

ESTENOZ NOMINATION

HEARING
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
UNITED STATES SENATE
ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS
SECOND SESSION

TO

CONSIDER THE NOMINATION OF SHANNON A. ESTENOZ
TO BE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR

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JULY 10, 2024
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ESTENOZ NOMINATION

WEDNESDAY, JULY 10, 2024

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES,
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:00 a.m. in Room SD-366, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Joe Manchin III, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JOE MANCHIN III, U.S. SENATOR FROM WEST VIRGINIA

The CHAIRMAN. The Committee will come to order.

We meet today to consider the nomination of Shannon Estenoz to be the Deputy Secretary of the Interior. Ms. Estenoz currently serves as the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. She came before this Committee three years ago when we considered her for her current position. I want to welcome you back to the Committee. I want to thank you for being here and for your service and for your willingness to take on this important task, if confirmed. We also welcome any members of your family, and if you would like to introduce them, we would be happy for you to do that.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am very grateful to have my husband, Richard Grosso, with me today.

The CHAIRMAN. Richard, it's good to be with you and thank you for being here.

As Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks for the past three years, Ms. Estenoz, you had responsibility for the nation's parks and wildlife refuges and the endangered species program. As Deputy Secretary, your responsibilities will expand greatly, as you know. The Department of the Interior manages 20 percent of the nation's land, over 700 million acres of subsurface mineral rights, and over three billion acres on the Outer Continental Shelf. These lands and waters produce nearly 20 percent of the nation's energy, including 43 percent of our coal, 27 percent of our oil, 14 percent of our natural gas, and two-thirds of our geothermal energy and much of our wind, solar, and hydropower. In addition to the parks and refuges that you oversee now, the Deputy Secretary also shares responsibility for energy and mineral production, dams and reservoirs and irrigation projects, grazing and timber, insular areas, Indian tribes, abandoned mine lands, and wildfires. The Department's mission is two-prong, requiring both preservation and production, conservation, and wise use. The Department does not

have the luxury to choose one mission over the other, it must fulfill both and find the right balance between the two. As the Department's chief operating officer, the Deputy Secretary of the Interior must play a major role in striking the right balance in keeping the Department on course for its mission.

You have spent the past three years overseeing two of the Department's largest units, which together account for nearly a third of the Department's budget. You are familiar with the Department's mission and the issues facing it. In your current job you have had a major hand in tackling the deferred maintenance backlog in our national parks and wildlife refuges pursuant to the Great American Outdoors Act, increasing access to outdoor recreation for disadvantaged communities, cleaning up orphan wells in the national parks, and working with the Defense Department on endangered species recovery. You have a reputation for being able to understand complex problems, for being able to work collaboratively with others, for being thoughtful and willing to listen, and for working across the aisle, which I appreciate very much. While my colleagues across the aisle have taken issue with much of what the Department has done throughout this Administration, as I have also, both the Committee and the full Senate were able to approve your previous nomination without controversy on your own merits and on voice votes. I look forward to hearing from you this morning on your nomination to take on still greater responsibilities as Deputy Secretary.

And now, I will turn to my friend and my Ranking Member, Senator Barrasso.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN BARRASSO,
U.S. SENATOR FROM WYOMING**

Senator BARRASSO. Well, thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for holding today's hearing.

Ms. Estenoz, welcome back to the Committee. Congratulations on your nomination to be Deputy Secretary of the Interior. Over the last three years, you have served as the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. In that position you oversaw the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service. These two agencies play a very significant role in my home State of Wyoming, as you are well aware. During your tenure, you have shown a willingness to listen and to learn. You have demonstrated an ability to work across party lines, and have made a sincere effort to find common ground on many very difficult issues. I appreciate the collaborative approach that you have taken as the Assistant Secretary.

We are here today to examine whether you should be confirmed as the Deputy Secretary of the Interior. A person who holds this position has a profound impact on the lives of the people in Wyoming and the Rocky Mountain West. If confirmed, one of your most important responsibilities will be to oversee energy and mineral development on federal lands. We in Wyoming are proud to be America's leading producer of coal, uranium, trona, bentonite, helium, and proud to be a leading producer of oil and natural gas. In Wyoming, most energy and mineral production takes place on federal lands. In fact, almost 50 percent of Wyoming's land and almost 70

percent of Wyoming's minerals are owned by the Federal Government. Energy and mineral production is the engine of Wyoming's economy. In 2021, oil and gas production alone contributed nearly \$12 billion to Wyoming's economy and supported 58,000 jobs in a state where the population is only 500,000. For years, the State of Wyoming has collected over a billion dollars annually in royalties and taxes for energy production on federal lands. Wyoming uses this revenue to fund K-12 public education and other essential services. It is imperative that the Deputy Secretary understands how the Department impacts the people of Wyoming and the West.

For more than three years, Secretary Haaland has laid the groundwork for my state's economic ruin. Absolutely, she has done that. She has canceled two years' worth of oil and gas leases. She has nearly tripled timelines for oil and gas permits. She has put two million acres of existing oil and gas leases on hold. She has raised the cost of operating on federal lands by 20-fold. And she has even refused to deliver leases to the winning bidders from the 2020 lease sales. It is now 2024. That is the Secretary of the Department.

If that weren't enough, Secretary Haaland now wants to prohibit coal leasing in the Powder River Basin. Last year, the Powder River Basin supplied 45 percent of all coal mined in the United States. It is the single richest source of affordable and reliable energy in the country. The Secretary wants to shut it down. It is an utterly reckless proposal by a completely irresponsible and unfit Secretary of the Interior. Secretary Haaland also wants to ban grazing, energy and mineral development, and recreation on over two million acres of federal land in Southwest Wyoming. That is an active proposal by the Secretary of the Interior. These lands are not national parks. They are not wildlife refuges. They are not wildlife areas. These are lands that Congress has specifically set aside for productive use, being attacked by the Secretary of the Interior.

Time and again, Secretary Haaland has shown a contempt for the law of these United States, she has shown a hostility toward the people of Wyoming, and she has shown an indifference to the energy and the mineral security of our nation. This needs to end. Neither Wyoming nor America can afford another four years of these destructive policies.

So I look forward to hearing from you today. More than anything else, I want to know whether you are going to be a voice of reason at the Department, and I hope you will be. I want to know whether you are willing to exercise independent judgment or whether we should just expect more of the same of what we have gotten from this Administration and this Secretary of the Interior.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator.

Ms. Estenoz, we welcome you, your husband, and your staff. We would like to hear from you now with your opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF SHANNON A. ESTENOZ, NOMINATED TO BE
DEPUTY SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR**

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Barasso, and members of the Committee. I am honored to appear be-

fore you as President Biden's nominee for Deputy Secretary of the Department of the Interior. I want to thank my husband, Richard, for being here today. I would also like to say hello to our sons, Nick and Spencer, to my mother, and to my friends and extended family, who are watching this morning.

