%. Were you aware that this contract carried an approximately 20% profit margin? If so, please explain the basis for approving a profit margin above the industry average on a project paid for by the American taxpayer.

c. Please explain the basis for the nearly eight-fold increase in projected costs associated with this project.

6. One of the Reflecting Pool contracts is with Atlantic Industrial Coatings, owned by John J. Cafaro. Mr. Cafaro resides near Mar-a-Lago and was a major Trump donor in 2020 and 2024. Mr. Cafaro also pled guilty to conspiring to bribe a congressman in the early 2000s and to campaign finance violations related to donations to his daughter's 2004 congressional campaign.

a. Are you aware that Mr. Cafaro received a no-bid contract despite his history of federal criminal convictions involving public corruption and campaign finance violations? If so, please explain in detail your involvement in the review and selection of this contractor.

b. Did anyone at the Department of the Interior conduct any review of potential reputational or ethics concerns associated with awarding federal funds to Mr. Cafaro?

c. Were any White House officials involved in recommending, discussing, or advocating for the selection of any contractor associated with the Reflecting Pool project?

d. President Trump publicly stated that at least one of the contractors was selected because the company had performed work at one of his golf properties. Are you aware of President Trump's comments? About which contractor was President Trump speaking? If President Trump was speaking about an individual or company that was not awarded a contract, which company was it and why wasn't it awarded the contract?

e. Did DOI make these contracts available to the public through full and open competition before awarding to the winning contractors? If not, please explain the basis for the sole-source or limited competition award.

Response to Questions 5 and 6: President Trump has made it a priority to restore Washington, D.C. as a capital that reflects the greatness of the nation, particularly as

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America marks its 250th anniversary. This city belongs to every American, not just its residents, and the National Mall and monuments here are visited by tens of millions of Americans and international travelers annually. This Administration inherited a substantial deferred maintenance backlog in D.C. after years of neglect, and the reflecting pool is just one of many park assets across the region that have been restored. As I stated at my hearing, the contracts associated with this project were awarded by warranted contracting officers – career professionals licensed by the federal government – in compliance with applicable law.

7. During the June 24, 2026, hearing, we spoke about the supposed vandalism at the Reflecting Pool, resulting in multiple arrests and detainment of citizens accused of wrongdoing by the Park Police. In a Truth Social post, President Trump mentioned a 350-foot gash made in the pool, insisting that it was "cut and powerfully lifted off the surface leaving very jagged, uneven edges." When asked if he had proof of the vandalism justifying the arrests and citations, Mr. Trump responded, "Well, you'd have to go see the Parks Department. They'll show it to you, or see, see the secretary, but I saw it." He added, "[w]e also have pictures." When asked about the release of the photos containing evidence of the arrested individuals vandalizing the pool, the President said "You'll see it in court. But all you have to do is call the Parks Department. Call the Department of the Interior."

    a. Have you personally seen photographic or video evidence of vandalism occurring at the Reflecting Pool?

    b. What factual evidence exists for the multiple arrests and detentions? Please produce all evidence relied upon to support those arrests and detentions, including any photographic or video evidence.

    c. Please provide all memoranda circulated to the Park Police from August 4, 2025, to the present related to enforcement of any and all laws, regulations, and rules related to the National Mall and Memorial Parks.

    d. President Trump reportedly claimed that fertilizer was placed in the Reflecting Pool. Have you completed any scientific testing of this claim? Please provide evidence of this testing to the committee.

    e. Numerous ducks have been found dead in or around the Reflecting Pool. What was their cause of their death? Please explain whether the chemicals and hydrogen peroxide from the project contributed to their demise.

Response: **During my time at the Department, I have had the privilege and honor of**

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working with the U.S. Park Police, one of the most extraordinary and historic police departments in the United States. I have been impressed by the Park Police's professionalism, training and discipline. The service that this law enforcement agency provides our Nation, protecting our parks, memorials, visitors and the local community is admirable. I believe that the officers involved in the apprehensions and arrest of these individuals at the reflecting pool were doing their duty, enforcing the law appropriately, without political motivation. Vandalism hurts everyone. This investigation is ongoing and I do not have additional information to share at this time. Again, as I stated, once information is available publicly, I would be happy to share with you.

8. The Trump Administration has already made many changes to the National Park Service that fall under the jurisdiction of your role at Interior. The FY2027 Trump Administration budget proposal makes severe cuts across the Park Service budget while also including a $10 billion mandatory fund to establish the Presidential Capital Stewardship Program within the Service to fund construction and beautification projects in and around Washington, D.C.

    a. As Acting Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, do you support the FY2027 budget proposal's overall cuts to Park Service operations? Do you separately support creating the $10 billion Presidential Capital Stewardship Program?

    b. This budget proposal also includes around a 25% cut to park operations funds totaling $757 million dollars. Were you part of the decision making to severely cut park management and resource stewardship?

    c. Do you agree with allocating $10 billion to D.C. beautification rather than continuing to fund park management and resource stewardship at FY26 levels?

    d. Do you believe there is a need to increase staffing at our national parks, wildlife refuges, and fish hatcheries?

    e. We understand that you need to approve all new FWS and NPS hires. How many vacancies are pending your approval? For each, how long have those approvals been outstanding? What is your schedule for deciding whether to approve each pending vacancy?

Response: As the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, I support the President's FY2027 budget. The Secretary's approach, and mine, has been to focus on outputs rather than inputs: enhancing visitor access, streamlining permitting, addressing facilities maintenance, conserving resources and meeting our

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mission. I agree that having staff in the right locations is critical, and we have worked to increase the number of seasonal staff in the parks, extend seasonal employment from six to nine months, and expand local direct hiring authorities.

9. In your role at the Interior, you have jurisdiction over portions of the White House complex, including President's Park, the North and South Lawns, and certain museum areas. Given NPS's management responsibilities, significant construction activities on White House grounds would typically require coordination with NPS. On October 20, 2025, President Trump demolished the East Wing to facilitate construction of the ballroom. Alongside Senators Heinrich and Peters, I requested information from the White House and NPS regarding agency consultation, approvals, and compliance with applicable planning and review requirements. I did not receive a response.

    a. At the time demolition began, were you serving as Acting Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks?

    b. Who informed you of plans to demolish the East Wing before demolition activities commenced? When were you informed?

    c. Was NPS involved in reviewing or approving the Trump Administration's plans to demolish the East Wing of the White House?

    d. Did NPS participate in any meetings concerning the project?

    e. Did NPS prepare any memoranda, recommendations, meeting minutes, or briefing materials concerning the project for the White House, GSA, National Capital Planning Commission, or any other relevant agency?

    f. Did you personally review those materials?

    g. Will you share those documents with the Committee before we vote on your nomination?

