

HEARING ON THE NOMINATION OF MARTHA WILLIAMS TO BE DIRECTOR OF
THE U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE
INTERIOR

Wednesday, November 17, 2021

United States Senate

Committee on Environment and Public Works

Washington, D.C.

The committee, met, pursuant to notice, at 10:04 a.m. in
room 406, Dirksen Senate Office Building, the Honorable Thomas
R. Carper [chairman of the committee] presiding.

Present: Senators Carper, Capito, Cardin, Whitehouse,
Kelly, Padilla, Cramer, Lummis, Sullivan, Ernst.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE THOMAS R. CARPER, A UNITED STATES
SENATOR FROM DELAWARE

Senator Carper. I am pleased to call this hearing to order.

We will be joined shortly by Senator Capito and other colleagues. There is a vote, I think, literally taking place, I believe, right now, and so some of the members will be voting and then coming here to join the hearing.

I am happy to be here today to introduce and to welcome Martha Williams. I am the husband of a woman named Martha, so immediately, it is a good start there. Martha is President Biden's nominee to serve as the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. I think she has been joined by her daughter here today. I ask that you introduce her when you speak, and anyone else that you might like to introduce.

Joni Ernst, good morning, Joni. How are you? Okay.

We thank you for joining us to discuss your vision that is important and the role that is important in order to field the questions from the members of our committee.

As our Nation's oldest federal conservation agency, the Fish and Wildlife Service has the responsibility of enforcing our wildlife protection laws, restoring habitat, and preserving public lands for future generations. Those are tall orders. They are tall orders, especially given the current and future

biodiversity challenges that we face in this Country of ours.

A recent report by the United Nations shows that nearly one million species, nearly one million species may be pushed to the brink of extinction in the years ahead. They could face extinction, and somebody needs to do something about it. We are part of those somebodies who need to do something about it on this committee.

That alarming number is a dire warning for all of us to do our part to protect our plants and all of God's creations that inhabit this planet. The report also underscores the importance of having a dedicated, results-driven leader at the Fish and Wildlife Service who brings people together to tackle these challenges.

I am confident that Ms. Williams is that kind of leader. As the current Principal Deputy Director of the Service, she has a clear understanding of the inner workings of the agency, and her experience is not limited to working at the Federal level. Prior to her current role, she served as the Director of the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. For how long what that? Forever?

Ms. Williams. A long time, Chairman Carper.

Senator Carper. Okay. Throughout her career, Ms. Williams has cultivated deep respect from those with whom she has worked on conservation efforts. That is probably why her nomination

enjoys such broad support amongst the environmental and sportsmen communities, from Ducks Unlimited to the National Wildlife Federation, to Earthjustice. Many of our Nation's foremost conservationists, our hunters, our anglers, our wildlife enthusiasts strongly support her nomination for this role.

Ms. Williams grew up on a farm and has spent her life and career fostering a love of the outdoors and a commitment to protecting our precious natural resources.

Last month, I had the distinct pleasure of hosting her and her colleagues from the agency in Delaware as we toured one of our two national wildlife refuges, called Prime Hook, which is in the southern part of our State, just north of Lewes, Delaware, and joining her was Assistant Secretary Estenoz. We were delighted to host you that day. As she heard me say then, we are incredibly proud of our two national wildlife refuges in the first State, Prime Hook, which we visited, and Bombay Hook, which is just to the north of there.

In addition to being home to threatened and endangered migratory bird species such as the Red Knot and the Piping Plover, our wildlife refuges attract thousands and thousands, tens of thousands of visitors each year from all over the world. These visitors drive a booming ecotourism industry in Delaware and other places, too.

Unfortunately, these special places are also vulnerable to rising sea levels and worsening storms. In 2021, Superstorm Sandy hit the First State of Delaware and wreaked havoc on our coastal communities, including Prime Hook.

Using relief funds provided by Congress, the Fish and Wildlife Service engaged in a large-scale project to restore approximately four thousand acres of tidal marsh. This restoration project benefitted wildlife and the surrounded community. It was a real win-win.

It is also an example of the Fish and Wildlife Service's successful conservation work to adapt to the escalating challenges of a changing climate while making our natural resources more resilient. I am eager, I think we are eager, to hear from Ms. Williams about how the Fish and Wildlife Service can build upon this extraordinary model. I would like to say, find out what works; do more of that. This worked.

Ms. Williams will have no shortage of essential work ahead of her in this role, should she be confirmed. Our staff and I look forward to partnering with her on this important mission: continuing this committee's strong bipartisan track record of working together in a lot of ways, but especially on wildlife conservation issues.

With that, let me turn it over to Ranking Member Senator Capito for her opening remarks. Senator Capito, which staff

tells me she is voting, and I am sure she will be here soon, and at the appropriate time, we will hear her comments. I understand she will have a bunch of questions, as well.

With that, Ms. Williams, you are recognized to let us hear your statement. Make sure your mic is on. We want to hear every word.

[The prepared statement of Senator Carper follows:]

STATEMENT OF MARTHA WILLIAMS, NOMINEE TO BE DIRECTOR, U.S. FISH
AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Ms. Williams. Thank you, Chairman Carper and when other members arrive, Ranking Member Capito, and members of the Environment and Public Works Committee.

My name is Martha Williams, and I have with me today my children, Kate and Ian, and I am joined virtually by my partner, Doug, my parents, my siblings, and family across the Country. I am also joined in spirit by my late husband. It is an honor and a privilege to be here as President Biden's nominee for Director of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

I believe that public service is one of our most important callings in this great Nation of ours, and if I am confirmed in this position, I look forward to serving the President, Secretary Haaland, the Fish and Wildlife Service employees, all of the American people, and the resources that we steward.

I come from a family that has served our Country and communities with courage. My father and uncle are Marines. My grandfather is in the Army; my uncle is in the Air Force, my father-in-law and another uncle in the Navy. My father is also a civil engineer, a bridge builder, literally and figuratively, and he has been known to use his skills as a force in conserving working landscapes.

My mother is infinitely capable and is a fierce leader in

her own right, most importantly, as a teacher of nature. During my youth, we spent our time together cutting and baling hay on hot summer days, often racing to beat the rain. On rare and special time off the farm, we ran barefoot on mossy paths in the Adirondacks, watched newts change colors, fished, swam, paddled, and hiked together.

Growing up on a farm taught me the joy and the necessity of teamwork, how to work hard, and to appreciate nature and the natural resources that our great Country is blessed with. Developing a life, family, and career in the west made me realize the importance of context and place, both defined by the need for autonomy and reliance on community.

I have learned that the best way to build a team is to hold oneself to the highest standards, work side-by-side, sometimes literally mending fences, and sometimes just lending a hand or an ear.

My life is steeped in conservation. It is what I think about. It is what I see, smell, hear, and dream about. I am a lifelong student of nature, the outdoors, fish and wildlife management, people management, and what it takes to solve seemingly intractable natural resource issues.

I have worked on a number of these challenging issues, and from various perspectives, whether as a customer of the Fish and Wildlife Service, as the Director of the State of Montana's

Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, in the legislature, in the judiciary, as legal counsel on issues before the Service, and as a teacher, making sure to impart on my students those skills they need to lead us all into the future.

Using a scientific wildlife management and collaborative approach and always with others, I have tackled tough wildlife management issues head-on. Sometimes, we have made only small yet durable steps forward. Other times, we have made great strides in habitat restoration and conservation: bison restoration, predator recovery, cold and warm water fish recovery, tackled invasive species, supported law enforcement, wildlife movement, organizational and people management, and very importantly, the development of conservation leadership.

