

**Center for Biological Diversity • Animal Welfare Institute • Atlanta Audubon Society
Born Free USA • Citizens Coal Council • Coal River Mountain Watch • Coastal Plains Institute
Delaware Ecumenical Council on Children and Families • Endangered Habitats League
Endangered Small Animal Conservation Fund • Endangered Species Coalition
Environmental Action Committee of West Marin • Environmental Protection Information Center
Friends of the Earth US • Howling for Wolves • Kentucky Resources Council, Inc.
Klamath Forest Alliance • Mass Audubon • Movement for a People's Party
New Mexico Horse Council • New Mexico Sportsmen • Northern Jaguar Project • NY4WHALES
Ocean Conservation Research • Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition • Predator Defense
Project Coyote • Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility • Rocky Mountain Wild
Save the Manatee Club • Save Wolves Now Network • Seven Circles Foundation
Shawnee Forest Defense! • Southwestern Indiana Citizens for Quality of Life
The Rewilding Institute • Trap Free Montana • Trap Free Montana Public Lands
Unexpected Wildlife Refuge • Urban Bird Foundation • Valley Watch, Inc. • WCH Consulting, Inc.
Western Nebraska Resources Council • Western Values Project • Western Watersheds Project
Western Wildlife Conservancy • WildEarth Guardians • Wild Zone Conservation League**

December 11, 2019

Re: Please Oppose Aurelia Skipwith to be Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Dear Senators,

On behalf of our organizations and millions of members, we urge you to oppose the nomination of Aurelia Skipwith to be the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In her role as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Ms. Skipwith has undermined scientific integrity and the work of career scientists at the Service and circumvented the Endangered Species Act at the behest of the coal industry, putting numerous species at risk of extinction. In addition, while Ms. Skipwith has worked for two years within the Department, her prior experience does not meet the statutory requirements — that an individual have scientific training and experience in wildlife and fisheries management — that are required by law to be the Director of Fish and Wildlife Service.

As detailed in an exposé by the Washington Post, and in records obtained via the Freedom of Information Act, Ms. Skipwith was instrumental in an effort to undermine safeguards for endangered wildlife in Appalachia, including the Guyandotte River and Big Sandy crayfish, to green-light mountaintop coal mines owned by political benefactors of the Trump administration.¹ Ms. Skipwith pushed to overrule the career scientists at the Service that were attempting to develop conservation measures to protect two endangered crayfish caused by water pollution from these mines. At Ms. Skipwith's insistence, an industry-written plan was deemed acceptable, even when the career scientists had warned it would ravage the 'crayfishes' habitat. Scientific integrity is the hallmark of what makes the Endangered Species Act the most effective conservation law in the world. Her actions blindsided

¹ See Juliet Eilperin, How the West Virginia coal industry changed federal endangered species policy, The Washington Post (May 10, 2019) available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/how-the-west-virginia-coal-industry-changed-federal-endangered-species-policy/2019/05/10/56d28de0-4bf0-11e9-b79a-961983b7e0cd_story.html?utm_term=.8b9d794bac05

Service scientists who were following the law’s clear mandate to use the best available science in developing a conservation plan for these species.

In her two years as a political appointee within the Department of Interior, Ms. Skipwith has been involved in efforts to weaken the Endangered Species Act’s implementing regulations and strip protections from our nation’s most vulnerable species, including the grizzly bear, American burying beetle, Mexican wolf, and dunes sagebrush lizard. Her official calendars show she was also involved in efforts to weaken the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, weaken protections for the wildlife refuge network from dangerous pesticides, and weaken protections for National Monuments. Ms. Skipwith is clearly ideologically opposed to the mission of the Fish and Wildlife Service, and would not be able to separate her personal biases from the science-based decisions required of the Director.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is a unique federal agency that regularly deals with complex scientific issues relating to the conservation of the natural world at the local, national and global scale. Recognizing this, Congress took the unusual step of requiring that the President only appoint a Director who is “by reason of scientific education and experience, knowledgeable in the principles of fisheries and wildlife management.”² Ms. Skipwith’s academic and professional career demonstrate that, while accomplished, she lacks the necessary scientific education and experience to be the Director.

As recently as 2013, Ms. Skipwith was a summer legal intern with the U.S. Department of Agriculture where she worked in the Office of Technology Transfer and the Foreign Agriculture Service. She was general counsel at AVC Global, a company she co-founded, and she worked at Monsanto prior to law school. Ms. Skipwith has certainly had a successful career, but none of her experiences or education remotely qualifies her to run the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Every one of the 12 prior directors of the Fish and Wildlife Service since 1964 has had, at a minimum, a degree in fisheries or wildlife management or a closely related field. One prior Director has had a Ph.D., eight had master’s degrees, and three had bachelor’s degrees in a wildlife field. More importantly, nearly all prior directors of the Fish and Wildlife Service spent significant time either working within the Fish and Wildlife Service or at a state fish and game agency. The average amount of time served by prior directors before being nominated was approximately 16.5 years of relevant experience. Ms. Skipwith, unfortunately, has no relevant work experience related to conservation or wildlife management.

PAST DIRECTORS OF THE U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Name	Presidential Administration	Period Served	Confirmed?	Experience/Education in Wildlife Management
Dan Ashe	Obama	2011-2017	YES	M.S. in Marine Affairs; 15 years at FWS
Sam Hamilton (died in office)	Obama	2009-2011	YES	B.S. in Biology; 30 years at FWS
H. Dale Hall	G.W. Bush	2005-2009	YES	M.S. in Fisheries Management; 27 years at FWS

² 16 U.S.C. §742(b).

Steven A. Williams	G.W. Bush	2002-2005	YES	Ph.D in Forestry; 7 years at Massachusetts Div. of Fisheries and Wildlife
Jamie Rappaport Clark	Clinton	1997-2001	YES	M.S. in wildlife ecology; 13 years at FWS
Mollie Hanna Beattie	Clinton	1993-1996	YES	M.S. in Forestry; 5 years at VT Dept. of Forests & Nat. Resources
John F. Turner	G.H.W. Bush	1989-1993	YES	M.S. in Wildlife Management; WY State Senator for 20 years
Frank Harper Dunkle	Reagan	1986-1989	YES	M.S. in Wildlife Management; 17 years Montana Fish and Game; 3 years at FWS
Robert A. Jantzen	Reagan	1981-1985	YES	B.S. in Wildlife Management; 30 years at AZ Game and Fish Depart
Lynn Adams Greenwalt	Nixon/Carter	1974-1981	YES	M.S. in Wildlife Management; 21 years at FWS
Spencer H. Smith	Nixon	1970-1973	YES	B.S. in Wildlife Management; 17 years at FWS
John S. Gottschalk	Nixon	1964-1970	YES	M.S. in Fisheries Management; 19 years at FWS

Ms. Skipwith's overall lack of experience and background in wildlife management, together with her ideological opposition to the protection of our nation's wildlife, disqualifies her for such a critical position. For these reasons, we strongly urge you to oppose Ms. Skipwith's nomination to be the Director of FWS.

Sincerely,

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Citizens Coal Council
Coal River Mountain Watch
Coastal Plains Institute
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