Response: I have been Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks since August 2025 and in this role I have become familiar with a longstanding concern: the White House lacks a safe, secure permanent indoor venue capable of hosting large official functions. However, as this matter is currently the subject of active litigation, I am unable to provide additional comment.

10. In August 2025, Park Police adopted a policy that allowed Park Police officers to initiate

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vehicular pursuits when a suspect is wanted for or suspected of committing a felony offense, or when a threat to public safety exists based on the suspect's actions. The stated purpose of that policy was to improve public safety. Yet since its adoption, multiple pursuits have ended in devastating crashes, including one that resulted in the death of a teenager and another that left an individual paralyzed. At the same time, Secretary Burgum joked at a Cabinet meeting that officers "had so much fun" conducting a pursuit immediately after the restrictions were lifted.

a. Did you support the decision to expand Park Police pursuit authority beyond prior limitations?

b. Do you believe it is appropriate for the Secretary of the Interior to describe high-speed vehicle pursuits as something officers "had so much fun" doing?

c. Are you aware of the March 12, 2026, pursuit that resulted in a teenager being killed?

d. Are you aware of the May 3, 2026, pursuit that resulted in a pedestrian becoming paralyzed?

e. Can you provide any evidence that the NPS conducted an analysis to determine whether the public safety benefits of the expanded pursuit policy outweigh the deaths and catastrophic injuries that have occurred since its implementation?

Response: I believe that the U.S. Park Police should have the tools and authorities they need to protect visitors to our national parks and monuments as well as the people of the District of Columbia. I support holding bad actors accountable; and the U.S. Park Police officers need a policy framework that lets them do their jobs effectively. At the same time, I recognize our responsibility to protect the public includes bystanders with no connection to an underlying offense. I am aware of the tragic incidents you described. I understand that the U.S. Park Police is conducting after action reviews of these incidents and will make any appropriate adjustments after the conclusion of these reviews.

11. Public reports indicate that Park Police officers are conducting multi-agency traffic stops and operations associated with federal immigration enforcement activities. As you know, NPS is governed by the Organic Act, which directs the Service to conserve the scenery, natural and historic objects, and wildlife within federal parklands, and to provide for their enjoyment in a manner that leaves them unimpaired for future generations. The Park Police operate within that framework as the Service's federal law enforcement arm.

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a. Is it true that Park Police officers are currently participating in joint operations with Immigration and Customs Enforcement or other federal agencies conducting immigration enforcement activities?

b. Do you support Park Police participation in these activities? If so, why?

c. How does conducting traffic stops for the purpose of supporting immigration enforcement further the National Park Service's statutory mission of protecting monuments, federal parks, and visitors?

d. At a time when the Park Police has repeatedly cited staffing shortages and resource constraints, how do you justify assigning personnel to immigration enforcement operations rather than park protection and visitor safety?

e. What training, to date, have Park Police officers received for immigration enforcement procedures?

Response: The U.S. Park Police, America's oldest uniformed federal law enforcement organization, play a vital role in the national capital region, protecting national parks, memorials and the public. Park Police officers enforce the law within their jurisdiction and carry out their mission in accordance with federal law, in addition to coordinating, assisting and partnering with other federal, state and local law enforcement agencies operating in this area to enhance safety and reduce crime. These officers undergo comprehensive law enforcement training, with special skills for protecting national icons, parks and managing urban crowds and civil disorder. U.S. Park Police officers may stop vehicles to enforce traffic and public safety laws, but do not conduct immigration-related stops or arrests. In support of President Trump's initiative to make D.C. safe and beautiful, the U.S. Park Police have already hired over 300 new officers to meet growing demands on the force and strengthen our ability to meet the Department's mission. I support the U.S. Park Police and highly value their dedicated service to protect and serve the American people.

12. Department of the Interior Secretarial Order 3415A1 requires that all Federal Register notices are to be issued by the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. Is the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, Dr. Jenifer Chatfield, involved in the issuance of Federal Register notices?

Response: A multitude of career bureau staff, the staff in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Fish and Wildlife and Parks, and additional senior departmental staff are

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involved in the review of, or support the issuance of, Federal Register notices, as appropriate, and ultimately the Assistant Secretary of Fish and Wildlife and Parks issues the Federal Register notices. However, it is important to note that in most cases publication decisions are statutorily driven.

13. Dr. Chatfield was the co-director of a captive breeding facility in Florida named 4J Conservation Center, so named because all four family members that started the business have first names that start with "J." 4J's permit was recently renewed and there are allegations Dr. Chatfield used her government position to help their permit application get through that process. As you may likely know, House Natural Resources Committee Democrats asked DOI's Inspector General to investigate potential ethical violations because of her potential involvement in agency decisions that would directly benefit her family's captive-bred wildlife business.

    a. Are you aware that Dr. Chatfield co-directed 4J Conservation Center?

    b. Are you aware of allegations that Dr. Chatfield used her position to assist 4J's permit renewal?

    c. Did you know whether she recused herself from 4J's permit application decision?

    d. Have you checked whether she has recused herself from any decisions since beginning in her current role overseeing FWS?

Response: Dr. Chatfield has brought her professionalism and expertise to her role at the Department, and I appreciate her commitment to serving the American people. The Department takes the ethics rules seriously and each employee, regardless of position, is expected to meet their federal ethics obligations.

14. The next meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora ("CITES") is coming up in July. CITES is an essential international agreement that ensures that international trade of endangered species is legal, traceable, and sustainable. Will Dr. Chatfield be representing the United States at this meeting?

Response: Two of CITES scientific advisory committees are meeting in July to address technical and scientific issues related to CITES-listed species. At this time, Dr. Chatfield is scheduled to participate in these meetings as part of the United States delegation.

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15. Please provide a complete accounting of all official FWS travel requests that required your review or approval from August 4, 2025, through June 24, 2026. For each request, please provide the information in a table or spreadsheet that includes:

    a. Date the travel request was submitted;

    b. Date of the approval or denial;

    c. Name of the event, meeting, conference, training, or other official travel purpose;

    d. Travel purpose/mission category (statutory requirement, treaty obligation, scientific research etc.);

    e. Destination (city, state, and country, if applicable);

    f. Requesting office, program, or region;

    g. Number of employees requesting travel;

    h. Estimated cost of the travel; and,

    i. The reason for the approval or denial, including any written justification, policy, or guidance relied upon.

Response: In accordance with law and policy, I generally review official travel by certain designated FWS personnel to ensure alignment with Administration priorities and responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars, including official travel to conferences with more than two employees and travel costing over $2,500.