Wildlife and natural resource conservation rests with all of us, from rural and remote communities to large, urban landscapes, private land, tribal lands, and public land. It is a shared responsibility. We all play roles in this important American model, and it is with a strong commitment to collaborative conservation that we can achieve our collective goals.

The Fish and Wildlife Service's role in conservation covers inspiring breadths, depths, and importance, with at least one National wildlife refuge in each State and territory, the Service can make access to nature available to every American.

Its mission to steward migratory birds, wildlife, fish, and their habitats, and ultimately, the ecosystem functions for all Americans is critical to the well-being of our economy, communities, and people. Each program and region within the Bureau contributes to this collaborative and multi-disciplinary effort to steward the health of the interconnected ecological processes that are so important, whether locally, nationally, or internationally.

If confirmed as Director, I will apply two central tenets to leading the Fish and Wildlife Service to its conservation mission. The Service will adhere to its underpinning of scientific integrity, and it will work collaboratively, leveraging the expertise of our many partners, whether State, Tribal, or local governments, private landowners, organizations, or industry.

This truly is an extraordinary time for the Fish and Wildlife Service, when both the challenge and the opportunity to maintain healthy ecosystems and healthy populations of wildlife have never been greater. I make this promise that, if confirmed as the next Director, I will give it my all to serve with courage and excellence.

Thank you, Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Capito, and members of the committee for your service and for your consideration. I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Williams follows:]

Senator Carper. Thank you for an excellent statement.

Senator Capito has voted, and she has joined us now, and she is going to make her statement. Then we will get into some questions.

Senator Capito?

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO, A UNITED STATES
SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA

Senator Capito. Thank you, Chairman Carper. I am sorry I missed your opening statement. I know it was a barn-burner.

Senator Carper. I could give it again.

Senator Capito. No, please don't give it again.

[Laughter.]

Senator Capito. Welcome to the committee. As you know, and you have been around here before, we have a lot of moving parts today, so we are so excited to have you in front of the committee, and we really want to welcome Kate and Ian. I understand I missed their introductions, but I know you are very proud of your mom today, and I am really pleased that you were able to make the trip with her, so that is nice for you as well.

So, good morning, and we are considering the nomination to lead the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service of Ms. Martha Williams. We had the opportunity, thank you for coming by my office last week. Was that just last week? The other week, I guess it was two weeks ago, and I look forward to hearing more about your work at the Service in this testimony today.

I applaud the Service's expansion of hunting and fishing in the lands and waters that it manages, which was announced in April, and we spoke about that briefly. As you know, our sportsmen play a key role in our conservation efforts. I look

forward to working together on more ways to expand outdoor recreation opportunities across the Country, including in my own State, at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, which is absolutely gorgeous, and also that the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge, where we have a new fish and wildlife Center that I worked on and have seen. It is a great educational and beautiful way to pay tribute to sort of a very unusual mountainous region of our State.

As we discussed in our meeting, while I am encouraged by the efforts to expand hunting and outdoor recreation opportunities, I am concerned with the number of planned regulatory actions introduced or announced by the Service in this Administration. The impacts that those actions could have on landowners and the timely delivery of needed infrastructure packages are significant.

Timely project construction is critical, another thing we talked about, in particular, as the Administration works to implement the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act that the President signed, and the Chairman and I were lucky enough to be there right on the podium while he did that.

We will not fully recognize the benefits of this law if permitting and environmental review processes bog down projects with delays and duplicative reviews. Make no mistake, this is not to shortcut any reviews that we would have, it is to short-

cut the time that it takes these reviews to move forward.

For example, the Service is currently taking public comment on an additional new potential permitting program for the incidental take of migratory birds. We talk about the need to streamline the existing permitting, but this action adds another layer of requirement. You referenced the important of timely consultations and reviews, but I am not sure how another burdensome layer will achieve this goal.

In addition to aggressive regulatory actions, I am disappointed about the Administration's lack of transparency, particularly on climate and environmental issues. Ms. Williams, I hope that we do not see this lack of concern for transparency occur under your leadership at Fish and Wildlife, and I will probably ask a question to that effect.

We are continuing to see aggressive policies and actions from the White House. Despite the potentially wide-ranging effects of these proposals, Administration leaders are hiding the ball from the American people, making it difficult for us to hold the Administration accountable.

We should have had more nominations from the President to consider today. Don't get me wrong; we are pleased to have you here, because this is a critical agency. I have raised this multiple times, but President Biden has not put forth a nominee to lead one of EPA's most significant offices, and that is the

Office of Air and Radiation.

In fact, yesterday marked the 300th day that Joe Goffman served as the acting leader of that office. To give that further context, 300 days is the maximum amount of time he can serve as an acting leader under the Federal Vacancies Act. Three hundred days, and still no nominee. This is the very office that is reportedly developing the growing number of costly and far-reaching environmental regulations that President Biden and countless Administration officials and Mr. Goffman raised in Glasgow.

President Biden has also not put forth a nominee to lead the Federal Highway Administration. Can you imagine us putting into effect the bill that was just signed into law without somebody leading a very critical agency? They will play an integral part in the implementation of the historic infrastructure act that we just passed.

The agency responsible to oversee the safe use of our Nation's nuclear energy plants, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, is currently working with just three commissioners, with two vacancies.

Instead of ensuring transparency and accountability to the American public and Congress, the President has chosen to rely on his climate czars sitting in their offices in the White House. The Senators on both sides of the aisle are here to

fulfill the institution's Constitutional role of advice and consent. It is time for the President to stop delaying and nominate individuals for these critical posts and to stop shielding the Administration's decisions.

I thank you again. Thank you for letting me take the time to pop off a little bit on another issue. I would like to note as well that Senator Daines, who is our colleague from Montana who served with you, who has become very, very familiar with you through service in Montana, wrote a very glowing reference to the rest of us in favor of your nomination. That, I think, carries great weight. I congratulate you for securing that from a good friend of both of ours.

I thank you for being here before us today, and with that, we will go to the questioning.

[The prepared statement of Senator Capito follows:]

Senator Carper. Would you like to enter that letter for the record?

Senator Capito. Yes. I will enter the letter for the record.

Senator Carper. All right, without objection.

[The referenced material follows:]

Senator Carper. Okay. We have three, I call them perfunctory, questions we ask of witnesses who have been nominated for different roles, but they are important questions. I am going to ask them at this time.

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

Ms. Williams. I do, Chairman Carper.

Senator Carper. Second question: 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? Do you?

Ms. Williams. Yes, I do, Chairman Carper.

Senator Carper. Thank you. My third question would be: do you know of any matters which you may or may not have disclosed that might place you in a conflict of interest if you are confirmed?

Ms. Williams. I do not.

Senator Carper. All right, good. Thanks.

Now we will proceed to questions. I will lead that out.

Tell us, in about 15 seconds, tell us about the farm that you grew up on. Just a little bit about the farm. What did you raise? What did you do?

Ms. Williams. Chairman Carper, it is a working farm. My parents still live there and still work on the farm. We had a variety of crops that have changed over the years. Also, when I was growing up, we had dairy cows. We always had steers, chickens, a menagerie of animals that people would drop off, knowing that my mother and the farm would take care of them. We had horses. Right now, they are growing sorghum. We always had very award-winning alfalfa at the State fair, and corn.

Senator Carper. Sounds like a pretty good place to grow up.

Ms. Williams. It is a pretty good place to grow up.

Senator Carper. Have your kids ever been there?

Ms. Williams. Yes, they have.

