

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

"This morning, we will hear from President Trump's nominee to be the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife at the U.S. Department of Interior, Mr. Kevin Lilly. Welcome, Mr. Lilly, to the Environment and Public Works Committee. Mr. Lilly, I know you spent a considerable amount of time with the Energy and [Natural] Resources Committee yesterday, given the nature of this position and our split jurisdictions. And so, we are very appreciative that you are here with us today.

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

"This role includes oversight of the implementation of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), conservation and funding partnerships with states and landowners and stewardship of our national parks. The Fish and Wildlife Service also participates in the federal permitting process through the ESA consultation process. This process has been long, inefficient and costly for projects and communities across the country.

"Any Assistant Secretary confirmed to this position must believe that federal agencies can protect threatened or endangered species while also providing timely consultation, habitat and incidental take decisions to ensure that important infrastructure projects can responsibly and efficiently move forward. These projects should not be held hostage because federal agencies failed to coordinate early, or establish clear schedules or make necessary determinations. Striking an appropriate balance between conservation and beneficial economic development is essential for all states, and that's no different than the state of West Virginia, my home.

"Oversight of the National Park Service is equally important in West Virginia. We have the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve. It's one of West Virginia's great natural resources and an important economic driver through tourism and recreation. I highly recommend it. The Park has defied the falling attendance trends facing other national parks. New River Gorge posted a 9.5% increase in attendance in 2025, with visitor spending contributing over $100 million into the local economy in 2024.

"However, the Park only has now an acting superintendent instead of a permanent one. New River Gorge National Park needs a permanent superintendent to focus on improving the visitor experience and park operations, as well as working with surrounding communities to leverage the opportunities presented by the Park's increasing attendance. I expect the Assistant Secretary to make filling this position a priority for the National Park Service.

"West Virginians are proud conservationists with a tradition of hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation throughout our beautiful state. The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation has been a great success in this country in ensuring we responsibly manage public resources for the future.

"Unique in this model is the role our hunters, anglers and outdoor recreationalists play, not only in local conservation work, but also in funding and helping to deliver

conservation programs. This model supports recreation and tourism opportunities in local communities all across the country.

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

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