I was honored in 2021 to have been reported by voice vote by this Committee, to have been reported 19 to 1 by the Environment and Public Works Committee, and to have been—a little over a month later—confirmed by the full Senate by unanimous consent. It has been the greatest honor of my professional career to serve in this role for almost three years.

I am a fifth-generation Floridian, born, as were all of my grandparents, in Key West, where I grew up on the water—swimming, fishing, snorkeling, and boating. I, like my late father, am a civil engineer. For the first ten years of my life, his career took him—and us—to oil platforms off the coast of Louisiana, the Tennessee Valley Authority in Knoxville, the Army Corps of Engineers in Kansas City, and finally, back home to Key West. I spent my own career in the Everglades, wearing many hats, over many years, working on the world's largest hydrologic ecosystem restoration program.

The vast majority of my 29-year career has been spent on the ground in my big and complicated State of Florida. I have been a stakeholder, a state water manager, an appointee of both Democratic and Republican Governors of Florida, and for more than seven years, the Director of Everglades Restoration at the Department of the Interior. In my career, I have spent thousands of hours—thousands of hours, as I know all of you have—engaging on issues like these in community centers, private kitchens, under live oak trees, at boat docks, and on tree islands, because in a big, diverse state like Florida, where most of the land is privately owned, and where ranching and farming and mining are adjacent to huge metro areas, the only way to get anything done is to talk to everyone—not because you think you can get everyone to agree, but because understanding diverse perspectives always drives better decision-making.

Since 2021, as the Assistant Secretary, I have overseen two of the Department's larger bureaus—the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—as they steward the nation's most iconic places and important history, work with communities to protect and promote the recovery of imperiled species, and to implement some of the most important environmental laws enacted by Congress. I have also had the pleasure of working with many of you on issues in your home states and that affect national parks, wildlife refuges, species, industries, resources, and livelihoods across the country. To put Congress's landmark investments to work for the benefit of the American people—the Great American Outdoors Act, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and the Inflation Reduction Act—I have worked with offices and bureaus within the Department and their subject matter experts, scientists, resource managers, and leaders, in addition to community stakeholders and philanthropic sectors across the nation.

We marked the 50th anniversary of the Endangered Species Act with a call to action to focus more partnership energy on species recovery and listing prevention. We have downlisted or delisted more than 30 species due to improvement or recovery. We have strengthened existing partnerships and built new ones so that today the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service counts the Department of Defense and the National Alliance of Forest Owners among its most valued partners in species recovery. Having worked as a leader in the Department for almost 11 years, first as a career senior executive, and now as a policy official, I understand the responsibilities of the Deputy Secretary and the weight of the decisions that office must make. In essence, the portfolio of the Deputy Secretary is the portfolio of the Department. I have been on the front lines of resource management for almost 30 years, delivering consensus-based solutions to often very difficult problems. In that time, I have learned that people in communities are more similar than they are different, and without fail, every issue I have ever worked on has first and foremost been a people and community issue. At the Department, I know that there are many difficult issues—a few very long running—and we continue to work our way through them.

In 2021, I pledged to this Committee that as Assistant Secretary I would use the tools that have served me best in my career: communication, transparency, and intellectual honesty. If I am confirmed as the next Deputy Secretary of the Department of the Interior, I will continue to honor this pledge.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you, and I look forward to your questions. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Estenoz follows:]

**Statement of
Shannon A. Estenoz
Nominee for the Position of
Deputy Secretary of the
United States Department of the Interior
Before the
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate**

July 10, 2024

Thank you, Chairman Manchin, Ranking Member Barrasso, members of the Committee. I am honored to appear before you as President Biden's nominee for Deputy Secretary of the Department of the Interior.

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

I was honored in 2021 to have been reported by voice vote by this Committee, to have been reported 19-1 by the Environment and Public Works Committee, and to have been, a little over a month later, confirmed by the full Senate by unanimous consent. It has been the greatest honor of my professional career to serve in this role for almost three years.

I am a fifth generation Floridian – born, as were all of my grandparents, in Key West where I grew up on the water - swimming, fishing, snorkeling and boating.

I, like my late father, am a civil engineer. For the first ten years of my life, his career took him to oil platforms off the coast of Louisiana, the Tennessee Valley Authority in Knoxville, the Army Corps of Engineers in Kansas City and finally back home to Key West. I spent my own career in the Everglades – wearing many hats over many years working on the world's largest hydrologic ecosystem restoration program.

The vast majority of my 29-year career has been spent on the ground, in my big and complicated home state of Florida. I have been a stakeholder, a state water manager, an appointee of both Democratic and Republican governors of Florida, and, for more than seven years, the Director of Everglades Restoration at the Department of the Interior.

In my career, I have spent thousands of hours engaging on these issues in community centers, private kitchens, under live oak trees, at boat docks, and on tree islands because in a big diverse state like Florida, where most of the land is privately owned and where ranching, farming and mining are adjacent to huge metro areas, the only way to get anything done is to talk to everyone – not because you think you can get everyone to agree, but because understanding diverse perspectives always drives better decision making.

Since 2021, as the Assistant Secretary, I have overseen two of the Department's larger bureaus – the National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – as they steward the Nation's most iconic places and important history, work with communities to protect and promote the recovery of imperiled species, and implement some of the most important environmental laws enacted by Congress. I have also had the pleasure of working with many of you on issues in your home states and that affect national parks, wildlife refuges, species, industries, resources, and livelihoods across the country.

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In 2021, I pledged to this Committee that as Assistant Secretary I would use the tools that have served me best in my career: communication, transparency, and intellectual honesty. If I am confirmed as the next Deputy Secretary of the Department of the Interior, I will continue to honor this pledge.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and I look forward to your questions. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you for your statement.

I skipped over a very important part of this hearing. I am going to ask you three questions now for you to answer.

Will you be available to appear before this committee and other congressional committees to represent the departmental positions and respond to issues of concern to the Congress?

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. Are you aware of any personal holdings, investments, or interests that could constitute a conflict of interest or create the appearance of such a conflict, should you be confirmed and assume the office to which you have been nominated by the President?

Ms. ESTENOZ. No.

The CHAIRMAN. Are you involved or do you have any assets held in a blind trust?

Ms. ESTENOZ. No.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Now we will start our questions.