Senator Carper. They are both nodding yes.

Ms. Williams. Mr. Chairman, if I may, it is called Camp Granddaddy.

Senator Carper. All right, a good name. All right, let me start off.

First question I have is with respect to the Endangered Species Act, Conservation Without Conflict. The Endangered Species Act has worked quite well to conserve and recover

species in our State. People travel to Delaware from around the world to observe our endangered species, specifically birds, such as the Red Knot and the Piping Plover that I mentioned earlier.

Last month, when we were in Delaware together, we learned about the Fish and Wildlife Service's impressive work to prevent new species from requiring Endangered Species Act protection, an initiative known as Conservation without Conflict. The northeast Fish and Wildlife Service region is leading a collaborative effort between ten States to conserve the Salt Marsh Sparrow, a bird that is especially susceptible to the impacts of climate change.

Question: would you elaborate on the importance of the Fish and Wildlife Service leadership role in coordinating this effort and efforts like it, and would you share with our committee how you intend to support the Conservation Without Conflict Initiative if you are confirmed?

Ms. Williams. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I also want to thank you for the lovely visit to the special wildlife refuge in your State, and to see firsthand some of these issues with you.

Senator Carper. As I recall, it was a perfect day. We have a lot of those in Delaware and West Virginia, where I was privileged to be born, so I know firsthand, but it was a great day.

Ms. Williams. It was a perfect day, Mr. Chairman.

I have a long experience with the Endangered Species Act and have thought about it often, so I come at the Endangered Species Act from a number of perspectives: as a customer, working for the State of Montana, as counsel to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as a teacher, and because I love the outdoors and nature, so I think about it often. I would answer that, as I said in my opening statement, we all share in this responsibility, and that it is a collective effort.

So while the Fish and Wildlife Service plays a very important role in stewarding species once they are in the emergency room of the Endangered Species Act, we also play a critical role in supporting these partnerships to help prevent species from ever needing to be listed, and I think that that is where we do some of our most important work.

There are many examples of that, and I am really proud of and happy to see that growing across the Country, the various efforts, especially Conservation Without Conflict. I think that Conservation Without Conflict Coalition is extraordinary in a time, it is a product of our times. It, for example, represents 50 entities, and its focus, as I will, if confirmed, I will make sure that the Fish and Wildlife Service's focus is the same, is to be creative, and to be thinking in a coordinated effort, and as I said in my opening statement, to leverage on all these

various expertise of all these different parties.

So I think that there are many examples of where the Endangered Species Act has succeeded and not least of where it has encouraged these types of partnerships and has encouraged States, private landowners, Tribes, municipal governments, NGOs, industry, all working together.

Another very good example, I think, is in the southeast, and I think of also the National Association of Forest Owners working on wildlife initiatives, where they are working across with many different partners, and really, as you do in this committee, it is a bipartisan issue. It is not a partisan issue. It is one that touches all of us. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator Carper. Thank you. I think I am going to hold and ask my next questions a little later. We will let the other members of the committee go ahead and start.

Just to telegraph my pitch, my colleague, the Senator from West Virginia, has mentioned the bipartisan infrastructure bill that the President just signed into law. I am going to be asking a question with respect to wildlife crossings when I have my next shot.

I just want to say, again, to Senator Capito, to every member of this committee, to our staffs, how proud that we were on Monday together there on the lawn in front of the White

House. We were signing into law maybe one of the two most extraordinary infrastructure bills in the history of the Country, and legislation that this committee reported unanimously out with respect to roads, highways, bridges, surface transportation; with respect to water, drinking water, water sanitation; and provided, really, the foundation on which the bipartisan bill was built and signed into law.

The President knows that, and we know that, and we are just very, I would just say to everybody that has been a part of that on this committee, thank you again. Senator Capito?

Senator Capito. [Presiding.] Thank you, thank you Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

I am going to go to the transparency issue. This is hopefully a short answer. Just to impress upon you, I think I did in my opening statement, how important transparency is, and I think the frustrations sometimes, and this happens on both sides of the aisle, whoever the President is, the opposite party. I think more information is better, and I think there is no reason to hide why decisions are made, so I am asking you to pledge an oral pledge of transparency and full open-door policy so that we can have that give-and-take that I think is so critical.

Ms. Williams. Senator Capito, absolutely. I am very comfortable making that pledge and agree with you that

transparency is so important in building trust in government and trust in what the Fish and Wildlife Service, how we deliver on our mission, so I look forward to working closely with you.

Senator Capito. Thank you very much. I think I am going to go to a question on the Endangered Species. The Fish and Wildlife Service, I believe, under your leadership, has announced intentions to revisit Endangered Species Act language that references economic impacts. Do you believe that economic impacts should be considered when making an ESA listing or determination?

Ms. Williams. Senator Capito, I would love to back up a little bit to and repeat that I think that the, and I share with you on this, that the Endangered Species Act is a very important environmental law, and I am committed to ensuring that if confirmed, the Fish and Wildlife Service implements it in an effective way, where we achieve its goals and where we are being transparent.

So, yes, this Administration is reviewing first off, under an Executive Order. We have reviewed a number of regulations that were promulgated under the previous Administration, and I think that is wise, to go through how those rules were promulgated, and do they make the most sense going forward. I promise to you that I think about this all the time too, to be very careful in swings of having regulation apply one way and

then swinging hard another way.

Instead, I think you will see with a number of regulations that we are thinking of build back better, if you will, and thinking of more durable long-term solutions to prevent that swing back and forth. So, I recognize that the Endangered Species Act has economic impacts and is very important to you and your State, but I do think that the statute, at the same time, is very clear in when economic impacts should be part of a determination and when they shouldn't.

Senator Capito. When are those times?

Ms. Williams. Senator Capito, I should know, I don't have the statute in front of me. So I can't answer that right now.

Senator Capito. Maybe we could get a clearer answer for the record.

Ms. Williams. I would be happy to because I can just go to the statute.

Senator Capito. Okay, let's move on.

Ms. Williams. Thank you.

Senator Capito. In 2019, the Service repealed the so-called Blanket 4(d) Rule for threatened species. The previous administration cited the Obama Administration's shift to more tailored rules to increase the State flexibility and encourage private landowners to recover species. But the Service recently announced its intention to undo this reform.

How has your experience as a State wildlife official inform your view of the role of 4(d) rules and regulatory relief? You have obviously administered under both of these, a blanket one and a non-blanket one, for lack of a better word.

Ms. Williams. Senator Capito, thank you for that question. I want to thank you again for the visit with you a couple of weeks ago. It is hard to believe it has been a couple of weeks ago.

I think that 4(d) rules can be very important in providing flexibility, especially for States. So I don't think they are always needed, but I think they are a very important tool, that the Fish and Wildlife Service, if I am confirmed, will continue to use to the best advantage and flexibility for all involved, but also while adhering to the law and to the science.

Senator Capito. Lastly, the work you have done, and you mentioned this in your opening statement and in your response to Chairman Carper, too, the importance of private landowners as partners in conservation. Could you expound on that a little bit?

Ms. Williams. Yes. Thank you, Senator Capito. Many States have a large percentage of public lands, and more and more in the west. But at the same time, private land is critically important, and I don't want to use that term of art out of turn. Private land is very important to the conservation

of species. For example, the American the Beautiful initiative, what I like about it is a focus on collaborative, locally-led efforts to support conservation and to support working landscapes. So I think private landowners and private landowner partnerships play a very important role in conserving species.

Senator Capito. Thank you.

Senator Padilla.