16. Please describe how reductions in force, deferred resignations, retirements, hiring freezes, reorganizations, or other workforce reductions since January 20, 2025, have affected grizzly bear conservation, recovery, monitoring, conflict management, research, and related activities within the NPS, FWS, including at FWS Headquarters, Region 1, and Region 6.

17. Please identify the number of Department of the Interior employees who have departed since January 20, 2025, whose duties included grizzly bear conservation, recovery, biology, monitoring, conflict management, habitat management, research, or related activities. Please provide this information by bureau, office, duty station, position title,

and separation type (e.g., reduction in force, deferred resignation, retirement, voluntary resignation, or other).

18. Please identify the resources currently available for grizzly bear conservation, recovery, monitoring, and management within NPS and FWS. Please include the following:

    a. The number of full-time equivalent employees and vacant positions assigned to grizzly bear-related work;

    b. The number of active contracts, cooperative agreements, or grants supporting grizzly bear conservation;

    c. Any suspended, delayed, or canceled fieldwork, monitoring, research, conflict response, or recovery activities; and

    d. Any statutory, regulatory, or recovery plan obligations that have been delayed, reduced, or are at risk due to resource constraints.

Response to Questions 16 - 18: Each of these questions focuses on staffing and resources related to grizzly bears, a species that has been twice delisted and determined to be recovered by the FWS and is the current subject of litigation. The Department remains committed to effective conservation, recovery, monitoring and management of grizzly bear populations. Currently, grizzly bear-related work is distributed within the Department across multiple program areas, local management units, and cooperating agencies. However, a complete accounting of staffing and resources in the format requested is not readily available as this data is not tracked in the manner described. The Department continues to align our workforce and resources with core mission requirements, including our responsibilities under the Endangered Species Act. With respect to plans, the FWS is preparing a final rule on the status of grizzly bears in the lower-48 states under the Endangered Species Act. The court-ordered deadline for this rule has been extended from January 31, 2026, to December 18, 2026.

19. Will you commit to briefing Committee staff on DOI's planned construction of border barrier infrastructure within the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, which will include FWS assessments of impacts to refuge resources and recommendations provided to Customs and Border Protection to minimize harmful impacts?

Response: Although the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge is managed by the FWS, the Department of Homeland Security is the agency charged with responsibility for

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protecting our Southern Border and would be best suited to providing a briefing on any infrastructure plans along the border.

Senator Merkley:

1. What involvement have you had in the Reflecting Pool project?
    a. Please describe your role in the decision-making process that led to the use of a sole source contract for both the water filtration and re-painting of the Reflecting Pool.
    b. If confirmed, do you agree to comply with all oversight requests from Congress related to the Reflecting Pool Project in a timely manner?
    c. Please provide the complete contracts and all modifications, as applicable, for work related to the Reflecting Pool that has been carried out during 2026.
    d. What credentials did Atlantic Industrial Coatings have for securing a sole source contact for re-painting the pool?
    e. Did adding hydrogen peroxide to the water or driving the President's motorcade inside the pool violate the warranties of either contract for repairing the pool?
    f. What is the cost of each of the contracts on the pool, how much of that is specifically for the coating, and what are the funding sources for the project?
    g. How much money has been spent on this project so far, what is your estimate for fully fixing the pool, and how long will it take to fix the damage?
    h. Based on what you know now, do you think it was appropriate and in the best interests of the taxpayer and landmark to approve a sole source contracts for the Project?
    i. Based on what you know now, what would you do differently to more responsibly manage this Project?

Response: President Trump has made it a priority to restore Washington, D.C. as a capital that reflects the greatness of the nation, particularly as America marks its 250th anniversary. This city belongs to every American, not just its residents, and the National Mall and monuments here are visited by tens of millions of Americans and international travelers annually. The reflecting pool is just one of many park assets across the region that is being restored after years of neglect. As I stated at my hearing, the contracts associated with this project were awarded by warranted contracting officers – career professionals licensed by the federal government – in compliance with applicable law. The U.S. Park Police have made arrests for vandalism at the reflecting pool, which will be prosecuted in accordance with law. After the necessary repairs are made, I am confident that this pool, reflecting monuments to Presidents Washington and Lincoln will make the American people proud. If I am confirmed, I will comply with legitimate oversight requests in a timely manner

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consistent with executive branch policies and applicable law.

2. What involvement have you had in the proposed "Boca Chica Land Exchange" between SpaceX and the Lower Rio Grande Valley/Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuges in Texas?

    a. Has the Department approved the exchange?
    b. Do you commit to holding off on moving forward with this exchange while current litigation on this matter is pending?
    c. What was the appraised value of the Lower Rio Grande Valley refuge lands proposed for divestiture at the time of federal acquisition?
    d. How have the activities of SpaceX at Starbase affected the value of the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge lands identified for the planned exchange?
    e. Will the Fish and Wildlife Service require full mitigation for all damages or degradation caused by SpaceX activities on federal land?

Response: I am generally aware of the proposed Boca Chica Land Exchange in Texas and the related active litigation. Given that pending case, I am not in a position to commit the Department to any particular course of action.

Senator CAPITO. Thank you. Thank you, and welcome to your family. Thank you for being here ,and thank you for your service to our Country in more ways than one.

To begin this, we have three standing yes or no questions that we ask all of our nominees who appear before us. I am going to ask you these pretty straightforward questions.

Do you agree, if confirmed, to appear before this committee or designated members of this committee and other appropriate committees of this Congress to provide information subject to appropriate and necessary security protections with respect to your responsibilities?

Mr. LILLY. Yes, ma'am.

Senator CAPITO. Do you agree to ensure that testimony, briefings, documents and electronic and other forms of communication of information are provided to this committee and its staff and other appropriate committees in a timely manner?

Mr. LILLY. Yes, ma'am.

Senator CAPITO. Thank you. And finally, do you know of any matters which you may or may not have disclosed that may place you in a conflict of interest if you are confirmed?

Mr. LILLY. No, ma'am.

Senator CAPITO. All right. With that, I am going to start with my round of questioning. I am going to mention, this morning I had an interesting experience with the National Park Service myself, in that I was given sort of a preview of the undercroft of the Lincoln Memorial, which will be opening tomorrow to the public. It is an extremely interesting and extremely well done presentation of how the monument was built.

And it will be a welcome respite for some visitors, because it is air-conditioned in there. It has great bathrooms, which all visitors are looking for. It is a real testament, I think, to the National Park Service and their talents to have this done in 3 years. I hope anybody listening makes sure that on a visit to Washington you make sure that you do that, since it is going to be open from 9 to 9.

Mr. LILLY. I am glad you enjoyed it.

Senator CAPITO. It was great.

