

Statement of
Shannon A. Estenoz
Nominee for the Position of
Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks
U.S. Department of the Interior
Before the
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

May 18, 2021

Thank you, Chairman Manchin, Ranking Member Barrasso, and members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. It is an honor to appear before you as President Biden's nominee to be Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks.

I want to say hello to my husband Richard, our sons Nick and Spencer, my mother, and my friends and extended family who are watching.

I am a fifth generation Floridian – born, like all of my grandparents, in Key West – we call ourselves “Conchs” after the beautiful mollusk once plentiful in the Florida Keys.

My father was a civil engineer and for the first ten years of my life, his career took us to oil platforms off the coast of Louisiana, the Tennessee Valley Authority in Knoxville, and the Army Corps of Engineers in Kansas City.

Before my father passed away in 1979, we returned to Key West where his last job was as an engineer for Monroe County, where he worked to replace the old 7-mile bridge – perhaps the most famous section of the Overseas Highway.

To grow up in Key West is to grow up on the water - swimming, fishing, snorkeling, boating – and whether you know it or not, the water and its wildlife shape you.

One of my earliest memories on the boat with my grandfather fishing was the day he caught me “setting free” the bait fish in his live well. He didn't scold me, because he knew there is no conflict between harvesting fish and wanting to protect them.

When your family has been in a place for many generations, there is an instinct to conserve that has nothing to do with science or regulations – it has to do with a connection to place and to a way of life.

My own career path includes many echoes of my father's. I too pursued civil engineering. As a student, I returned to eastern Tennessee to intern at Eastman Chemical Company.

I dedicated 24 years of my career to an infrastructure modernization program, led by the Army Corps of Engineers, to restore the Everglades. I guess I never lost my childhood instinct to help

fish - and birds, and mammals and people – by helping to restore the land and the ecosystem that sustains them all.

My father was a bridge builder, and as part of my work on Everglades Restoration I was proud to play a part in building new bridges across the Everglades. Today water flows under those new bridges into Everglades National Park.

I know that jobs, infrastructure, conservation and restoration can – and should – go hand in hand. My work involving the Everglades was ideal training for the role of Assistant Secretary of Fish and Wildlife and Parks.

I've spent more than 2 decades in the trenches of collaborative conservation, land and ecosystem restoration, species recovery, water management, invasive species response actions, and National Park stewardship.

I spent 7 years at the Department of the Interior as its Director of Everglades Restoration, reporting directly to the position I have been nominated for. I was a colleague and leader of the dedicated career staff in both bureaus that this Assistant Secretary manages.

As a State official, I was a customer of the Fish and Wildlife Service's regulatory programs, and know first-hand what it is like to be in the shoes of states trying to work with the federal government.

As a stakeholder, I participated in the government's efforts to engage the public, and I have put in the hard work to build coalitions to get things done.

Now, I have been in my current role at Interior for 112 days. Every day I learn more about the fish, wildlife and parks issues facing your states and the nation.

I will draw on my long state and federal experience as I work on water management and predator recovery in the west; protecting resources central to Tribal cultural and economic well-being; combating invasive aquatic species; and collaborating on conservation of the sage brush ecosystem.

The National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service play crucial roles in the challenges before us: recovering species and conserving habitat; supporting recreation and restoration jobs on public lands; and stewarding our most treasured landscapes and imperiled species through threats like wildfire and drought that are intensifying as a result of climate change.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is also on the front lines of wildlife disease, including preventing those diseases from spreading to human populations.

And the Park Service will play a key role in recommitting to our government-to-government relationship with Tribal nations and telling the story of all Americans.

If I am confirmed I will bring with me the tools that have served me best in my career: communication, transparency, and intellectual honesty.

I will approach this role with a passion for collaboration and meeting big challenges in partnership. I look forward to celebrating together the results we achieve together. I hope that today will be the first of many conversations with this Committee.

Thank you and I look forward to answering your questions.