Senator Padilla. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Williams, thank you again for your testimony this morning, and for your years of public service and dedication to natural resource conservation. I certainly enjoyed our conversation yesterday and appreciated reviewing your written testimony, where you cover two central tenets for your work, ensuring the Fish and Wildlife Service adheres to scientific integrity as well as to work collaboratively with partners and stakeholders. These tenets will be especially important to your work, as we discussed yesterday, when it comes to California water issues and ecosystem preservation.

California water is always a challenging topic. I know that many of my colleagues on this committee, even those who are not from California, are familiar with how contentious water issues in California can be. We have to carefully balance the needs of many interests, including imperiled wildlife and fragile ecosystems as we play to address present day challenges,

let alone prepare for the future.

So striking the right balance will require the personal involvement of the Director to coordinate with other Interior agencies, with NOAA, with the State of California, with tribal governments and many other very active, and might I say opinionated, stakeholders whose lives and livelihoods depend on water and a healthy environment.

Ms. Williams, during our meeting yesterday, I was pleased to hear your commitment to visiting California and to personally engaging on these critical water issues if confirmed. So can you describe for me and the committee, if confirmed, what your approach would be to working with the many stakeholders in California, not just on water, but on a number of issues?

Ms. Williams. Thank you, Senator Padilla. I too enjoyed the opportunity to visit with you yesterday, very much appreciated that. California water is an incredibly important issue and yes, I do think that it would be helpful for me to go to California, to your State, and to be very closely engaged in the issues, that is too important not to delegate completely. I have faith in our public servants and working with them on these issues. To date, I have very closely worked with the Bureau of Reclamation, with our sister agencies, with NOAA and NIMS, with the State of California, with tribes.

So I would agree with you that there are many partners,

many voices, sometimes strong, understandably so. I think California water is one of the most challenging issues we do face. As you are, I am sure, painfully aware, this was a very difficult year in the face of the drought. So there is much work to do. We will never be able to let up on the gas on that work. It is very important.

I look forward to engaging more. I look forward to visiting, and I look forward to hearing from people in person on their perspectives on these matters.

Senator Padilla. And a comment, not necessarily a question, I just want to offer some thoughts. Your prior work experience and relationships are obviously helpful, your commitment to demonstrate willingness to collaborate and partner is necessary. But at the very foundation of it is building credibility, and building trust, especially on contentious issues. And the time we are living in, there is even too often a fundamental debate as to what is truth and the value of data and the significance of scientific contributions, those sorts of things.

Again, my comment, feel free to respond if you would like.

Ms. Williams. Yes, please, Senator Padilla. That is right. The scientific integrity with which we work, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is critical to building that credibility. If confirmed, I know that we will, as I said,

place a continued import on scientific integrity. And yes, in my experience in working as Director of the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, as vice president of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, working closely with the Directors of California, Oregon, other States, I look forward to continuing to build those partnerships. I think the tribes are also very important in the water issue, as are irrigators, as are many.

So I agree, building those relationships is important. I very much appreciate the question yesterday, and I think the challenge before all of us is how do we build credibility for government, and specifically for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It is such a good question, and I think the world is changing quickly, that our traditional ways of reaching out aren't always enough. I think that goes to a question of Senator Capito's as well, that at the Fish and Wildlife Service, if I am confirmed, we will continue to be creative in how we reach out to people and how we stay engaged.

Senator Padilla. Thank you. I have no additional questions, just a closing comment. I also look forward to working with you on access to nature and wildlife, particularly for some of the more densely populated communities in California, particularly southern California. We know that national wildlife refuges offer tremendous opportunities. There are some existing that could use a little bit more support and

enhancement. So I look forward to working with you on a number of fronts. Thank you.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Williams. Thank you, Senator.

Senator Capito. Thank you. Senator Cramer.

Senator Cramer. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Ms. Williams, for being here. Thank you for our conversation yesterday. I apologize to Senator Lummis for holding you up and getting to her meeting late, but she was fine with it, as far as I know.

[Laughter.]

Senator Cramer. But thank you for that. I found it instructive.

Of course, we spent a lot of time talking about what we're going to talk about now, and that is waterfall protection area easements, particularly pre-1976 easements that were signed by grandfather, great-grandfather of lots of landowners throughout North Dakota, with goodwill and good intention. But they have been very frustrated, as you know. I won't plow all that ground again, you and I have been through it.

But I told you I would probably show you a picture, and I brought it with me. You may have seen this picture before. This is a plot of land that has a WPA easement on it. It is a plot of land that I visited with your predecessor, Ms. Skipwith,

last year. It is the same photo that I showed Ms. Estenoz at her confirmation hearing before I voted for her for confirmation as Assistant Secretary. And I show it to you now.

This represents obviously a farmer's land with a WPA easement on it. I asked Ms. Estenoz and I am going to ask you and maybe anybody else who wants to answer, what do you think is the wetland in this picture? By the way, you do not have to consult the hydrologist to answer this question. I am not one and it is pretty obvious to me.

Ms. Williams. Well, Senator Cramer, I think I could offer a very long answer. The importance of the prairie pothole region is so critically important to migratory birds, to hunters, and ducks throughout the world, really. So I would not offer to answer exactly what a wetland is in that question. This is the reason. Sometimes wetlands are ephemeral. Sometimes wetlands appear dry and you don't see the surface water.

What I would do is be happy to see it on the ground, look at the maps myself and really learn about the specifics of this place, Senator Cramer.

Senator Cramer. Would it surprise you that when great-grandfather signed the easement for this plot of land and the acres in the land that were contracted to be wetlands, prior to 1976, that the contract says lakes, ponds, and other types of

wetlands? No? So since you don't know, put that back up really quickly, though. For those of you who aren't hydrologists or don't like long answers, this is water. This is water. It is always there, it is what you would call a lake. And this, probably a pond. Or maybe they are both ponds, or both lakes. There is no question that that is water.

Now, bring up the other map. This is the Fish and Wildlife Service map of the easement, the modern map. Under your direction and predecessors, they have been modernizing the maps. The original maps were hand drawn in pencil and included lakes. This is the same plot of land.

All of this, all of these little 5.4 acres, 4.2 acres, .4 acres, .42 acres, .88 acres, .2 acres, these are all now wetlands in the easement. The lake up in the northeast is no longer a wetland. That is called bait and switch. That is what has -- you just made a strong commitment to Senator Padilla that you are going to, you used the word continue several times, which is concerning to me, because I am not interested in continuing the same old thing. I am interested in doing it right and doing it a new way. That is recognizing that water is water and dry land is dry land. And that contracts with landowners matter.

You also just highlighted the importance of the prairie pothole region to ducks and migratory birds and all this. But

you know who it is really, really important to? The farmer that owns it. The farmer that has been making a living on it. The farmer that has been growing food for a hungry world population, largely of other people. Largely of other people.

The farmers on land like this have been so abused by the Federal Government that they no longer want to enter into these easements. They no longer want to voluntarily conserve. In fact, in my State of North Dakota, many farmers are being punished because they did this before the Fish and Wildlife Service came on.

I just want to ask one simple question before it is over. Now, I have been through this with a secretary, an assistant secretary, two assistant secretaries now, a Fish and Wildlife Service Director, Administrator, and nothing has changed. Republicans, Democrats, moderates, conservatives, I don't know, maybe some liberals. I don't know. It doesn't matter to me.

Nobody has done anything about this. You have been the acting director for some time. I want to know why I should support you. Because I supported all your predecessors. Now I want to know why I can call on you to do something different for the landowners as well as the critters that rely on good conservation practices.