Recently, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia vacated the biological opinion that governed consultations under the Endangered Species Act for coal mining activities in States that have primacy under SMCRA. You and I have already talked about this. This leaves States like my State of West Virginia in tremendous limbo with respect to how the ESA reviews will be carried out.

We did have Director Nesvik in front of the committee, as Senator Whitehouse mentioned. I asked him to make the same commitment that I am asking of you right now. Do I have your commitment to work with the Office of Surface Mining, State regulators, including the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection and the mining industry on a path forward that allows ESA consultations to take place in an efficient manner and avoid unnecessary delays in the permitting process in the wake of this court decision?

Mr. LILLY. Yes, ma'am.

Senator CAPITO. Thank you very much.

Let's talk about permitting reform. As you know, we are in dire need of permitting reform. This is something we have said for years. Senator Whitehouse and I are working with our staffs very diligently, with the Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

We need the ability to build critical infrastructure in a timely manner. We need to do it the right way. One if the biggest hurdles projects can face is under the ESA consultation. In this position, how will you work with Director Nesvik to ensure that the implementation of the ESA will protect endangered species, without a stonewalling effect?

Mr. LILLY. Thank you, Senator. Thank you, Chairman, that is a great question. Yes, I have spent a great deal of time with Director Nesvik, as well as the Fish and Wildlife staff and other staff members within the Department of the Interior. I think that the fundamental reality is that many things that are well-intended become subject to the unintended consequences of our own action.

I think that is reflected in the Endangered Species Act. I think when it was established in 1973 and passed, I believe at that time by unanimous vote, it was, as some people called it, a wildlife management process in which the objective was to recover and de-list species.

Consequently, the de-listing of species should be received with great fanfare and celebration. It should be something that we continue to work toward, rather than something to battle against. It seems that in some sort of a perverse sense that while we receive, when we have successes, we are immediately sued, that there are those that literally go through reasonable science, tremendous hours, of biologists, of scientists, population managers, attorneys, the public input. When all the science is culminated to come up with an answer and yet it can be whisked away through judicial review.

That doesn't work to our benefit, I think, of either the species or the American people. The only thing that it benefits are legal fees and the perpetual litigious nature that the ESA has become.

To answer your question directly, ma'am, working toward ESA reform is a benefit to all. I believe it is a bipartisan reality. To deregulate, to protect our environment, to protect our species, no question. Also to be reasonable, and not use it as a burden upon American industry, upon private landowners, upon tribal communities, and upon stakeholders.

Senator CAPITO. Thank you.

I want to turn briefly, I just have a minute left here, this is not a brief topic, but it is the National Parks. Obviously, they are still—West Virginia's National Park was signed into law by President Trump in 2020 as the latest park, the 63d park. And I mentioned its successes. It is a real source of pride for all of us in our State.

How will you, using your professional background, use that to strengthen local economies and grow tourism in our National Parks? That is a big question for a 20-second answer.

Mr. LILLY. Sure. I think it is a great question, and I think it leads to other concerns. My background, and if I have to stop, I guess I can answer it later, but the National Park Service is one

of the most complex ecosystems and organizations in the United States, and in the U.S. Government.

The multiple sources of revenue, capital leases, deferred maintenance, law enforcement, housing, concession contracts, trademarks, IP, bridges, tunnels, golf courses, dealing with gateway communities, and realizing that the balance that must exist and the collaboration with all of these varying components which I have spent a career as a fiduciary dealing with, and having some degree of experience in, and also working with these businesses that are so reliant upon the success of the parks is extremely important.

One of the things I do, every time I go to a park, I make sure that I spend a tremendous amount of time in roundtables with local business, community and tribal leaders. I want to hear directly from them how we can better serve one another to serve the American people, to make this not a mutually exclusive relationship, but an inclusive one.

Senator CAPITO. Thank you.

Senator Whitehouse?

Senator WHITEHOUSE. Thanks very much. Mr. Lilly, thank you for joining me yesterday, to discuss the issues that the Interior Department is facing. Thank you for your service in our military.

I would like to talk with you about the Reflecting Pool, as we discussed yesterday. At the moment, the Park Police are making arrests around the Reflecting Pool. The President has claimed that vandals, quoting him here, took some form of knife or blade and put a 250-foot-long gash into the beautiful facade of what took so much work, competence and money to build and complete. He increased the estimate to 300 feet later, and then to 350 feet, insisting that it was, quoting him again, "cut and powerfully lifted off the surface, leaving very jagged, uneven edges."

He was asked what truth there was of any of that, since it doesn't seem to be visible to any other person. And he said, well, you have to go see the Parks Department. I will show it to you, or see the Secretary, but I saw it, we have pictures.

He also said, you will see it in court.

You were a police commissioner in Texas, I understand?

Mr. LILLY. Yes, I was.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. When people visiting the Reflecting Pool are being arrested, handcuffed and dragged away by your police officers, you would like to think that they have proper probable cause to arrest someone. I grew up in the Foreign Service. There are plenty of countries in which arrests made to satisfy a political leader's narrative that had no basis in fact was something that they did. The American system of justice is not operated that way.

What can you tell me here today about what damage was done to the Reflecting Pool, where this 350-foot gash came from, and why tourists are being arrested? What is the factual predicate for these arrests?

Mr. LILLY. Yes, sir, thank you. And indeed, I have spent, as the son of a police officer, as well as police commissioner, I have spent virtually my entire life in and around the law enforcement industry or business, community, rather.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. You would agree with me that arresting tourists to vindicate a political narrative, not because of any evi-

dence of a crime, would be a wrong thing to do, if that were what happened, correct?

Mr. LILLY. Senator, the U.S. Park Police is one of the most extraordinary and historic police departments in the United States, founded in 1789. And in the year that I had the opportunity and pleasure and privilege and honor to work with them, I have been amazingly impressed by their professionalism, their training, their discipline, their service and their duty and service to this district and the people that live here.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. Which is why these incidents seem so aggravating, and I would like to ask you to respond to the question.

Mr. LILLY. And consequently, sir, I would say that, and I think that all people would agree, that ensuring that law and order is maintained for anyone to imply, and I am not saying that you are, that the U.S. Park Police in any way used political motivation to carry out their duties, I think would be unjust and in some ways an egregious accusation.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. What is the predicate, then? Is there in fact a 350-foot gash done by a vandal to the Reflecting Pool?

Mr. LILLY. The predicate, sir, is that I have no doubt that the police officers involved in the apprehensions of these individuals, of which I believe there were five, were doing their duty, they were enforcing the law appropriately. And I think that all of us should recognize and believe that vandalism of any kind is an affront to civilized society. It hurts everyone.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. Mr. Lilly, the question is, was there vandalism? Did someone cut a 350-foot gash in the Reflecting Pool? And what vandalism did these individuals do? Is it really vandalism to pick a piece of floating peel of paint out of the Reflecting Pool? People have run through the Reflecting Pool in the past. The President drove through the Reflecting Pool, apparently.

