

**STATEMENT OF AURELIA SKIPWITH
NOMINEE FOR
DIRECTOR,
U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS**

SEPTEMBER 11, 2019

Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Carper, and members of the Committee. It is an honor to be here today as President Trump's nominee to be the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. I am deeply appreciative of Secretary Bernhardt's confidence in me. Today, I am requesting your support for my nomination.

I want to acknowledge Mrs. Lillie Bell Skipwith, my mother, who has always been my cheerleader; Leo Giacometto, my fiancé, who has managed to survive all of my endeavors; and my sister, my aunts and uncles and dear friends who have come here today to show their support. I also want to thank Congressman Lacy Clay, who was my representative in Congress for many years, for his introduction; it means a lot to me because I still call Missouri my home and I still have ties there today.

My mother picked cotton on her way to becoming one of the first Black women to graduate from THE W in Columbus, Mississippi. Today, she continues to work as a public-school teacher in Indianapolis. And my father joined the Navy right out of high school, during the Vietnam War, and retired as an Army Master Sargent with 34 years of service.

My respect for the outdoors and wildlife began at an early age. My summers were spent in Mississippi where I helped my grandpa on the hog farm, in his garden, and with the hound dogs. I studied animal science at Morehead State University, and biology and research at Howard University, which spurred my intrigue in discovering and testing new theories, to challenge the status quo and to bring forth new innovative technologies to better our world. After receiving my degree from Howard University, this interest continued as I pursued and obtained my Masters of Science degree in Molecular Biology and Genetics in Animal Sciences from Purdue University in Indiana.

With this knowledge, I led teams to develop new crops to improve productivity for farmers that benefited the natural environment and consumers around the world. I love biology and science, and I learned a lot from being in the lab and being in the field.

Through this experience, I grew to recognize that one may have the best intentions and the best available science, but without fair and balanced regulations and laws, one's future can still be stifled. I saw those stifling effects first hand when managing a team to adapt a new corn to address the drought in Africa. I knew what I needed to do. I enrolled at the University of Kentucky to pursue my law degree.

After graduating law school, I was the legal advisor for an all-natural animal nutrition company, responsible for research, development, and the approval for their first all-natural pesticide.

I understand the necessary balance of natural resources among the different user groups and conservation is at the core of it all. That is what has led me here today.

For over two years, I have served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Fish Wildlife and Parks and I have had the pleasure to work with the Service's professionals, an experience that, coupled with my scientific and legal background, has prepared me well to lead the Fish and Wildlife Service.

I view the 567 refuges within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as our Nation's crown jewels. These jewels are stopovers in flyway zones, they are home to endangered species, they are places where people can hunt, fish, and recreate. They are truly living classrooms.

The Service and I are committed to align regulations and policies with laws that govern the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, providing transparency and consistency in actions from for the public and our federal partners.

More than 70 percent of lands in the United States, both coastal and inland, are privately owned. If confirmed, it will be a priority of mine to work closely with private landowners, states, tribes and federal partners so that our decisions as stewards of public resources are mutually beneficial to trust species, the land owners and the American public. By connecting people with the natural environment and leveraging expertise and innovation through partnerships, we can accomplish so much more.

This is truly an exciting time to be nominated to lead the dedicated career professionals of the Fish and Wildlife Service forward in pursuit of common sense solutions to 21st century conservation challenges. I will continue to have my open-door policy, to hear all sides in order to make an informed decision; that decision will be based on the best available science, within the realm of the law, and all intertwined with common sense. Above all, I will continue to take the public trust very seriously and believe trust and accountability are essential for success. In that spirit, I am committed to leading the agency with the highest ethical standards and to ensuring that professional ethics are maintained throughout the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

My mom taught me that it did not matter where you started from, but where you were headed. She made sure my education was a big part of that and instilled in me the drive to go after what I believed was right. My father taught me the importance of service to our country and instilled an ethic of personal discipline and accountability.

With these teachings in the forefront of my mind, I am honored and humbled to appear before you today, a product of the American Dream. I am motivated and inspired to take on this leadership responsibility and to continuing the tradition of excellence of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. I am committed to give my all.

Thank you.