Ms. Williams. Senator Cramer, thank you for the question. I appreciated visiting with you on this issue.

I understand, I completely understand that it is very important to you. It is very important to your constituents. I also recognize it is very important for people to know that they are being dealt with unfairly in matters like this.

So when you started the question, and when you were speaking, you talked about wanting to get this right. What I can commit is I too want to get this right. I think that you have given me a challenge that I am really looking forward to diving into and finding a more positive way forward.

So I would like to commit to you to do that. I recognize that this is very important for you and your State. It is important for, as we talked about, it is important for the credibility of the Fish and Wildlife Service. And it is important for my relationship with you as well.

Senator Cramer. All of those things are true. I am looking forward to that. I am hopeful for it. I am less optimistic each time this promise is made and each time somebody comes and visits and each time nothing changes. I know you receive da letter from a whole bunch of my landowners and ag groups earlier this year, much earlier this year in your acting capacity. I don't know if you read the letters or responded. But there hasn't been a change yet in a single appeal, including appeals that have gone all the way to the Director.

Now, the one thing that I will say for this, then I will

wrap up, is the new mapping and all of these veiled attempts to do the right thing, in my view, have led to a really good record, a really good record for the landowner and for the State. I am not a big fan of litigation, but we are getting really close to that being the only solution here.

So I am hopeful that we can get it fixed before that.

Thank you.

Ms. Williams. Thank you.

Senator Capito. Thank you. Senator Whitehouse?

Senator Whitehouse. Thank you, Chairman.

Welcome, Ms. Williams. Glad to have you here.

Just two topics with you. One is whenever we have people here from the Department, I want to make sure that I raise the issue of oceans and coasts. I know very well that it is called the Department of the Interior, and too often that seems to be also its focus.

We have spent years dealing with the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which I think is better described as the Upland and Freshwater Conservation Fund, because so much of the effort there goes to upland and freshwater projects, and not even to coastal States so much. But even in coastal States, to upland and freshwater projects in those coastal States.

So I am just going to take this opportunity to remind you that America is a coastal nation, and we have a lot of coastal

States. They are at unprecedented risk as a result of fisheries moving about, because the oceans are warming, acidification doing damage to everything from coral reefs to the little critters like therapods that make up the base of the oceanic food chain. And of course, the ocean is more and more coming ashore in our States as a result of sea level rise and worsening storms. These are all the various prices of fossil fuel emissions and the resulting changes in our climate and oceans that those emissions have provoked.

So I would love to hear you, I know you come from a square State and the Secretary also comes from an inland square State. We want to make sure that coastal America is not overlooked at the Department of Interior.

Ms. Williams. Thank you, Senator Whitehouse. I want to start off with, I understand the importance of this issue and that oceans and coasts do face unprecedented challenges. While I have called a square State, a rectangle State, my home for a long time, I did grow up in Maryland.

Senator Whitehouse. That is coastal. We will grant you that. On behalf of Senator Cardin, we will accept that.

Ms. Williams. I very much appreciate the national treasure of the Chesapeake Bay.

Senator Whitehouse. Which is almost as nice as Narragansett Bay.

Ms. Williams. Yes. And I understand you come from the Ocean State, and it is very important, and it is to me, too. It is also, the Fish and Wildlife Service, if I am confirmed as Director, I will absolutely support those programs that are deeply engaged in coastal issues and oceans. I recognize the challenge with climate change, the need for coastal resiliency, the importance to communities. And I think of the example, Senator Whitehouse, of going to Prime Hook Wildlife Refuge with Chairman Carper and seeing what can be done in a coastal restoration project, and the many benefits that can provide.

Senator Whitehouse. As you know, in Rhode Island, all of our wildlife refuges are coastal. In addition to those issues, there is one I would like to specifically direct your attention to, and that is that in the previous Administration, it seems that an edict came down from on high that was not very nuanced, let's say, about locations. That was, there will be increased hunting in the refuges.

Well, our refuges aren't all that big. Some of them are a little bit over a mile in area, maybe. They have a lot of use and they have nearby neighbors. So hunting in a small area with a lot of neighbors and a lot of use is a very different problem than it is in vast areas of wildlife refuge, where people can go in for literally days on a hunting trip. It has created a lot of unhappiness with neighbors, hikers, walkers. It did not seem

that in the previous Administration it was very easy to get anybody's attention to this, that it was just, there shall be hunting, and we are not really interested in what the local conditions are.

So I would urge your attention to continuing to work with us to find favorable local resolutions for these small and heavily used wildlife refuges in my State. If you will help me with that, that is what I want to hear.

Ms. Williams. Yes, Senator, I look forward to working with you on that. I realize that place matters, and that we will always work with local communities and tailor our regulations to the locality. At the same time, hunting and fishing is very important in many areas as well, and is part of providing access to nature for many Americans. But I look forward to paying attention, Senator Whitehouse, and working with you on this.

Senator Whitehouse. You are more likely to see a stroller than game in our wildlife refuges.

Ms. Williams. Understood. Thank you.

Senator Capito. Senator Lummis?

Senator Lummis. Thank you, thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for your time yesterday, Ms. Williams. It was nice to see you yesterday and congratulations on your nomination.

I am always happy to see someone who served in State

government here in Washington, because I am of the opinion that the States are the great incubators of innovation. The best ideas tend to percolate up from the States.

So my first question is about federalism. Do you support the States having the lead role in managing wildlife within their respective State borders?

Ms. Williams. Senator Lummis, and again, I appreciated getting to visit with you yesterday. I always like talking to someone who comes at issues from the same place, coming from the west.

So as the previous Director of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and working from a State perspective, yes, I think that States play a critical role. As I said in my opening statement, wildlife conservation is a shared responsibility. This American model of ours is part of making sure we understand the different roles we play. The Fish and Wildlife Service steps in when species are in the emergency room and are listed as threatened or endangered.

But the primary management of species that are not listed as threatened or endangered, or are not migratory birds, or are not covered by federal law in another way, remain with the States, because States are on location. They understand the place, they understand the context.

Senator Lummis. So you would agree that States play the

lead role unless the ESA kicks in? Or the Migratory Bird Act?

Ms. Williams. Senator Lummis, I would say that States play a lead role. But I would be careful to parse out the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Lacy Act.

Senator Lummis. Okay, if those federal laws don't apply --

Ms. Williams. Yes, then the States play the lead role.

Senator Lummis. Then the States play the lead role. Okay, thank you.

Now, in Wyoming, as you know, we talked about yesterday our concern about grizzlies, they are way over objective. Do you support delisting the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem population of the grizzly bear?

Ms. Williams. Senator Lummis, I appreciated visiting with you on grizzly bears. I support the long-term recovery of grizzly bears and very much appreciate the efforts and the leadership that Wyoming, for example, has put into that.

Senator Lummis. Okay, so long-term recovery. Well, it has been a long-term recovery and they are recovered. Every single objective criteria has been met. Then when the bar has been raised before, that objective has been met. And it has been raised again and that objective has been met.

So do you intend to demand additional requirements, or raising the bar again in future delisting?

Ms. Williams. Senator Lummis, if confirmed, I will make

sure the Fish and Wildlife Service adheres to the law of the Endangered Species Act and the underlying science.

Senator Lummis. So does the recent petition filed by an environmental group challenging grey wolf delisting have any bearing on grizzly bear delisting in the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem?

Ms. Williams. Senator Lummis, I realize, thinking about the grizzly bear answer, what I didn't provide is the context of having chaired the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee, and having worked with the Governor of Montana to put together a grizzly bear advisory council. So I am steeped in predator conservation and understand the challenges of recovery and management of those species.