Mr. LILLY. Sir, I stand by my statement that the U.S. Park Police operate and conducted their business in defending and protecting this city in an appropriate manner, and there was no malfeasance, nor was there any political motivation to it.

And furthermore, sir, as you know, this is an ongoing investigation. Consequently, I am not in a position to share that information publicly. Once it is available publicly, I am happy to meet with you. I met with you yesterday, sir, I will meet with you any time.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. Was there or was there not a 350-foot gash in the Reflecting Pool?

Mr. LILLY. Senator, I stand by my statement, sir.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. Your statement does not answer the question.

Mr. LILLY. I stand by my statement, sir.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. OK. You will not answer the question. I can see why you do not want to answer the question. You are in a terrible position because the President has made up a 350-foot gash, and unfortunately now police officers are being put in the position of having to make arrests that I suspect are going to fare very badly in court, because there is nothing about touching the Reflecting Pool or picking up a piece of floating, peeling paint that amounts to vandalism as a matter of law.

Thank you, Chairman.

Senator CAPITO. Senator Curtis?

Senator CURTIS. Thank you, Mr. Lilly. It occurs to me as I think about my State, two-thirds of my State is owned by the Federal Government. I have counties that are over 94 percent federally owned. We have five national parks. You might be the most important nominee to come before me, for many reasons. I am grateful for this opportunity.

I did catch very carefully your claim of two Eagle Scouts. I also am a father to Eagle Scouts, and I can tell you from my experience as fathers, we have no business taking credit for it because we all know it is the mother who pushes them through those requirements.

[Laughter.]

Senator CURTIS. So to your wife, congratulations on your two Eagle Scouts.

I appreciate the decision to end the time entry system at our Arches National Park. Are you familiar with that? Were you involved in that?

Mr. LILLY. Absolutely, sir.

Senator CURTIS. For many Utah families and visitors, that system became an unnecessary barrier to accessing public lands. I myself waited in line for over an hour with a reservation a year or two ago.

It has also created real challenges for our small business, as you have mentioned gateway communities a couple of times. We also know that the reservation portal does not really fix the problem, it manages scarcity rather than actually solving the problem.

As we enter the busiest months of the year, rather than limiting access, our focus should be on managing demand, investing in infrastructure, and improving the visitors' experience. Most importantly, we need to keep our parks easily accessible to the public.

Your descriptions of growing up being in the outdoors was similar to mine. It was my scouting experience that was actually part of that. I think the more we make that accessible to people, the healthier we are as a society.

Can you walk us through the specific steps the Department of Interior is taking to reduce congestion, improve traffic flow and expand visitor experience at Arches, so that more people can enjoy that park without waiting?

Mr. LILLY. Yes, sir. One of the things that I have mentioned many times is when I first arrived at the job, I told the staff, I told our politicals and our careers that we would never refer to an American citizen as a guest in a National Park, because they own it. Our parks are owned by the American people, and consequently, it is incumbent upon us to ensure that Americans have access to their parks, which they own.

And I believe in certain cases, sir, and you specifically mentioned Arches. That timed entry was actually a deterrent. In fact, the numbers play out. I was at Arches earlier this year. I met with gateway community members. I looked at the demographics. I looked at the economic analysis of the city of Moab. And I realized and was told by the members of the commission that Moab actually had a 500,000 person reduction in visitor attendance. That is a catastrophic effect.

And it was referred to as recessionary upon the city of Moab, that when they began timed entry attendance and visitation in Moab, decreased hotels, restaurants, concessionaires, all suffered.

The way that we can combat the sort of perceived issue of congestion is, I think, we have used an extraordinary semi-pilot program in Yosemite, which has been incredibly successful. It involves technology. It involves utilization of fast lanes. It involves utilization of license readers. It involves, I am not sure I can say this publicly, can I say the Chik-Fil-A model? I guess we all know what that is.

Using tablets in order to work to decrease the congestion and allow the more rapid access, ingress and egress in and out of a park. And we saw that most recently at Yosemite and at Arches as well.

Senator CURTIS. I am going to jump in, simply because of time. I would really like to engage with you. You and I have the fortunate situation where a visit to Arches is actually part of our job. May I just express a desire to engage with you to solve those problems? Arches actually has another entry that is not used.

Mr. LILLY. Understood.

Senator CURTIS. There are lots of choices. The community cares deeply about preserving and protecting it, but they also care deeply about those 500,000 people who did not have the experience that they could have had.

Thank you for that commitment. I will carry that back to them.

Also I would like to point out throughout Utah, we have these gateway communities, and I would like to invite you to be equally engaged at all of our five National Parks. I will meet you there, my team will meet your team there, anything that we can do to rectify this situation where we are preserving, protecting, but also optimizing these parks in our State.

Mr. LILLY. There is indeed a balance, yes, sir.

Senator CURTIS. Thank you. And I apologize. I am out of time.

Senator CAPITO. Senator Merkley.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you, Madam Chairman, and welcome, Mr. Lilly. We were able to talk previously about the challenge of increasing pollinator plants. In organized agriculture, it has become more efficient, there are fewer wild species, if you will.

I mentioned Lamar Alexander had spotlighted a program for roadside pollinator plants. I recalled you mentioned in Texas that is a program for using roadsides as massive pollinator fields to help, or pollinator plants in the side. Did I catch that correctly?

Mr. LILLY. Yes, sir. The wildflower program, which was initiated by Lady Bird Johnson, is a stable feature of Texas, along both our Federal and State highways.

Senator MERKLEY. I had a comment on the fact that we face a huge drop in natural pollinators, including the Monarch, the Western Monarch almost disappeared twice, almost extinct. And that one idea that we had worked on and passed into law and funded was for groups to adopt sections of the interstate highway system to plant pollinator gardens, but also that some ranchers are working to, in their grazing lands, that serve cattle, they are also scattering wildflower seeds.

I would like to know if you will continue to work with us to increase the pollinator population, if you will, of these wild species. And of course, with a special interest on my part of the Western Monarch.

Mr. LILLY. Yes, sir. And I also enjoyed spending time with you last week in your office. Certainly, I am intrigued by the programs that we used in the State of Texas, and to see how we can think about those types of measures as it relates to this particular situation. I am happy to work with you, sir.

Senator MERKLEY. Another issue that I mentioned was the Klamath Basin, that has a lot of drought, and has high conflicting demands for water between farming, ranching, in lake with some endangered species and in Klamath River. And that that requires very conscientious effort to provide support for that Klamath Basin.