My first question is going to be, basically, on energy, and this is the name of this Committee—Energy and Natural Resources.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. Right now, we are pretty much independent, as far as the United States of America. We are producing more energy than ever in the history of our country. We are number one in the world in production, and we have done that with an all-in policy. My exasperation with the Administration is how they are implementing some of the laws and rules that we passed here, and we keep having to fight continuously. Companies have been damaged and are suing, and they will win because the Administration is outside of the window of the legislation—the intent of the legislation. My thing is this—we have produced more gas, oil, solar, storage, everything that we have done, but we can't be independent unless we start mining our own critical minerals, unless we are able to get leases on lands where we have plentiful resources, where we should be extracting as we transition. That is the hard problem that we have here, and the Administration has not listened or has not been willing to listen. The Ukraine war made it all so evident that the United States of America must be the leader, and should be the leader, and they are depending on it in the rest of the world.

Do you believe it is in our best interest to improve our energy independence?

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes, I do, Mr. Chairman. American energy is good. American energy independence is critical as we address the climate crisis, and it is important as we address the climate crisis and attempt to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It is important as we seek to secure affordability and reliability for the American people, and it's important for our national security.

The CHAIRMAN. Do you believe there should be a pause on any of the federal leasing as far as lands for coal and gas and oil and critical minerals?

Ms. ESTENOZ. Well, Senator, I think it's critically important that, as you mentioned, as we pursue our transition to a clean energy economy that we know that we are going to continue oil and gas leasing. We know that, you know, according to the Energy Informa-

tion Agency, currently our consumption is something like 83 percent non-renewable, and renewables are increasing. And that is a good thing, and we need to continue that, but we know that oil and gas and coal are going to be part of our energy mix for some time to come. And it is really this conversation about what is the mix and how do we conduct the transition.

The CHAIRMAN. Do you feel comfortable speaking truth to power to your superiors that you answer to when they are going a different direction and you know it's not within the laws of what should be done, the leasing that we should be doing and handling and basically, we are not? We are fighting for every lease we have offshore in the Gulf. We are fighting for every lease onshore. I am sure you are going to hear from my friend here pretty quickly about the unbelievable roadblocks that have been put up. It makes no sense at all. So we need somebody that will say, these are the facts, this is the law, we should be following it.

Ms. ESTENOZ. So Senator, and I might repeat this a little bit this morning.

The CHAIRMAN. That's okay.

Ms. ESTENOZ. But I recognize how important it will be for me to earn the confidence and trust of—inside the Administration—particularly on energy and public lands issues, but also from the members of this Committee. And I will tell you that in my 30-year career in Florida, I have never shied away from sharing my opinion, but I know that being effective in that regard means being a credible person and a thoughtful person and a careful person about the knowledge that you are imparting. And so, the short answer is yes, I think the Administration, and I think all of you deserve me, if I am confirmed as Deputy Secretary, to speak frankly and truthfully.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, we appreciate that. We all want you to succeed. We really do.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. We want you to be upfront and honest with us too.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. According to the Council on Environmental Quality, from 2010 to 2018, Interior's environmental impact statements averaged five years to get to a record of decision—five years to just make a decision, which is absolutely horrible. It's a problem for all types of energy, including those this Administration wants to transition to. I will give you an example. According to a 2023 study by Stanford University, two-thirds of all solar projects requiring an environmental impact statement are litigated, and half of all renewable projects are canceled, more than any other type of energy project. So it does not behoove anybody for an agency not to be efficient in giving us some results quickly, giving us some direction, and making sure that we can follow through.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes, so Senator, it's interesting, I have been on both sides of NEPA. I have been, as I have Fish and Wildlife Service—

The CHAIRMAN. Do you believe we need more permitting reforms?

Ms. ESTENOZ. I'm sorry.

The CHAIRMAN. Do you believe permitting right now is hindering all of us?

Ms. ESTENOZ. Well, what I would say is that I think there is a lot to be done on permitting. So first, let me say about the National Environmental Policy Act—it is a very important body of law. We know that NEPA is an important part of making sure that projects, you know, that we are able to initiate projects and protect important resources in the process. But we also know that NEPA takes longer, often, than any of us want it to take or than it should take. So the Administration has promulgated some new regulations with respect to NEPA. I think this is particularly important as we try to deploy renewable energy.

The CHAIRMAN. We had some NEPA reforms in our agreement on finances and debt.

Ms. ESTENOZ. That's right.

The CHAIRMAN. But they have backtracked on that.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Well, Senator, I think my feeling about permitting and NEPA—these are big topics. So I have been a customer of permitting programs before. And I have spent a lot of time talking to the regulated industry and folks who are coming to us with permit requests. And I have sort of distilled down what the pillars of customer service are when it comes to permitting. And it feels to me like, you know, projects need consistency, they need transparency, they need predictability, and they need timeliness. And these pillars, if we can drive our permitting toward these pillars of what I call customer service and think about the permitted, the regulated community as our customers, and then we can act and I am sure we will talk—

The CHAIRMAN. That would be refreshing.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. I'm so sorry. I am going to have to cut you short because I am way over my time.

Ms. ESTENOZ. I'm so sorry.

The CHAIRMAN. Oh, no, it's not your fault. It's my fault.

Ms. ESTENOZ. We will talk more about it, I am sure.

The CHAIRMAN. We will, I know that.

And I will turn to Senator Barrasso now.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes, sir. Sorry.

Senator BARRASSO. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

I wanted to start with something you talked about early in your testimony—endangered species list, recovery, and delisting. You know, the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem population of grizzly bears—

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes, sir.

Senator BARRASSO [continuing]. Fully recovered for 20 years. I understand why they went on the list initially, down to a hundred—now well over a thousand, spread way beyond the area that people were hoping they would stay in that we knew that they were not going to stay, as they continue to grow. Grizzly bears are still listed as threatened under the ESA. The number of bears is far greater than the number required for delisting by the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes, sir.

Senator BARRASSO. Wyoming has played an important role, as a state, in leading this recovery. So as Assistant Secretary, you will have the authority over Fish and Wildlife Services. When can we expect the Service to delist the grizzly bear?

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you so much for this great question, and if Mr. Daines joins us later, I think we will get it again.

[Laughter.]

Ms. ESTENOZ. It's such a good one. So first of all, let me agree with you, Senator Barrasso, and congratulate Wyoming and everyone who has been working on bears for all these years that the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem recovery management area population has met its recovery criteria. You are absolutely right. It has met and exceeded its recovery criteria. And that is fantastic news, and it's not just Greater Yellowstone, by the way, it's also the Northern Continental Divide that has met its recovery criteria too. So what does that tell us? It tells us bears are doing really well in important parts, and particularly in Wyoming and Montana.