I think there are some similarities for wolves and grizzly bears because they are predators. But otherwise, the Fish and Wildlife Service, if confirmed as Director, the Fish and Wildlife Service will certainly look at the science specific to the species.

Senator Lummis. I think what I am hearing you say is that you are not willing, you are not willing.

Ms. Williams. Senator, I am not willing?

Senator Lummis. To consider delisting the grizzly bear in the Greater Yellowstone Area.

Ms. Williams. Senator Lummis, I apologize if I said that I

am not willing to consider delisting the Greater Yellowstone population. What I --

Senator Lummis. Do you believe all the science has been met? Do you know that all the science has been met?

Ms. Williams. Senator Lummis, as you know, the Fish and Wildlife Service put out a species status assessment on this very question. While population numbers are robust in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, there are also elements when listing and delisting species, there are five criteria that the Fish and Wildlife Service must meet. The species status assessment noted as a court has noted that there are still elements that we need to work through. I have talked to the Director, as you know, Director Nesvik, in Wyoming, and Montana, and Idaho on meeting the criteria of adequate regulatory mechanisms, on recalibration and on genetic connectivity. That is what the court has repeatedly required.

Senator Lummis. And none of those have --

Senator Carper. [Presiding.] Senator, you are about a minute and a half over.

Senator Lummis. I apologize.

Senator Carper. We will recognize you again.

Senator Kelly, thanks for joining us.

Senator Kelly. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Williams, thank you for joining today and for your

willingness to serve. I really appreciate that, and many Arizonans do as well.

I want to begin by asking about an ongoing challenge that communities throughout Arizona are facing from salt cedars. Salt cedars are an invasive plant species that deplete scarce water. They increase the risk of flooding and wildfires. About six months or so ago, I took a helicopter tour of the west valley, west of Phoenix, where the Salt River meets the Gila River. And the scale and the scope of the problem is rather disturbing. It is pretty enormous.

Slowing the spread of salt cedars is a priority for Rio Reimagined, which is made up of local governments, business groups and non-profits. While our local coalition has taken important steps to combat the spread of salt cedars, federal support can help accelerate these efforts.

Ms. Williams, what role do you believe that the Fish and Wildlife Service has in helping localities combat the spread of invasive plant species? What resources does Fish and Wildlife provide to localities to make the sort of investments to combat these invasive species?

Ms. Williams. Senator Kelly, thank you for that question, specifically, because invasive species cost the U.S. economy \$120 billion a year. So I hear it is very important to you and to your State, and it is across the Nation as well.

The Department of Interior addresses invasive species collectively. The Fish and Wildlife Service plays an important role in the Department of Interior effort to combat invasive species. To explain or to indicate how much I understand this is a critical issue to address, when I was the Director of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, we had invasive aquatic species, mussels, move into Montana. We stood up with the help of many partners, and the legislature stood up a program to prevent the spread of the invasive species and to mitigate any impacts, and we able to hold the line for mussels not to cross the Continental Divide, into the only drainage, the Columbia River System, that did not have aquatic mussels. I say that as an example to illustrate how I recognize this is a very important issue.

The Fish and Wildlife Service will work always with partners and localities in salt cedar especially. We play a very critical role. The way that we deliver invasive species prevention within the Fish and Wildlife Service, as a part of the Department of Interior's efforts, it is cross-programmatic and obviously, in all of the regions. So we come at it from a collective effort within the Service with many programs, whether it is fisheries and aquatic services, whether it is through law enforcement, which both played a very important role in combatting the moss balls and stopping those moving.

So this is something that is important, and we will always commit to helping combat invasive species, especially in your State, with the salt cedar.

Senator Kelly. This one is very critical for us, because of the amount of water that these salt cedars consume. When you consider that we are in a 20-year drought, with Lake Powell and Lake Meade at historic low levels, this is one of the areas that we need to address, we need to be able to conserve every drop of water.

So I look forward to working with you and your office to come up with a comprehensive plan on how we are going to deal with this invasive species. Thank you.

Ms. Williams. Thank you, Senator Kelly. I look forward to working with you on this.

Senator Carper. Perfect timing. Alaska has reported for duty.

You are recognized, Senator Sullivan.

Senator Sullivan. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Captain.

Senator Carper. Colonel.

Senator Sullivan. Good to see you.

Ms. Williams, thank you for the meeting yesterday. I appreciated it. I appreciate the time, and the topics we discussed.

I want to start with an issue that you and I kind of talked

about, but I want to make it a little bit more public here. So the Biden Administration keeps talking about racial equity, environmental equity. I am all for that. How do you define that? It is confusing to some of us as it relates to the environment. How do you define that?

Ms. Williams. Senator Sullivan, I too appreciated your time yesterday and getting to visit on issues about your special and unique States, the great State of Alaska.

If I understand your question, I think of serving all Alaskans --

Senator Sullivan. I am talking about, they do a lot on racial equity, environmental equity, these are new terms. I didn't know what they meant until the Biden Administration came in. I still don't know what they mean. But what do you think they mean in the environmental area?

Ms. Williams. Senator Sullivan, this is one of the four priorities this Administration set out. The Fish and Wildlife Service, under my direction so far, and if confirmed, we will continue to have a robust implementation of social justice, racial equity. Racial equity means to me, Senator, treating everyone fairly and being inclusive in how we work with everyone.

Senator Sullivan. Good.

Ms. Williams. And making all feel that they belong and are

part of the outdoor experience.

Senator Sullivan. Let me give you my definition, as far as I have seen it. I think there have been 19 executive orders or executive actions from this Administration that are focused on Alaska, mostly shutting down Alaska, harming Alaskans. They don't ask, they just do it.

I think the Biden Administration's environmental justice agenda is trying to help minority populations unless they are indigenous people in Alaska. That is what I think. Because every action, so many of the actions that this Administration takes, harms Alaska Native people. They almost go out of their way: ANWAR, King Cove, the Alaska Native Vietnam Veteran Allotment Act, which the Secretary committed to me that she would expedite. She has put a delay on that.

Vietnam veterans, Mr. Chairman, who are Native, who got screwed by their Country, are now going to die before this bill is implemented. The seat otter management, I mean, the list is so long. Oh, by the way, the \$2 trillion relief bill that had a provision saying tens of thousands of Alaska Natives don't get relief, could you imagine any other group in America where the Congress and the President, the Democrats and the Congress say, all these minorities get relief for COVID, but one group in one State, they don't get any relief. It is called discrimination, last time I looked.

So I want you, and let me give you one other one. This one you and I talked about. This is why I get so riled up about these issues. This is a study by the American Medical Association. It shows where people in the America, their life expectancy increased from 1918 to 2014, or decreased. Unfortunately, in a few places in our Country, it decreased, mostly because of the opioid epidemic.

The part of America that increased the most, life expectancy, was Alaska, particularly the Native communities. Here is the reason why: resource development. Responsible resource development.

So when this Administration targets my State to shut down these opportunities, it is literally a matter of life and death. And when U.S. Senators, like Senator Heinrich of New Mexico, constantly send letters to the Administration saying, hey, shut down this Alaska project, that Alaska project, it really, really riles me up.

So here is my question for you. I don't want my constituents' life expectancy to go negative, in the wrong direction. It is going the right direction now. North Slope, Northwest arctic Borough, Aleutian Island Chains, that is all because they have responsible resource development opportunities.