We have done various programs to try to help make sure water is available when needed for ranching and farming, or to be able to seasonally retire certain water rights so ranchers or farmers do not go out of business. Also to improve the conditions in the lake. Algae has gotten a lot of attention in the Reflecting Pool, but algae, with rising temperatures and rising amounts of phosphorus in our water is an issue all across the Country. Very difficult challenge.

I would like to know if you had a chance to examine that collaboration that is going on in the Klamath Basin, and can be supportive of our efforts to help address those multiple needs.

Mr. LILLY. Yes, sir. After our meeting, we did discuss that. I met with Director Nesvik on that specific topic. And as I mentioned and as you know, sir, obviously water is an extraordinarily important issue at the Department of the Interior, especially in our Department of Water and Science, especially as it relates to water rights, irrigation.

Absolutely, Senator, I look forward to working with your staff and working with my team on this issue.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you.

One of the concerns I have had is whether the administration executes programs that are duly authorized and funded by Congress. I feel like this is a Constitutional issue, that the power of the purse rests with Congress.

Occasionally, or sometimes more than occasionally, there have been programs where the administration has not distributed the funds.

One area that I am particularly concerned about is that of the International Affairs Programs in the Fish and Wildlife Service. These are the multinational species conservation fundings. The cogoal is for the United States to participate in programs that reduce the illegal trading of animal parts, which there are some of the syndicates that are involved in drugs and terrorism also make money smuggling animal parts of rare species. And also to try to have a world for the generations to come that still has rhinos and orangutans and tigers and so forth.

With this program, can you commit to making sure that the funds appropriate by Congress are duly disbursed in a timely fashion to the various groups that are working on these issues?

Mr. LILLY. Senator, I am aware of that issue. In my prior experience, working with trafficking, it was one of the most critical func-

tions that we dealt with. Human trafficking, animal trafficking, all of it is run by cartels and is an enormous business.

I can commit to you also that we are working to enhance and increase our law enforcement capabilities as it relates to our special agents within Fish and Wildlife. And I will work with your officer on this particular topic.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you. And specifically, I am asking if you can make sure that the moneys that have been appropriated and authorized will be timely disbursed and get to these international organizations for the work they are doing.

Mr. LILLY. I will work to that end, yes, sir.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you.

Senator CAPITO. Senator Husted?

Senator HUSTED. Thank you, Chairman Capito. And Mr. Lilly, great to have you here in the committee today.

I had the opportunity last week to visit Maumee Bay State Park with our Ohio Department of Natural Resources Director, Mary Mertz and Congressman Bob Latta, who has been very involved in issues regarding wildlife in Ohio and natural places.

I have been engaged in these issues pretty much my entire life. I have seen how concerted efforts can change things for the better. We had a chance to meet with a bunch of sportsmen's groups and environmental groups and habitat groups, you name it. We recounted the number of fish species that are on the recovery, bird species, predator species who are on habitat recovery.

A large amount of wetlands have been restored in Ohio to help serve as a buffer for nitrogen, phosphorus runoff from agriculture, to absorb more of that to help make sure that we do not have algae blooms in Lake Erie. It also creates an enormous amount of new habitat for wildlife as well.

We also know that there are also struggles with invasive species, invasive plants. There are certain types of plants that overtake these wetlands.

You see all this progress that has been made through these concerted efforts. It is great, it is fantastic, we know it is possible. In that context, I am just interested, what is your view as you look at the responsibility you have? I talk about the Great Lakes, but across the Country, what more can we do to make sure that the people of our Nation get a chance to experience more wild spaces, more public lands that are fruitful for these types of recreational purposes? There is a huge economic benefit, but it is also a huge benefit to the quality of life.

Mr. LILLY. Thank you for that question. I enjoyed spending time with you last week as well.

I think it is sort of a multi-faceted question, one, as it relates to the wetlands that you referred to and sort of the natural buffer that they provide. We continuously work with items such as varying grant programs, NACA grants, et cetera. We work with communities and States on their wetlands, on the preservation of wetlands.

I personally am a duck hunter. I recognize the importance of maintaining our flyways and maintaining our wetlands appropriately, such that and so that it can continue to be enjoyed, not just for hunting but also for recreation.

Senator HUSTED. I will tell you, one of the big things that we have up in that part of the State and Lake Erie is bird watchers who come during the spring to see the enormous migration that we have of birds coming back from Canada.

Mr. LILLY. Absolutely. The opportunity for birding is extraordinary. This type of habitat improvement works toward that particular recreation.

Second, the other part of your question had to do with invasive species. If I may, I will answer that.

Senator HUSTED. Please.

Mr. LILLY. Invasive species, as you and I spoke about, sea lampreys especially, invasive carp, is an enormous problem. It is not just in fish. It is also dealing with pythons in Florida, it is dealing with feral hogs in Texas, which is an enormous problem.

And one of the things that we are working on, specifically to answer your question, is the use of technology to combat that problem. Drone use, algorithmic research, tracking, statistical analysis, probability analysis, so that we can more efficiently locate where they are. Part of it is finding them, especially with four-legged invasive species.

Then also to continue to work with the Fish and Wildlife Service in our robust invasive species program, which I am fully supportive of and realize that it is a problem and it is one that we need to spend more time on.

Senator HUSTED. I can just say that this is always a big, as an Ohioan, we have seen Lake Erie recover in amazing ways. And it is very successful. It was a very successful recovery. We still have issues on, issues like algae blooms and the phosphorus and nitrogen.

The big, big concern I can tell you is the invasive plants, the invasive lamprey, potentially the invasive Asian carp. All of those things are of great concern, and I know that you have a lot of demands. I just ask that you keep your eye on how we can get to protect against those challenges and continue to mitigate successfully as we have.

Mr. LILLY. Yes, sir, and we certainly do.

Senator HUSTED. Thank you, Chairman Capito.

Senator CAPITO. Thank you.

Senator Lummis is on her way, so I will give her a minute or so.

I will take license here to ask you something I mentioned in my opening statement, and it is back to my New River Gorge Park and Preserve. I mentioned that we had not really had a full time superintendent. We are getting off the ground, numerous visitors, challenges on infrastructure. It is not a very large, by what we see in States like Utah and others, but it is exceedingly important. It needs the full attention of a full time superintendent.

I would hope that when you are confirmed, that I have your commitment that a new superintendent, permanent, would just be focusing solely on this New River Gorge Park and Preserve would be something West Virginians could look forward to.

Mr. LILLY. Well, I am honored that New River Gorge is the 63d and most recent National Park in the National Park Service. I think your question is a great one for multiple reasons, not just for

New River Gorge. I think it is the importance of leadership in an organization.