There is a petition before us. Wyoming has petitioned us to delist the Greater Yellowstone. They have asked us to find the population, a distinct population segment. And so that is the sort of arcane part of the law that we are trying to work through. Congress has asked us to use that designation sparingly. And we are also looking at our delisting criteria. So what I would say to you, Senator, is that with the ESA, the question is delist, list—it's also the path you take to get to that decision that matters when it comes to whether or not a court will overturn it or not or sustain it. And so, it's really the path that we are working through, the path that Wyoming has asked us to follow.

So I appreciate the question. And what I want to say to you is, regardless of the outcome of my nomination, I will continue to work with Wyoming on that particular issue.

Senator BARRASSO. Great.

In August of last year, the BLM issued a draft resource management plan for the Rock Springs Field Office. This plan would block or severely restrict access to over 3.5 million acres of federal land in Southwest Wyoming. If finalized, the plan would devastate the livelihoods of the people and the communities in my state. The governor, congressional delegation, state legislature, county commissioners—across the board, everyone strongly opposes what the Secretary has come out with. So far, the Department has done little to address any of our concerns. If confirmed, what would you do differently?

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes, so thank you, Senator. You are right, it's a BLM RMP process, and I am not involved in those processes, but I am very much aware of Rock Springs. I am very much aware of the concern in Wyoming and the engagement in Wyoming and how important it is. As a plan, it covers quite a large area. You are absolutely right. I also understand and am very grateful, just on behalf of the Department, for the incredibly constructive input that folks in Wyoming have provided, in particular. I am particularly grateful to the Governor for his leadership in really facilitating that input. I have heard both the Secretary and the BLM Director say to this Committee that when the final plan comes out that we expect that input to be reflected in that final plan. If I am con-

firmed, Senator, depending on where the plan is, you know, I would welcome—if you think it's important and if I am invited to come to Wyoming and talk to folks about how they are feeling about the plan.

Senator BARRASSO. Well, we would love to have you.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you.

Senator BARRASSO. One final question. In May, the Bureau of Land Management took steps to prohibit coal leasing in the Powder River Basin. Last year, the Powder River Basin represented about 45 percent of all the coal mined and used in the United States. Ms. Stone-Manning has said that existing leases will be able to meet our coal demand in the future. I doubt that. She isn't capable of assessing our future coal demand. I do not think she is capable of doing an objective decision on this. Where do you stand on future leasing?

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you, Senator.

Yes, I am familiar with Powder River Basin—growing increasingly familiar in preparation for this Committee hearing. And yes, coal, even as demand for coal falls, it's still part of the energy mix, particularly, almost exclusively in the important sector of electricity generation, and I understand that. If I am confirmed as Deputy Secretary, I would seek to understand, at the appropriate level, the deepest level, this argument about, sort of, you know—

Senator BARRASSO. That is the question, you know, should the Department end new leasing in the Powder River Basin?

Ms. ESTENOZ. Right and—

Senator BARRASSO. Fundamental question.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes, well, so, you know, I think if I am confirmed, I would need to understand the issue better, Senator, particularly as it relates to the debate you have just mentioned, which is that we have a lot of capacity in existing leases, and whether or not we believe that existing capacity is adequate. You disagree. I would, as the Deputy Secretary, I would come to understand that debate better.

Senator BARRASSO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, that is a tough one because we are concerned about the Administration not following the law. The land and resources belong to all of us.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. And we need that. And we need to have a pathway forward. These are long-term propositions and investments. People aren't making them now if they don't have leases to go on. Mining operations can't start and stop like any other.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Right.

The CHAIRMAN. They have to continue on. If not, you are going to thwart them all.

With that, we turn to Senator Cortez Masto.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am actually going to yield my place in the queue here to my esteemed colleague from Colorado who has to preside relatively quickly over the Senate.

The CHAIRMAN. That is very kind of you.

Senator Hickenlooper.

Senator HICKENLOOPER. I appreciate that. Thank you, Senator.
The CHAIRMAN. You owe her now, you know that, don't you?
[Laughter.]

Senator HICKENLOOPER. I do, trust me. I am fully aware.

And Ms. Estenoz, thank you so much for your service. I want the record to show that there are few people that work in the Federal Government who I hear Republicans and Democrats both praising, from the time when she was working at non-profits and in her years of public service. So we are grateful for all your public service and for taking on this new challenge.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you, Senator.

Senator HICKENLOOPER. I want to talk a moment about water. And it's hard to shift right to water because you talked about the Yellowstone Basin area, where I did my research when I was a geologist for my master's, and then the Powder River Basin, which, of course, in politics in Wyoming is famous for political opponents accusing each other of being just like the Powder River—a mile wide and an inch deep. It's a famous political jargon out there.

The Colorado River is at a critical point. After decades of drought and aridification in the Basin, state and water officials are working assiduously to envision long-term water management for the river after the current operational guidelines expire in 2026. You have a wealth of experience in water management in your time in South Florida, particularly with respect to the Everglades—that river of grass, as Marjory Stoneman Douglas once put it. You are someone who knows rivers and understands water and water management. You know how important it is to rely on state and locally led solutions to where the rubber meets the road for confronting these challenges. When you look at the challenges we face in the Colorado River Basin, how do you see the path forward? What is your perspective?

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you, Senator. And let me first say how proud I think all of us should be, everyone should be, for the tremendous work to stave off a crisis in the Colorado River Basin in the face of record drought. And the reason I credit everyone is because, you know, the place that we find ourselves in now was really the outcome of bringing everyone together—the seven basin states, the tribes, and in particular, giving the tribes a meaningful seat at the table to reach a consensus in this interim period. And what I would say is, my outlook post-2026 is really good because we have sort of demonstrated to ourselves that we can do it and we have got the capacity now, the developing of additional muscle memory for that. And I think what we learned in Florida is that the only path forward on water is a path we travel together. There is no other way to manage water for the future than to bring everyone to the table and to try to find a consensus way forward. That is my 30 years of experience in water management. I feel particularly fortunate that we have Commissioner Touton at the table. She seems to me to have been a truly positive force in the Colorado River.

So what I would say to you, even in my current position, you know, I have some interest on the Colorado River in my current portfolio, and what I would say is that I am very optimistic for our post-2026 future.

Senator HICKENLOOPER. Well, I share your admiration of Camille Touton. She has appeared here a couple times herself and has done a remarkable job of both providing the leadership, but also the technical background.

Ms. ESTENOZ. That's right.

Senator HICKENLOOPER. Which, I think, you bring the same elements to the table.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you.