This Administration is trying to crush those. Literally

for my constituents, it is a matter of life and death. For the Native people, again, Biden Administration, environmental equity, seems to exclude a certain indigenous population in America, my constituents. You and I had a long talk about this yesterday.

I would like to get your commitment on every one of these attempts to lock up my State, until you look at, is it going to hurt Alaskans, working families, is it going to hurt Native people. Because usually it is, and nobody is asking us. Your agency is a huge offender. Do you care to comment on this? You can tell it makes me a little bit upset. I just want to know. The discrimination against indigenous people in my State needs to stop. The war on working families, against people in my State, needs to stop.

Your agency is going to be a big part of it. So what is your thinking on this? You can be as long or short as you want.

Ms. Williams. Senator Sullivan, thank you for that question. Again, I appreciated visiting with you on this issue yesterday. Racial equity, Alaska Natives, are very important, I know, to the --

Senator Sullivan. They don't seem important to this Administration. They seem targeted, to be honest.

Ms. Williams. If I am confirmed, the Fish and Wildlife Service will work very closely with Alaska Natives. I care very

much how we deliver our conservation mission in Alaska, as an example, and I know that we talk about Alaska Natives and Alaska Native Corporations differently than we do tribes in the lower 48. But I do have experience in working closely with tribes on a number of issues.

So I look forward to absolutely being in contact with you, Senator Sullivan, working closely with you and making sure, if confirmed, that the Fish and Wildlife Service delivers fairly, transparently with Alaska Native Corporations, but all Alaskans.

Senator Sullivan. All Alaskans. Because this really, it is easy for my colleagues and the Administration to kind of, hey, let's shut down Alaska, right? It's a Republican State, there are only 730,000 people there, the radical environmental groups are always asking us to shut it down, let's do it. This Administration is doing it, even more than the Obama Administration, which is kind of remarkable, and it is hurting people.

Senator Carper. The Senator's time has more than expired.

Senator Sullivan. Mr. Chairman, it is a really important issue. I hope we can have a hearing in this committee. My State is being targeted -- targeted. They are not targeting Delaware, that is for damned sure. It is really hard on the people I represent, and I am getting more and more mad about it. I think you can understand.

Senator Carper. Sure. I would invite the Senator to stay. I am going to ask some questions. If no one else shows up, you are welcome to continue this conversation. Thank you for joining us today and for your passion.

I want to return to something we were talking about earlier today. Senator Capito and I both mentioned the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which has been signed into law with great bipartisan support. We are grateful for everybody on our staffs on this committee, both sides of the aisle, who worked so hard to provide the foundation on which that bill was built.

But the landmark legislation includes I think about \$350 million for a wildlife crossing pilot program that is the result of years of bipartisan work by this committee. This program will address, as you may know, safety issues presented by wildlife-vehicle collisions, and also help conserve wildlife by improving habitat connectivity across the Country. That is another win-win.

Fish and Wildlife Service will need to work closely with the Department of Transportation to successfully implement this program. Here is my question. How do you think your experience with wildlife-vehicle collision and wildlife crossings in Montana has prepared you to help lead the implementation of this new pilot program for the Fish and Wildlife Service?

Ms. Williams. First, Chairman Carper, I want to thank you

for your leadership and all the members of this committee for your many years of work on this issue and a really momentous occasion of getting the Infrastructure and Jobs signed into law. It is a big moment, and a moment that has been a long time coming. So I thank you for your leadership on that.

Another piece of this momentous act passing is that it is this uncommon or important intersection of transportation and infrastructure in this committee and also Natural Resources and Wildlife Conservation. So I appreciate that intersection and I think moving forward we are all working very hard to not be stove piping these issues, but to be working with them together.

Specifically, the wildlife crossings in Montana, I have seen first-hand, as I think many of us have seen videos of the wildlife that use these crossings. It is quite extraordinary. You probably don't even realize they are all there until you see the videos. I think of one video of a crossing, a number of important crossings on the Flathead Reservation, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. There is a video of somebody sleeping in one of the underpasses. A grizzly bear, mountain lion, elk, lynx, all these species walking right by this person wrapped up in a blanket under the culvert.

Senator Carper. Was the person asleep or petrified?

[Laughter.]

Ms. Williams. I can't answer that. Senator Carper, I

think I might have been petrified had I been that person.

But we can't underestimate the importance of these crossings for safety and for wildlife. Experience shows that species use them. And they do help with safety.

Senator Carper. Thank you for that. These animals are pretty smart.

I am going to hold my questioning. We have been joined by Senator Cardin, and I recognize him for any questions he might have at this time. Senator Cardin, thanks for coming.

Senator Cardin. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To Martha Williams, first of all, thank you for your public service and thank you for your willingness to serve in this critically important position.

My understanding is that you have roots in my State of Maryland in Baltimore County on a farm. So that seems to me good sense. But why did you ever move out of Maryland?

[Laughter.]

Ms. Williams. Senator, I can say that I have moved back to D.C. and spend my weekends in Maryland. Is that a good enough answer?

Senator Cardin. You are getting there.

[Laughter.]

Senator Cardin. Where was the farm located in Baltimore County?

Ms. Williams. Near Hampstead, Upperco.

Senator Cardin. Yes, beautiful area. Of course, that area right now is starting to get developed. The land is going to be worth a lot more money than it was for farming, I am afraid. It is getting that way.

Ms. Williams. Senator Cardin, our farm was the first farm in Maryland to go in an agricultural preservation easement. So there are many farms actually in the neighborhood, in the watersheds, that are conserved to continue as working farms. It is something our family has been deeply engaged in for many years.

Senator Cardin. When I was speaker of the house in State legislature, Jim Clark was president of the senate, we developed and strengthened the ag easement program for just that reason. Senator Clark had a farm right next to Columbia, Maryland, and that is preserved in easement. So thank you for taking advantage of that program.

So I heard you mentioned already the Chesapeake Bay. But you responded to Senator Whitehouse like there are other bodies of water that are more important than the Chesapeake Bay.

[Laughter.]

Senator Cardin. So I just want to have you concentrate a little bit on our importance of your work, Fish and Wildlife, on the Bay. We are desperately in need of wetlands restoration.

We are using beneficial use of dredged material to restore wetlands in Blackwater Wildlife Refuge. We are looking at how we can restore islands for wildlife. We had Poplar Island which has been restored as a result of use of dredged material. We are now going to Mid Bay. I think you did respond to Senator Whitehouse, who by the way is a dear friend of mine, and I strongly support his efforts in regard to the coastal issues.

But in regard to the coastal programs themselves and protecting our coastlines in regard to fish and wildlife, all these are extremely high priorities. We have had bipartisan support in this committee to deal with those programs.

My request is that we have a very open relationship as it relates to strategies to advance these issues. We are not always in total agreement, because so many agencies are involved and Fish and Wildlife is one of those agencies. We would just like to have an open opportunity to make sure that we use every opportunity we can to advance these priorities.

Ms. Williams. Thank you, Senator Cardin. I couldn't agree more. The Chesapeake Bay is a national treasure. I hope that answers that question. I want to be very polite and serious. At the same time I do want you to know that I carry my Maryland roots with me and have Old Bay seasoning with me at all times, as do my children, much to the chagrin of those around us who don't quite understand our affinity for the spice.

In all seriousness, the Chesapeake Bay is so important. Our coastal programs are so important. It is going to be critical for climate change, for climate resilience. I had the opportunity to visit Masonville Cove. I have a promise to have a friend take me out to Poplar Island, and I have talked to our wildlife refuge staff. I am looking forward to going there.