One of the benefits that I have had of having a bit of a diverse background is understanding that culture within any organization is critical, and creating a culture of excellence, responsibility, accountability, always starts with the leaders on the ground.

Within the National Park Service, and certainly also with Fish and Wildlife and our refuge managers, a park superintendent can make a huge difference, especially as it relates to parks that sometimes are remote. I have made a commitment to the Secretary and to the National Park Service that I am taking a personal interest in our hiring and development of our leadership. Not just at the superintendent level, but the deputy superintendent levels as well. I completely agree that finding strong leadership for a park as important as yours to the people of West Virginia is paramount, and one that I am fully committed to endeavor toward.

Senator CAPITO. Senator Whitehouse, did you have another question?

Senator WHITEHOUSE. If there has been any request made to the Interior Office of Inspector General to look into the situation at the Reflecting Pool, how the contracts were let, how the contracts were administered, what actually happened, was it the hydrogen peroxide that tore up the paint, what is going on over there, it seems like it is IG material. You do, I think, have an inspector general.

Has any referral been made to the inspector general to have an independent set of eyeballs look at that situation?

Mr. LILLY. We do indeed have an inspector general program that is an independent body. To my knowledge, sir, I do not know of any inspector general inquiry or process as it relates to this topic.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. Should there be?

Mr. LILLY. Inspector general comments or inspector general programs can be launched by anyone at any time. I am not in a position to opine on whether one is warranted or not.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. I am sorry, you are the acting supervisor of the department, right? How is that not——

Mr. LILLY. Well, Senator, I think that your question implies that there is malfeasance involved. I would argue that there is not.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. There is no need for the inspector general to have a look, because everything is——

Mr. LILLY. I believe that we have conducted ourselves legally. I believe that the contracts have been done, and I know that the contracts have been done by warranted contracting officers who are licensed by the Federal Government, that are career professionals, that are excellent at their job.

I believe that everything that has happened with this program as well as all construction projects in the National Park Service are done in compliance with the law.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. Well, I guess as further examination continues, we will find out.

Thank you.

Senator CAPITO. Thank you.

Well, with no further questions and no other members, although I hear some are coming, they need to speed it along, I would like

to thank you, Mr. Lilly, for being here this morning and for all my colleagues who participated in today's hearing.

Senators who wish to submit written questions for the record have until 5 p.m. on Wednesday, July 1, to do so. The nominee's responses to those questions are due back to this committee no later than 5 p.m. on Wednesday, July 8th and will be submitted for the record.

With that, this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:01 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

DUCKS UNLIMITED

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President
Bob Spoerl
Waupaca, Wisconsin

Chairman of the Board
Chuck Smith
Memphis, Tennessee

Chief Executive Officer
Adam H. Putnam
Memphis, Tennessee

February 23, 2026

The Honorable Chair Shelly Moore Capito
and Ranking Member Sheldon Whitehouse
U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, DC

Dear Chair Capito and Ranking Member Whitehouse,

On behalf of Ducks Unlimited, I am pleased to offer our strong support for the nomination of Kevin Lilly to serve as Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks.

For decades, Ducks Unlimited has worked collaboratively with federal agencies, state wildlife departments, private landowners, and conservation partners to conserve North America's wetlands and waterfowl habitat. Effective leadership within the Department of the Interior is essential to sustaining our nation's fish and wildlife resources while balancing the needs of sportsmen, agricultural producers, and local communities. Mr. Lilly possesses the professional experience, policy understanding, and collaborative temperament necessary to fulfill that responsibility.

Throughout his career Mr. Lilly has demonstrated:

- Impressive discipline, organizational leadership, and management skills
- Effectiveness in navigating government oversight, stakeholder relations, and administration through public service

In his acting capacity as Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, Mr. Lilly has proven:

- A commitment to science-based wildlife management
- Respect for private land stewardship and working lands conservation
- A practical understanding of federal, state, and private sector partnerships
- Strong support for hunters, anglers, and outdoor recreation traditions

These qualities are especially important as habitat conservation requires cooperative solutions across jurisdictions and political viewpoints. Mr. Lilly understands that conservation succeeds when landowners, agencies, and the conservation community work together — an approach fully aligned with Ducks Unlimited's mission and proven model of voluntary, incentive-based conservation.

DUCKS UNLIMITED

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We are confident he will provide steady, balanced leadership that supports wildlife resources, honors the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, and strengthens partnerships that deliver measurable conservation outcomes for the American people.

Thank you for your consideration of this nomination. We respectfully urge the Committee to advance Mr. Lilly's nomination favorably.

Sincerely,

Adam H. Putnam
Chief Executive Officer
Ducks Unlimited, Inc.

HOUSTON POLICE OFFICERS' UNION
TEXAS' LARGEST POLICE UNION
1600 STATE STREET * HOUSTON, TEXAS 77007 * 832.200.3400 * HPOU.ORG
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March 30, 2026

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito, Chairperson
Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse, Ranking Member
Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Senators,

This letter is to strongly endorse the nomination and confirmation of Mr. Kevin J. Lilly of Texas to serve as Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks.

Mr. Lilly has a long and distinguished history of public service in the State of Texas. With the very significant Law Enforcement Mission at the Department of Interior, Mr. Lilly's many years of experience as a Texas Police Commissioner make him an excellent choice to ensure the protection of millions of Americans who visit our National Parks and Fish and Wildlife Refuges each year.

Our organization places our full confidence in Mr. Kevin J. Lilly in this important position. If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Ray Hunt
Executive Director

Fraternal Order of Police
United States Park Police Labor Committee

1320 "G" Street SE, Washington, DC 20003
Telephone: 202-991-2377 • Website: usppfop.org

June 23, 2026

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Environment & Public Works

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Environment & Public Works

Dear Chairman Capito and Ranking Member Whitehouse:

On behalf of the United States Park Police Fraternal Order of Police, I am writing in strong support of Kevin Lilly's nomination to serve as Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks at the U.S. Department of the Interior.

The Assistant Secretary's role is directly connected to the work of the United States Park Police, whose officers patrol and protect many of our nation's most visible urban national parks and federal parklands in Washington, D.C., New York City, and San Francisco. Our officers serve on the front lines every day, protecting visitors, communities, historic landmarks, and public spaces that are central to the mission of the Department of the Interior.

Acting Assistant Secretary Lilly has been highly communicative with our officers and has consistently demonstrated a willingness to engage in meaningful dialogue about ideas and policies that can improve the quality of life for law enforcement officers within the Department. His openness, accessibility, and respect for the men and women who carry out this mission have been deeply appreciated.

As the Committee prepares for tomorrow's confirmation hearing, we respectfully urge Senators to support Acting Assistant Secretary Lilly's nomination and vote to confirm him. We believe his continued leadership will benefit the Department, the National Park Service, and the law enforcement officers who protect our national parks and the millions of Americans who visit them each year.

