

Below is the opening statement of Chairman Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.Va.) as delivered.

"Good morning, everyone. It's nice to see you, and particularly you, Director Nesvik. Thank you for coming back to the Environment and Public Works Committee. We sure appreciate having you here today.

"The Trump Administration's fiscal year (FY) 2027 budget request for the Fish and Wildlife Service reflects a return to an effective and common-sense approach, I think, to carrying out the Service's mission while expanding access to public lands. I'm particularly appreciative that, under your leadership, the Service is showcasing over 570 National Wildlife Refuges by encouraging and expanding access for recreation.

"As we all know, our hunters and anglers are avid conservationists, and their work supports recreation and tourism opportunities in local communities across the [country], especially in my state of West Virginia. I'm sure your home state of Wyoming is the same.

"A continued strong relationship between state wildlife agencies, the Service and our conservation partners is paramount. This collaboration led to the reintroduction of elk in West Virginia after we lost our elk population in the mid-1800s. So, I am glad to see the Service has prioritized state-led conservation efforts under this administration.

"Strong bipartisan action from Congress has also led to wins for our wildlife and conservation efforts. Last [Congress], the EPW Committee passed the America's Conservation Enhancement Reauthorization Act.

"This law reauthorized important efforts such as the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Establishment Act, the National Fish Habitat Partnership and the Chesapeake Bay Program, one I'm particularly interested in. It also authorized funding for the Service to address the threats of emerging wildlife diseases, such as Chronic Wasting Disease, protect livestock from predators and combat invasive species.

"I look forward to hearing from Director Nesvik today on the Service's efforts to fully implement the ACE Act and other laws passed by the Congress.

"The Service also has the vital task of protecting threatened and endangered species and ensuring that Americans will be able experience the beauty of our nation for generations to come. The Service should carry out its mission without unnecessarily slowing down or halting projects as has been done under past administrations.

"I have long spoken about the issues with the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and how it is implemented by the Service. The experiences of public and private entities within the Section 7 consultation process in West Virginia are prime examples of why ESA reform is so important.

"Several years ago, my staff began holding monthly calls with the Service's staff at the Elkins field office because of delays with the consultation processes for critical projects. As a result of these calls, progress has been made and many of these projects have started moving forward.

"Now, under your leadership, Director Nesvik, there are significantly fewer projects facing delays and that, in turn, needs to be discussed on these calls. I am

appreciative of all that you and your team have done to facilitate that outcome. Thank you. And we talked about that when we met last week.

"Under the Trump administration, the Service is striving to better balance species protection and conservation with the economic development needs of all communities. This also includes returning the ESA to its intended purpose, the recovery and delisting of species. And this is something I have long supported.

"To that end, the Service is requesting additional funding for Priority Recovery Activities in the agency's FY 2027 budget request. I was pleased to see that the Service is requesting an increase in funding for energy project reviews, including the development and use of programmatic tools to automate ESA compliance, known as the Information for Planning and Consultation systems, or IPaC.

"IPaC has been a gamechanger in our state for our projects, drastically cutting down timeframes for Section 7 consultations. Recently, the Service issued a final rule designating over a million acres of critical habitat for the Rusty Patched Bumble Bee across six states, including West Virginia. Last week, your team briefed my staff on this rule, and I appreciate how quickly your team prepared and provided this information. So, thank you. I appreciate the balance you and your team struck in that final rule.

"I would [be] remiss not to mention the recent decision out of the D.C. District Court that invalidated the 2020 programmatic Biological Opinion issued by the Service for the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement's mining [regulatory] program. This decision will negatively impact coal production in the 24 states that have primacy. That includes my state. I am extremely disappointed by this court decision and very concerned about what it will mean for projects in my state moving forward.

"Director Nesvik, thank you for being here. I look forward to hearing how you intend to build on the progress you have made at the Service over the last few months and your plans for the months ahead."

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