So I am a huge supporter of these programs. I absolutely look forward to working closely with you, Senator Cardin, and being in close contact and understanding your concerns and these issues as they evolve. I think we have made great strides, but we have a lot of work to do. I very much appreciate yours and this committee's commitment to these issues.

Senator Cardin. Thank you for that. I have been to Poplar Island many times. It is much nicer in warmer weather than colder weather. Just warning you that I would love to join you and I will be pleased to join you. But I am not sure, having been on the White House lawn with Senator Carper for the bill signing of the Infrastructure Bill and wondering whether I would be able to move my body again, it was so cold, let's look for warmer weather when we go out and visit these just incredible restoration areas that we have been able to create. You will see incredible wildlife there that have returned. It is amazing. What we are doing at Blackwater with the restoration of wetlands is again, the wildlife there is absolutely

spectacular.

As you know, in Maryland, we have a lot of preserves that are conducive to wildlife, but we need to pay attention to restore these areas. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to working with you.

Ms. Williams. Thank you, Senator Cardin.

Senator Carper. Thank you, Senator Cardin. That was a chilly day on Monday, wasn't it? I was pretty amazed at the Speaker of the House and also at one of our colleagues, Senator Sinema, to be able to stand out there in that kind of weather, to stand and deliver, in spite of the very cold, very breezy, windy, cold conditions. Very cold.

I have two more questions, and I don't know if we will be joined by some other colleagues, either virtually or in person. But I have a couple of questions. One of them deals with State experience. Senator Cardin has served many years as a State legislator, speaker of the house in Maryland, as you may know. I had the privilege of serving as treasurer and governor of my State. I have fond memories of those days.

In those days, I still do, but really enjoyed rolling up my sleeves and just trying to get things done, working across the aisle with other officials in the First State with the environmental community, the business community, on matters of both regional and national importance.

From our conversations, I know you share a passion for that experience through your time leading the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. When you reflect back, what are you most proud of from your time leading that department? How did that role in particular shape you as a leader in wildlife conservation?

Ms. Williams. Thank you for that question, Senator Carper. My children always would ask me, what do you actually do, Mom, and what do you get done. I would answer, sometimes a bit too broadly. What am I most proud of? I am most proud of frankly leading and overseeing an agency of career public servants to best achieve the mission of conservation, and to empower them within clear guidelines to do the best work that they can do. So I am most proud of my leadership of overseeing and leading an agency, a conservation agency. I am proud of the habitats that we conserved and restored in my tenure.

I am proud of the relationships that we built of the Montana way of doing business, where we worked with everyone. It is not crossing the aisles or politics, it is, you work with every background in a way where you learn how to deliver.

I am proud of the way in which I worked and listened to people, sometimes frustratingly so. Learned every day, all day, on the job. I think I learned especially just how much I still have to learn. What did I learn most especially? That these

issues are hard, but that we are lucky that people care about them, that we have engagement and can, even if it seems tense at first, I learned how key it is to just loosen that knot and to get it started, to get conversation started and to get the work moving in the right direction.

So I am always learning that, but that is something that became so apparent to me, that sometimes the key step is to just start to loosen that knot.

So I am proud of our people. I am proud of the resources. I am proud of the people who lived in our State. So I hope to apply that, those lessons, if confirmed as Director, and realize that the Fish and Wildlife Service oversees the resources in all of this great Nation and international wildlife as well. So to always pay attention to the context of a place and the people there and realize the issues will need to be, to some degree, specific to the place and the people in that locality.

Senator Carper. Thank you for that very thoughtful response.

Senator Cardin and I get asked questions by the press, all kinds of different questions. I was asked by, I think it was the Washington Post, a month or two ago, some questions, little different sorts of questions. One of them was what do you do. I responded with the answer that I provide to students when I go to elementary schools, middle schools or high schools. I said,

I work with people like Senator Cardin and 98 other Senators, we help make the rules for the Country. I say to the students, do you have rules in your schools? Yes. Do you have rules on your school bus? Yes. Do you have rules at home? Yes. We have rules for our Country, and along with 99 other Senators and 435 House Members, the President and Vice President, I get to help make the rules for the Country.

One kid once asked me at a school, well, what else do you do? And I said, I help people. The staff and I, we help people, my colleagues and I. We try to help people. That is a great source of joy for us.

I have one more. One of the other questions they asked was, were you proud of stuff that you have done in your life. I said, helping to raise three boys was a source of great joy, still is. They are boys to men, but still it is a great joy.

All right. For me, the last question would be, this deals with the Delaware River Basin Conservation Act. We both care about the Chesapeake Bay, but we also care about the Delaware Bay and the Delaware River, along with a number of other States.

In 2016, I worked with a number of our colleagues to secure passage of the Delaware River Basin Conservation Act. The Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation have done, I think, an exceptional job in standing up the Delaware River Watershed Conservation Fund, which is

directed by that piece of legislation. The program leverages private dollars to restore polluted waters, to enhance fish and wildlife habitat and to increase access to nature.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act included \$28 million to expand on these important efforts. I would just ask, are you familiar with the Delaware River Basin Conservation Act, is that something you are familiar with? If so, would you elaborate on the importance of this regional conservation program and other programs like it?

Ms. Williams. Thank you, Chairman Carper. I appreciate the leadership for the act. It is an example, one of many, a very important example of the power of, what I hope a theme I have conveyed, the power of these collaborative, coordinated, deliberate efforts that bring, first of all leverages money and leverages expertise, so that the delivery of conservation is that much more, exponentially more than one entity could do on their own. So the Fish and Wildlife Service could never deliver this type of conservation on its own. It is the collective effort and the leverage of the funding that make it so effective.

Just like, in a way, Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge and the project that we viewed there, this too is an example that I think could be replicated elsewhere. I would answer that we all, I think, in this profession, look for examples where we

can take the pieces of them and replicate them, what works, and adapt what needs to be adapted for a specific location and place.

The Delaware River Basin is very important. I just really commend these efforts. And I know that our regional office and leadership has been key in building the relationships to make this so effective. So if I am confirmed as Director, I would make sure that leadership direction in this instance, I would call her out, Wendi Weber, has been extraordinary, and I would support other efforts like that of other regional directors, to make such a difference. Thank you.

Senator Carper. Thanks.

Senator Cardin, any more questions?

Senator Cardin. No, just again to thank you for your service. I look forward to working with you.

Ms. Williams. Thank you, Senator.

Senator Carper. I have just a real short closing statement. I want to thank Senator Cardin and others, certainly our Ranking Member, and other members of the committee who joined us in person and virtually. We want to thank you, Ms. Williams, not just for being here, but we are grateful for your willingness to serve in this capacity.

I would just say to your children, I am grateful to them for their willingness to share you with our Country. It is a

time when we face both great conservation challenges but great opportunities as well. Your conduct today has helped demonstrate why a President made such an excellent choice for this critical leadership role at the Fish and Wildlife Service. We are looking forward to seeing you confirmed without delay, so that you can get to work on behalf of the American people.

Before we adjourn, a little bit of housekeeping. I want to ask unanimous consent, if I can convince Senator Cardin not to object, I am going to ask for unanimous consent to submit for the record a variety of materials that include letters from stakeholders and other materials that relate to today's nomination hearing.

Is there objection? Hearing none, so ordered.

[The referenced material follows:]

Senator Carper. Senators will be allowed to submit question for the record through the close of business on Wednesday, November 24th, and we will compile those questions and send them to our witness and ask that you reply by Wednesday, December 1st.

With that, this hearing is adjourned. My thanks to all of you.

[Whereupon, at 11:39 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]