Senator HICKENLOOPER. In Colorado, there's now an option to add a state park pass. We call it the Keep Colorado Wild Pass—right on your annual car registration when you re-register your car. In the first year of using this model, the state has secured over 1.5 million passholders, over \$40 million in revenue that goes directly to benefit parks, wildlife, search and rescue efforts. It also demonstrates the appeal and the demand for outdoor recreation in Colorado, where we are lucky to have some of the best opportunities around, but recognizing that these opportunities are literally all across the country, as you know well. How is the Department of the Interior collaborating with state agencies, including state offices of outdoor recreation, to ensure continued innovation as the demand for recreation on state and federal lands continues to grow?

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you, Senator. It is such a good and important question. I come from a state where we like to be outside a lot and recreate, and I appreciate very much Colorado's model. I had not heard about the state pass associated with your car registration. The Department of the Interior, one of our very important missions—both on our public lands, our BLM lands, and their multi-use purposes and then, of course, the National Park Service—is recreation. That's why people come. In the Park Service, we are working on a number of innovations, including apps that help folks plan their trips, help folks understand ahead of time, trying to think of ourselves as a recreation and tourism organization and understand how people plan their visits to places like national parks. They tend to plan ahead of time. It is kind of the modern way we travel now. And so that is a big part of it.

We are trying very hard to encourage visitors to seek more than just the top 50 visited parks and recognize that we have recreational opportunities, not only in the rest of the park system, but that often, parks, to your point, to visit a national park, could also be to visit a beautiful state park or a county park. And so, really partnering with local governments and states to figure out how we can leverage each other's recreational opportunities for the benefit of the American public.

Senator HICKENLOOPER. That is exactly the right attitude.

Great, thank you. I yield back. Thank you so much.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you, Senator.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Cortez Masto.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. Thank you.

Assistant Secretary, welcome, great to see you. Thank you for visiting with me in my office.

I am going to just get right to the heart of it. I appreciate your comments so far. I think you have a great reputation so far. I think this Committee is going to test it. One thing that you should know

is that for Westerners, we are aligned on a lot of the issues, and the party politics stops at the state line. We have a lot of issues in common. One of them being this—and I am going to talk to you about it—most of the land is owned by the Federal Government in the West.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. In Nevada, it's over 80 percent. In some of my counties, it's over 90 percent.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Right.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. So it requires a great partnership. One of the things I have asked the Secretary and many working with her, is to do just this—Nevada needs a statewide resource plan.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Right.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. Working with the Federal Government on how we are going to manage all those lands in conjunction with the state needs, our local government needs, and our private sector needs, as well as our conservation needs. The challenge I have is, because you own so much of the land, we are also getting all these federal rules coming through requiring different things and nothing is working together. I need a state resource plan. It will probably be the first ever done by a state, but that is what I am looking for. So I am hoping you are helping us get to that point that will help people in my state manage, not just renewable energy, but so many other things that we need to manage throughout the State of Nevada, in conjunction with the partnership with the Federal Government.

Are you willing to work with me?

Ms. ESTENOZ. Absolutely, Senator. I will tell you, in my career, when I engage with community and with stakeholders, the thing that is universally frustrating for them is inconsistency in government, is when they feel like they are getting a run-around or they feel like rules apply to this here, but then they are different over here. And so, to the extent that we can address some of that and fix it in a statewide plan, absolutely, if I am confirmed as Deputy Secretary, I really look forward to working with you and ensuring that, you know, that we are working together.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. Thank you.

And let me mention, in Nevada, people don't even realize this—there are 28 federally recognized tribes. And so part of that conversation is bringing them in, making sure there is tribal consultation and we are all working together, as the stakeholders are all around the table, like you said. That is what you have been so focused on throughout your career, and I appreciate that.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. I am going to focus on a couple of things that I need your help with in Nevada. When BLM Director Tracy Stone-Manning was before our Committee last month, I talked to her about how I recently pressed the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of the Interior to update regulations that allow federal land in Nevada to be eligible for affordable housing projects. Affordable housing is necessary. In fact, the BLM Director signed a new agreement last August to make eligible public lands available for a \$100 an acre, and that is far below the fair market value for these lands. We urgently need you

to be at the top of this and pushing this and making this happen in our state.

So I am hoping I can get your commitment to work with us to make sure that we move forward in identifying this federal land for affordable housing.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Senator, you are touching on an issue that is at the front-of-mind for me in my current role, and if I am confirmed as Deputy Secretary, I do commit to working with you on this. Housing—employee housing, and affordable housing, particularly, but our nexus to affordable housing, we see it with our own employees, you know, who have a hard time affording to live, you know, in these areas. So yes, Senator, I look forward to working with you.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. Thank you.

I am going to ask for another commitment. Just recently we have the Shoshone–Paiute Tribe of Duck Valley Reservation. They are on the border of Nevada and Idaho. They are in both.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. They have a school that they have had for years that was on federal land that the BIA had access to and control over. Over the years, we have discovered that the BIA improperly disposed of fuels and pesticides on that land and has contaminated it.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Okay.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. The State of Nevada has come in and said we are going to move your school to protect our kids, but there's no remediation by the Federal Government. I need your help in making sure that happens. I have talked to the Secretary about making sure that happens, making sure that we get commitments. There have been commitments, but failed dates of commitment happening. So I need somebody from the Federal Government that is going to be a partner and I invite you to come. I was just there for a high school graduation. I invite you to come out to the reservation to see for yourself. So I hope I can get that commitment from you.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you, Senator. And yes, this is a new issue for me, and if I am confirmed as Deputy Secretary, I absolutely commit to working with you on it.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. And then, finally, again, we have a community—Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge and Death Valley National Park. You know it, Death Valley National Park, I hope. So—

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. In Nye County, right? So I toured this area. I know it well. I grew up in southern Nevada. There is a challenge we have there that we are trying to protect this land and the Devils Hole pupfish out of that area from any type of mining and mineral drilling that is going to impact the groundwater that our tribes rely on and that the local community relies on. And so there has been a letter that I have sent to Secretary Haaland requesting the Department to commence a 20-year mineral withdrawal of sensitive areas in that area, in that watershed. Everybody in my community, everybody in that community supports this, from the county, to the tribes, to everyone else. And so, I just need a commitment

that you are going to work with us to address and protect this sensitive land.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Senator, I will commit to working with you and understanding this issue better. Whether I am confirmed as Deputy Secretary or not, this is something that is obviously in my current portfolio, so I am happy to commit to learning more and working with you.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. Thank you. Congratulations again. Welcome to your husband and your family that is listening as well.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. Thank you.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you, Senator.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Murkowski.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning, Ms. Estenoz.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Good morning.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Welcome back to the Committee and thank you for the time that you gave me and my team yesterday. I appreciate that. It was a good opportunity to speak directly with you about the many decisions, really the torrent of decisions that we have seen out of the Department, which have effectively restricted access and that simply prevent development within the State of Alaska. These decisions have a major impact on a state where more than 200 million acres of land are managed by the Department of the Interior. They impact our jobs. They impact our economy, really, our ability to function as a state, both now and then into the future. But really, of late, and it seems like things have just accelerated the closer we get to an election time, but it seems like the Department is acting more like an environmental activist rather than a land manager, failing to recognize that we are a state where people live there, we work there, we protect the land there like nobody else can or will.

