

**Statement of George Robert Wallace
Nominee for the Position of Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks,
Department of the Interior**

**Before the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate**

June 4, 2019

Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Carper, and members of the EPW Committee, thank you for scheduling this hearing. I am grateful for the confidence of the President in nominating me for the position of Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, and appreciative of the strong support from Secretary Bernhardt.

I would also like to thank the members of my family who are here from Wyoming. My wife, Celia, is not only a remarkable partner but is also the epitome of bipartisanship, having worked for both a Democrat and Republican member of the Senate. My oldest daughter, Morgan, just completed her sophomore year in engineering at Wake Forest University. And my youngest daughter, Ella, just finished the eighth grade in Jackson, Wyoming.

The four of us live a mile south of Grand Teton National Park in the Yellowstone ecosystem. Each year our community hosts millions of visitors who come to play in two of world's most majestic national parks and the Bridger-Teton National Forest. They also marvel at the abundant wildlife we all enjoy -- thanks to wise management by state and federal officials -- and the National Elk Refuge, located in the heart of our valley.

It's a place where one of our most famous residents, Grizzly Bear 399, has her own Facebook page, where visitors can rent a car and get a can of bear spray at the same time, where our traffic is often slowed to a crawl by herds of bison and elk, and where a "neighborhood watch" means looking out for animals when our kids are walking to and from the school bus.

It's a community where lives are touched every day by the agencies and policies that you oversee on this committee.

So, when my friends back home good naturedly ask why I would leave such a special place for Washington, I tell them it's because this is a once in a lifetime opportunity to involve myself in issues I've cared about my entire adult life.

But I know that simply caring isn't sufficient justification to ask for your support to oversee two of the world's most celebrated agencies -- the National Park Service and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. So, I would like to explain how I got here.

My journey began decades ago, when I was hired right out of college as a seasonal ranger in Grand Teton National Park.

For the next five years I patrolled the park's rivers and lakes, worked with the mountain rescue team, enforced game and fish regulations, performed law enforcement operations and emergency medical services on the park highways, and travelled on skis for days at a time across the Yellowstone and Teton backcountry. And in the fall, if my park season ended early, I worked in an elk hunting camp in the nearby national forest.

But it wasn't the daily adventures that had the most profound effect on me. It was the political issues that swirled around almost every aspect of my job.

Here was a place where dignitaries from around the world travelled to attend the Second World Conference on National Parks and where the president of the United States came to relax. Up the road in Yellowstone a raging debate was underway over how to wean grizzly bears off human garbage. In the Tetons, exciting conversations about fire management, search and rescue, visitor use, and resource protection were almost a daily occurrence.

I still remember spending a day at a smoldering lightning strike on the west shore of Jackson Lake while officials at Moose headquarters, the regional office in Denver, Park Service headquarters in Washington, the Secretary of Interior, and the White House deliberated on whether to let this fire burn according to a new policy or have me snuff it out.

And it was because of those experiences and dozens of others that I began asking myself how I could get more involved in these debates.

That desire led me to quit my park job and volunteer on a campaign for Malcolm Wallop, who was running for the US Senate from Wyoming. His race succeeded and suddenly I had a front row seat to some of the most consequential energy, wildlife, and natural resource issues in generations.

Starting my Senate career as a legislative assistant following the Environment and Public Works Committee and ending as the minority staff director of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, I was here when Congress tackled the Alaska Lands Act, a crippling oil embargo, the Three Mile Island nuclear accident, the Exxon Valdez oil spill, the restructuring of the US electricity industry, controversial endangered species listings such as the snail darter and northern spotted owl, and much more.

I also broadened my understanding of new park authorizations, fee legislation, concession oversight, and the importance of timely communications with Congress while heading the Park Service's office of congressional affairs. Later, as chief of staff to the governor of Wyoming, I was in middle of wolf reintroduction in Yellowstone.

I ended my time in Washington working for GE, where I led a policy team that advocated for the deployment of clean energy technologies in the United States and around the world.

Over the years, I've also become a champion of public-private partnerships through serving as a board member on several natural resource-oriented foundations whose missions are to help fund important infrastructure projects, augment wildlife research budgets, and provide opportunities for young people to work and learn on our public lands.

Today, I work on the frontiers of the Endangered Species Act in southwestern Wyoming, bringing ranchers, regulators, conservationists, and industry leaders together to protect large scale habitats for the greater sage grouse while also removing barriers to multiple use.

Along the way I've learned so much -- especially that no one ever really wins by winning everything, that bipartisan solutions are always the lasting ones, and the importance of recruiting good people and trusting them to do big jobs.

Finally, if confirmed, I want to stress my commitment to work constructively with Congress on behalf of our parks, refuges, fish and wildlife. If well-meaning people engage in good faith and communicate effectively, the benefit to these national treasures can be unlimited.

Thank you. I look forward to answering your questions.