Sincerely,

Andy Keness

Andy Keness
Chairman

NOLAN CAPITAL, INC
338 Pier Ave
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Tel: 424.675.7605

Peter Nolan
338 Pier Ave
Hermosa Beach, CA 90254

March 9, 2026

The Honorable Mike Lee, Chair
The Honorable Martin Heinrich, Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito, Chair
The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse, Ranking Member
Committee on Environment and Public Works

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Lee, Chair Capito, Ranking Member Heinrich, Ranking Member Whitehouse, and Members of the Committees:

I write to express my strong support for the nomination of Kevin Lilly to serve as Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks at the United States Department of the Interior.

Mr. Lilly brings to this position a valuable combination of leadership experience, operational discipline, and a forward-looking business perspective that will benefit the stewardship of our nation's public lands and wildlife resources. His background in finance, management, and public service equips him with the strategic mindset necessary to ensure that federal conservation programs operate efficiently, responsibly, and with long-term sustainability in mind.

The responsibilities of the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks are significant, overseeing agencies such as the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Department of the Interior faces complex challenges that require thoughtful conservation paired with effective management. Mr. Lilly's pragmatic and business-minded approach reflect an understanding that protecting America's natural heritage must also incorporate sound governance, fiscal accountability, and collaboration with local communities and stakeholders.

I am confident that Kevin Lilly will work constructively with Congress, state and local leaders, and the business community to promote policies that strengthen stewardship while ensuring responsible management of our public lands and wildlife resources.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committees to support Mr. Lilly's nomination and advance it favorably to the full Senate.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Peter Nolan

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COLT

COALITION OF LARGE TRIBES

Blackfeet Nation • Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe • Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation
Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Indian Reservation of Oregon • Crow Creek Sioux Tribe • Crow Nation
Eastern Shoshone Tribe • Fort Belknap Indian Community • Hopi Tribe • Mandan, Hidatsa & Arikara Nation • Mescalero Apache Tribe
Muscogee (Creek) Nation • Navajo Nation • Northern Arapaho Tribe • Northern Cheyenne Tribe • Rosebud Sioux Tribe
San Carlos Apache Tribe • Shoshone-Bannock Tribes • Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of the Duck Valley Indian Reservation
Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux Tribe • Spirit Lake Nation • Spokane Tribe Standing Rock Sioux Tribe • Ute Indian Tribe
Ute Mountain Ute Tribe • Walker River Paiute Tribe

April 23, 2026

The Honorable Mike Lee
Chairman
Energy and Natural Resources Committee
363 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Chairman
Environment and Public Works Committee
170 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Martin Heinrich
Ranking Member
Energy and Natural Resources Committee
709 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
Ranking Member
Environment and Public Works Committee
530 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Lee, Chairman Moore Capito, Ranking Member Heinrich, and Ranking Member Whitehouse:

I write as Chairman of the Coalition of Large Tribes (COLT)—an intertribal organization representing the interests of the more than 50 tribes with reservations of 100,000 acres or more, encompassing more than 95% of the Indian Country lands and more than half the Native American population—to deliver COLT's strong endorsement of Mr. Kevin Lilly's nomination to serve as Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

The Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks directly oversees the National Park Service (NPS) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)—agencies whose policies often intersect with Treaty rights, sacred sites, and subsistence resources. In our experience with Mr. Lilly since he has been acting in this role, we have been heartened by his openness to work with tribal leaders on these issues, particularly with respect to COLT priorities like bison co-stewardship and access to federal lands for important tribal religious ceremonies. Mr. Lilly's long policy record echoes our personal experience with him, and we see him as a reliable advocate for greater tribal participation in the governance, stewardship and beneficial uses of public lands and natural resources, including conservation.

Additionally, we have confidence in his ability to serve flowing from his experience leading a large regulatory agency as Chair of the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, as well as

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Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux Tribe • Spirit Lake Nation • Spokane Tribe Standing Rock Sioux Tribe • Ute Indian Tribe
Ute Mountain Ute Tribe • Walker River Paiute Tribe

managing complex organizations in the private sector and serving as an Army veteran. We value his managerial competence and chain-of-command experience, particularly when agency implementation capacity—not just policy intent—determines whether tribal sovereignty, Treaties, and other government-to-government agreements are honored.

We appreciate the openness we have seen from the nominee to:

- Tribal tourism partnerships linked to National Parks, including removing barriers to local hiring, a way for tribal citizens to be more engaged at Parks close to home;
- Access to recreation and conservation funding;
- Support for tribal wildlife hunting and protection and habitat restoration programs;
- Respect for Treaty rights; and
- Expansion of co-management and co-stewardship agreements, as well as 638 contracting.

The Assistant Secretary's portfolio directly affects these areas, and tribes need an Assistant Secretary we know will be willing to hear from us, consider our perspectives, and lead his team to implementation. He has been very accessible and open. His approach is a breath of fresh air.

COLT has significant confidence in Mr. Lilly's leadership. We urge his soonest confirmation.

Very Respectfully,

Signed by:
EDB3CD26B0764EE

J. Garret Renville, COLT Chairman,
Chairman of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate of the Lake Traverse Reservation, South Dakota

Kevin Lilly

June 23, 2026

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Chairman
Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Madam Chairman:

The Ethics in Government Act of 1978, as amended, provides that Presidential nominees for a position requiring the advice and consent of the Senate shall update their public financial disclosure report with respect to any income and honoraria received through the period ending no more than five days prior to the commencement of the Senate hearing of their nomination. *See* 5 U.S.C. § 13103(b)(1) and 5 C.F.R. § 2634.606(a).

I hereby am providing you with a copy of the amendment required by 5 U.S.C. § 13103(b)(1) and 5 C.F.R. § 2634.606(a), to my OGE Form 278e, Nominee Public Financial Disclosure Report (OGE Form 278e Report), dated February 10, 2026.

The information on my OGE Form 278e was current as of February 10, 2026. Since that date for which disclosures were shown on my OGE Form 278e through the date of this letter, I have not received any other outside earned income, honoraria, or rental income during this period.

I further certify that I have transmitted copies of this report to the Designated Agency Ethics Official of the U.S. Department of the Interior and to the U.S. Office of Government Ethics.

Sincerely,



Kevin Lilly

)
Washington)ss
District of Columbia)

Subscribed and sworn before me on this 23 day of June 2026.

Joseph Nevins
Notary Public

My commission expires: 6.14.30



cc: The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse, Ranking Member
U.S. Office of Government Ethics
Heather C. Gottry, Designated Agency Ethics Official, U.S. Department of the Interior

○