We have kind of reached the point where we dread Friday. We dread Friday afternoon because that is when the Administration has seemingly been dropping these decisions with no notice, and that was something that you and I discussed yesterday. No notice to the congressional delegation on issues that are specific and unique to one state alone. So whether it was the rejection of the Ambler project, keeping 28 million acres locked down in public land orders, the PLOs, transforming our petroleum reserve from a place for energy production to, effectively, a de facto wilderness, or the looming evisceration of the coastal plain oil and gas program that we expect later this month. But you take into account all of these actions and many more and it's not hard to see why so many Alaskans are disappointed, they are frustrated, they are angry with the Administration's policy. And the sense that we have and that I hear directly from so many is that we are being treated like one big park. Everybody wants to come and see Alaska, but they want the jobs for Alaskans to basically be carrying the bags of the tourists rather than good, honest, year-round jobs where we are able to access our resources and provide, not only for the benefit of our citizens, but of the country.

But we are losing. We are losing the access to our lands. Instead of recognizing our very strong history of responsible development, the Administration seems to hold it against us. I think the Administration is rejecting some of our country's best opportunities for access, whether it's for critical minerals or other resources. And so we see this, and then on the other hand, we see countries like Russia, like Iran, like Venezuela, being almost rewarded, effectively, for abuse of their resources. They look the other way when it comes to human rights and environmental abuses. You look to Mozambique. You look to Congo. You look to China. And so we have just got this contrast that just makes no sense to the average Alaskan. And a point that I shared with you and I feel really strongly about—the Department is not keeping their commitment to us, but they are also not keeping their commitment to the law. They are just not keeping the commitment to the law. The latest example being the process to lift PLO 5150. That was abruptly canceled. We are not trusting Interior to follow the law when it comes to consultation with Alaska Natives or the State of Alaska in making these decisions.

So you are in a tough spot here. I grant you that. It is the Administration's policies that I think have kind of stacked the deck against you as a nominee. And I understand that, but I also need you to understand where Alaskans are coming from when they look at this Administration, when they look at the Department of the Interior and they see how this heavy hand is coming down on us. So I have got one question for you, and I need you to know that I can't vote to confirm you if I get the sense that you think everything is going okay in Alaska and that you would just simply continue the Department's—just the continuation of the heavy handedness coming out of the Department that is effectively shutting down the state.

So the question to you is, why should I support your nomination?

Ms. ESTENOZ. Senator, first of all, let me thank you for the time you gave me yesterday.

Senator MURKOWSKI. I appreciated it too, I really did.

Ms. ESTENOZ. I really was so grateful, not only for the time, but for the frankness, which is continuing now, which I actually appreciate so much. I went home last night. I thought about our conversation throughout the night. I woke up in the middle of the night, I thought about our conversation some more. And that is the kind of frank conversation that I really appreciate.

So what we talked about yesterday, and what I said earlier right before you came into the room, is that I know that I will have to earn both the trust and confidence of everyone both inside the Administration and on this dais. And all I can bring to this conversation today, and all I can say to you today, all I can do is compare myself to myself, which is to my 30-year career and the way that I have worked until this point. We have worked with you in my current portfolio, and we talked a little bit about it yesterday. I feel like we have tried very, very hard to go to Alaska, and you know, I have been to Alaska in this job, and I went, specifically, to listen. And we have tried to do that. We have tried to think transformatively. I have spent a lot of times, as I mentioned to you yesterday, I began during the presidential transition, even before

I was in this job, learning about Alaska, trying to understand Alaska because it is so—it is such a different place. It's such a special place. I mean, just the statutory framework is completely different.

And as I mentioned to you, Senator Sullivan said to me early on, you need to take ANILCA training, and, by golly, I took ANILCA training. And he was right. So what I want you to know is that—and I will say this a couple more times—is that, you know, my career is what it's been, but my personal life is also a factor here. You know, I know, because I was part of an energy-dependent family. My father was in the energy industry when we lived in Louisiana. We were a young family and our income depended on, you know, on oil and gas in the Gulf. So I understand that, as I said in my opening statement, that every issue we work on, whether it's a species issue or an energy issue, it's really a people issue. And that is what I would bring to the Deputy Secretary's job.

I know that I—my resume, you know—I have not worked in energy and public lands, but I know the Department really well. I have been a senior leader at the Department for 11 years. I know how it works. In my current portfolio I have intersected with energy, I have intersected with public lands. And I have a strong leadership style, Senator, that is—it's a combination. The engineer in me drives me toward knowledge, data, understanding issues very, very well, and very deeply so that my decisions can be thoughtful. The personality part of me is that my leadership is relationship-based. That means having a strong relationship with you and with your team and with the Alaska delegation. That is what I can assure you that I will bring to the Deputy Secretary job because I do not have any other way to work. I don't know any other way to work.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Ms. ESTENOZ. That's my answer.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Estenoz, I think what we are trying to tell you is that we believe that government should be our partner.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. Not our provider and not our decider, which is what they have decided to do, and that is why some of us who come from energy-rich states, which basically fuel this country, feel like we are getting left behind, we are basically not needed anymore, and none of them seem to understand. So what we are asking for is that partnership when you come into this position.

So with that, we will go right to Senator King.

Senator KING. I note the Senator from the grizzly bears is at the dais, welcome.

The CHAIRMAN. You're ready. You're all teed up for grizzly bears.

Senator KING. We will be disappointed if we don't learn something about grizzly bears.

Mr. Chairman, I want to address Senator Murkowski's question and hopefully make you feel better about this nominee based upon personal experience. About a year and a half ago, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed a large wildlife refuge area in western Maine. It happens to be an area of the state that is of incredible scenic and recreational value. It also is an area that has had tremendous local conservation efforts. The communities and the pri-

vate sector have done enormous amounts of conservation, setting land aside. The communities contacted this nominee. I contacted her, as did others in the delegation. And she listened. And she listened to the communities and she listened to their concerns and she weighed the facts and made a decision that this area did not need a wildlife refuge because it was already, in many ways, in a protected status. That's what I look for in a person in a position like this, someone who will pay attention to local concerns and listen. So I wanted to thank you for that and I think it speaks well of your approach and I think the Chairman put it well, we should be partners here, not adversaries, and we should try to find solutions to problems that are mutually beneficial.

