Opening Remarks of Ranking Member Whitehouse: *"The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Proposed Fiscal Year 2027 Budget."*

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is our nation's oldest conservation agency, dating back to 1871, and it's the only agency whose primary responsibility is to conserve and protect America's wildlife. A big job for a small agency.

Our conservation agencies are staffed with the best. Scientists with decades of experience and expertise have flourished at FWS, ensuring that generations of Americans can exist on the same planet as the California condor, the bald eagle, the monk seal.

These responsibilities are not to be taken lightly. This is why I'm deeply disheartened by the DOGE-fueled antics over the past year, compounded by the Administration's proposed 20% funding cut for next year.

There are reports that FWS has lost as much as a quarter of its staff. The DOGE boys chased out nearly 1,800 employees, purging at least 530 biologists, and over 100 regional senior staff. These people cannot be easily replaced – experts with deep institutional knowledge, dedicated to protecting the wildlife of our country.

Mr. Nesvik, in response to questions for the record from your confirmation hearing, you stated that you have spent your career "working closely with scientists" on wildlife issues and "deeply value their expertise, commitment, and contributions." I very much doubt that the 530 staff biologists that left the agency felt "deeply valued."

The proposed funding cuts won't help. Not cutting all funding for endangered species conservation, including iconic species such as elephants, rhinos, and great apes.

Not cutting Science Support, which provides technical assistance to local communities for wildlife and habitat conservation.

Not cutting State and Tribal Wildlife Grants, which help conserve fish and wildlife before they require protection under the Endangered Species Act.

In your confirmation hearing, you spoke openly about cooperative federalism. But, your budget goes out of its way to provide fewer resources to our states.

Most managers at our nation's wildlife refuges report that they don't have the resources and staff to fulfill their missions. Democrats and Republicans are eager to see the permitting process move faster. Fish and Wildlife Service staff often play an important role in permitting. How do we expedite permitting process if staff and resources aren't there?

You've also let Fish and Wildlife get wrapped up in this Administration's fraudulent war on low-cost clean energy. This administration blockades clean energy on purpose, to drive electric grids

to more expensive fossil fuel units — a massive wealth transfer, billions of dollars, from family pocketbooks to Trump's big fossil fuel donors. Payback, with consumers' money

Your IPAC database helps developers quickly determine if a project could affect a protected species. IPaC has received bipartisan praise. But in July of last year you banned wind and solar projects from using the online IPaC system. Who does that help?

[CHART 1]

Developers can once again access the system thanks to a recent court order, but the pattern at DOI is to abuse every process to stall clean energy projects. This is especially egregious coming from you as the former Director of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. Wind power accounts for about 20% of Wyoming's electricity generation. Surely in your time as the Director, you saw how helpful this database was for your state.

In closing, I'm reminded of this image displaying the biomass of mammals on Earth.

[CHART 2]

The vast majority of Earth's mammals are humans and livestock. A mere 5 percent of mammal biomass on this planet is still wild.

We are living through a biodiversity crash – often called a sixth mass extinction. This mass extinction is unique because it's being driven primarily by human activity: climate change, deforestation, habitat destruction, pollution, overexploitation, and more.

We need to do better by what wildlife remains. That is your job at the Fish and Wildlife Service. Zeroing out wildlife conservation funding for imperiled and iconic species does not help. Invoking the "God Squad" to remove Endangered Species Act protections from the Rices whale, of which only 50 are left - to promote oil and gas development — does not help.

Mr. Nesvik, generations will look back to understand why species on your watch went the way of the Dodo. How much of God's creation must be a sacrifice to the worship of fossil fuel? Right now, it's not a good look.