A couple of other points. Five-year EISs. That should be history.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes.

Senator KING. And I never want to hear about a five-year EIS. This Committee has heard me say this numerous times. A month ago, we had the anniversary of D-Day. Eisenhower retook Europe in 11 months. To me, that is the standard for how long things should take. And a five-year EIS is just a disservice to the process and to the citizens of the country.

Secondly, on the issue of permitting—we need permitting reform and the expediting of permitting in order to achieve a clean energy future. We are going to have to expand the grid substantially because of new demands of electrification in our society, and we can't hold up important, meaningful transmission projects or mining of critical minerals to supply EV batteries with a cumbersome, slow war of attrition in permitting. So I think we need to be—we have always thought of permitting as a, you know, as a sort of stopping process. We have to see it differently now. There may be environmental detriment, but there may be enormous environmental benefit, and I think that has to be part of the calculation.

Finally, I am worried about deferred maintenance on our public lands and our parks. Four years ago, we passed the Great American Outdoors Act. It was virtually unanimously supported by this Committee—historic legislation to pay down the backlog of maintenance. But the problem is the Department and the Administration are not funding maintenance adequately, and we are digging the hole again. Can you commit to me that you will advocate for adequate funding for maintenance of our national parks and public lands? It's sort of a mundane subject, but we are not going to be able to pass a Great American Outdoors Act every five years and convince our colleagues that this is necessary when, in fact, the system is somehow expecting it, and therefore not providing the maintenance on an annual basis that is necessary. So talk to me about that issue.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes, thank you, Senator. And let me just first, just say thank you very much. It was a pleasure to work with you on the proposed refuge, and I am really glad we got to a great place, and I am grateful that you picked up the phone and called me and we were able to work together.

Senator KING. Which I will continue to do, I assure you.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Please do. I am sure you will, and I welcome it.

And because both Senator Manchin and you mentioned the word partnership, I appreciate that word very much. The entire time

that I have been at Interior, this approach as partner, and in my case, it has been states, tribes, local governments, and stakeholder groups—very well-organized stakeholder groups. And as I said earlier in my remarks, I have found the only way really to advance policy is to come at it in partnership.

On deferred maintenance, I could not agree with you more, Senator. And what I would say is if—I would love to work with you on how we can best—we can do better communicating our needs. Cyclic maintenance is what we call the annual maintenance. There is no question that inadequate cyclic maintenance digs the deferred maintenance hole deeper, and we don't want that. Deferred maintenance is all about catching up. And so—

Senator KING. By the way, deferred maintenance is a debt.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes, right, right.

Senator KING. It's going to have to be paid eventually, and usually it will be more expensive than if we did it now.

Ms. ESTENOZ. That is a great way to describe it. And so, I commit to working with you, and I welcome working with you and others who are concerned about deferred maintenance, you know, on not only advocating for additional resources, but is there something we can do better about communicating the need that we think would be persuasive on this point of, as you say, this kind of dull, not super-exciting, but incredibly important issue of maintenance.

Senator KING. Thank you.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you.

Senator KING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator.

And now we have Senator Daines.

Senator DAINES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank my co-chair of the National Parks Subcommittee. Angus and I keep the National Parks Subcommittee. We call ourselves co-chairs. No matter who is in majority control, we are co-chairs, and that is the way we will continue to operate that as long as we are both on that Committee. So Angus, thank you.

Thanks for your service, Assistant Secretary Estenoz, and congratulations on your nomination to be the number two over there at DOI.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you.

Senator DAINES. I look forward to hearing more today about how you think about managing there, should you be confirmed. I will tell you, last night, I was going back and forth with Cam Sholly, Yellowstone National Park. He was grateful for your outreach to him. Angus, the co-chair of the Parks Committee, should know that because of the fast action of the rangers at Yellowstone National Park, acting on some credible intelligence, they prevented what could have been a mass casualty event over the Fourth of July holidays. They confronted a shooter and they killed him. One ranger was wounded. Thankfully, he's going to be okay, but had surgery. But I know Cam was grateful for your outreach to him—

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you.

Senator DAINES [continuing]. During the time, and not only what happened in Yellowstone Park over the Fourth of July holidays but also with the housing issues there, with the flood that we dealt

with, and I know Cam is grateful for your outreach and your support, and I am too. Thank you.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you, Senator. Thank you.

Senator DAINES. I want to talk about the St. Mary site. You thought I would talk grizzly bears right out of the gate. I will get to grizzly bears here, but I want to talk about the St. Mary siphon failure.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes.

Senator DAINES. This includes the Bureau of Reclamation in terms of what we need to do to recover. It's currently working to address the catastrophic failure. We had two siphons from the St. Mary River, which provide water, essentially irrigators at Montana's Hi-Line. If confirmed, will you work with Reclamation and the farmers and ranchers on the Hi-Line? The Hi-Line is the northern part of our state, up close to the Canadian border. It's very arid. It's dry. We depend on water to stay alive up there, and the irrigation systems in the St. Mary infrastructure. Just want to get your commitment that you would work with us and use all available resources at your disposal to replace these siphons and ensure the work is done as quickly as possible.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Senator, I appreciate the question, and I'm sorry to hear that we have a water management infrastructure failure. No one knows how serious those are better than I do, and if I am confirmed, I absolutely will work with you and with BOR to ensure that we are addressing that issue adequately.

Senator DAINES. Yes, this is one of the situations where you can't miss one irrigation season. Right now, we have got high temperatures. We have had a cool June and July, and suddenly the temperature spiked. July in Montana is higher temperatures and it gets to be very—

Ms. ESTENOZ. And Senator, I'm sorry, may I just quickly—may I thank you for acknowledging the incident in Yellowstone, and let me just say to the Committee, Senator Daines is correct. The bravery of our law enforcement officers in Yellowstone did, indeed, likely prevent a disaster and potentially a mass casualty event. It is true that one of our officers was shot, a very young officer. He is going to be okay. He is with his family now. And if Senator Risch was here, I would thank him, because our officer was flown to Idaho Falls, and the medical professionals in Idaho cared for him and we are very grateful for that. So thank you for raising that.

Senator DAINES. Of course, and thanks for your outreach.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes.

Senator DAINES. I do want to talk grizzly bears.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Okay, yes, sir.

Senator DAINES. Of course. So last February, of course, FWS initiated not a 17-month status review—it's called a 12-month status review for a reason. If they want to initiate a 17-month status review, we would be expecting the result here this month. But it's a 12-month status review. So you know, the data is very compelling in terms of where the recovery target is, where the actual populations are.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes.

Senator DAINES. My question is, would you help us and focus on getting this 12-month review done that should have been completed in February?

Ms. ESTENOZ. Senator, so thank you, and it is good to talk grizzlies with you again. And first of all, let me acknowledge that I agree with you 100 percent. Not that my agreement matters, because the facts are what they are. The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem population is recovered. The numbers from 2022—965. Not only that, as I said earlier, the Northern Continental Divide population is also recovered, at more than 1,100 bears. And we do have this petition in front of us that is asking us to delist the GYE as a distinct population segment. It is that definition that, you know, we are working through. It has got—you know, we tried to do that before. We have tried to do that twice before, and the courts have rejected it. And so, we are working through that. We are working through our delisting criteria. And in the meantime, I want to say, because I didn't say it earlier, when we were chatting about grizzlies, I just, I need to say for the record how grateful we are to both Montana and Wyoming for the stewardship of grizzly bears. And grizzly bears are doing well in those states because the states are taking good care of grizzly bears. And we know that.

And then, I also want to say for the record that we want grizzlies to be recovered and delisted. I want to say that without reservation. We want that. I want that for all of our listed species, right? A delisting is a celebration. But as I mentioned, in the ESA, the path that you use to get there also matters. It's not just the listing decision, it's the path you take. That is often what courts will attack. So we want to make sure we have got the path right.

Senator DAINES. Yeah, thank you, and I agree, but there's no reason we can't get this 12-month study wrapped up.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Sorry.

Senator DAINES. We're at 17 months.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes, sir, thank you.

Senator DAINES. The question is, we have got to get this wrapped up. Now, you all at Interior can decide to slow-roll this thing to the election if you would like. I think that's a big mistake. I think it violates the integrity of this process if we don't just commit to the 12-month, which should have been done in February. It is now the middle of July.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes, Senator, I can assure you that this process is running based on what the needs of the process are, and I agree with you, you know, driving toward a decision as soon as possible.

Senator DAINES. When is it going to be done?

Ms. ESTENOZ. Well, I think we're—I don't have a date for you, but as I mentioned to you when we met a couple of weeks ago, this issue may be—it's in the top five for the Fish and Wildlife Service leadership. I can tell you Martha has been out to Montana and Wyoming now a couple of times in the last month.

Senator DAINES. Yes.

Ms. ESTENOZ. So this is a top priority, and I want to stay in touch with you also in the days and weeks ahead.

Senator DAINES. I am just a little skeptical—

Ms. ESTENOZ. I know it. I know it, Senator.

Senator DAINES [continuing]. That we are going to see this get done before the election. I just think we need to get it done. I mean, just for the sake of the bears.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Agreed.

Senator DAINES. For the sake of the process. I hope we can dissolve the politics, if we might be able to, and try to stay focused on the science and get this done. I realize you want to get a solid review done so it protects ourselves when we get litigated in court.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes. Right.

Senator DAINES. But, I mean, at some point, is it 12 months—if we gave you two years, I'm afraid you would come back here and say we're at 36 months and still thinking about it.

Ms. ESTENOZ. I appreciate that. I appreciate that, Senator. You are right. And we have, you know, it's a little bit further complicated because we have three petitions before us that are all related. You know—

Senator DAINES. Yes.

Ms. ESTENOZ [continuing]. And so, I appreciate it, and as always, I will stay in contact with your office in the days and weeks ahead.

Senator DAINES. Okay.

I am well over my time, and the Chairman is very gracious.

Ms. ESTENOZ. I'm sorry.

Senator DAINES. I just, I got to talk the Ninth Circuit Cottonwood fix. Will you commit to working with this Committee to get this bipartisan—voted out of here by voice vote—fix to save our forest management industry in the West?

Ms. ESTENOZ. Absolutely, Senator. You know, it's one of the great regrets. When I was first in front of this Committee in 2021, you and I agreed, let's work together on Cottonwood, try to do an administrative fix. Couldn't get that done. Then, I tried, you know, we tried to help and work with you statutorily. So yes.

Senator DAINES. Well, and I am grateful we have got, you know, I have got my colleagues over on this side of the dais here, who have been supportive of this now. I think we are ready. We could use your help here to get this across the finish line.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Hirono.

Senator HIRONO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Congratulations on your nomination. When you appeared before this Committee at your last nomination hearing, I had invited you to visit Hawaii, and I understand that you have.

Ms. ESTENOZ. I have.

Senator HIRONO. So thank you very much. And I hope that you had an opportunity to hear from the people of Hawaii some of their major concerns relating to the Department and what the Department can do. And in that regard, I did want to thank you for your leadership and that of the Secretary for investing over \$36 million to help conserve some of Hawaii's most endangered native bird species. We do not have grizzly bears, but we have birds, beautiful birds.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Beautiful birds.

Senator HIRONO. So I really appreciated your explaining your leadership style, and it was good to hear some specific examples of how you have been a listener and your responsiveness. And I think part of what we need to do in Hawaii, especially, is to reach out to the Native Hawaiian community, and I hope that you were able to experience some of that when you visited Hawaii. But with regard to the Forest Bird Strategy, can you just explain your role in developing and implementing the Hawaii Forest Bird Strategy, and how you have really included the Native Hawaiian community in developing this strategy?

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you, Senator. And to answer your question, Hawaii was a remarkable experience, a transformative experience. It was my first visit and I was very grateful to be there. We did spend a great deal of time with the Native Hawaiian community on a number of issues. And so I was grateful for that perspective and experience as well.

On native Hawaiian birds, we did a lot of work during my visit. I got to meet a lot of the folks who are working on that. I think one of the pillars of that approach—so we know that these incredibly imperiled, very culturally significant species are under threat by invasive mosquitoes that essentially carry avian malaria. And these mosquitoes are actually expanding with climate change. So they are actually expanding in elevation, chasing the birds up the sides of the caldera and mountains. And one of the pillars of our approach here is to engage with the Native Hawaiian community and to incorporate cultural and indigenous knowledge in our approaches so that we are addressing this crisis in a way that is effective and that is also respectful of the cultural significance that this species plays. And my role has been to, you know, to really provide that leadership and encouragement and making sure the program has the resources that it needs, and that's what I have done.

Senator HIRONO. Thank you. And by the way, I want to add to this discussion my concern also about deferred maintenance, and I think our Committee members are very much committed to more being done because that is what deferred maintenance is, we keep deferring it.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes.

Senator HIRONO. So thank you very much.

One of the new issues that will come before you, if you are confirmed, is COFA implementation. COFA is something that I really worked tirelessly with my colleagues on to get the compacts approved, but what's new under the newly approved compacts is that the compact citizens who live in the United States, and there are many of them—20,000 or so in Hawaii—but they are now able to access federal programs and they were not able to do that before. So implementation of this 20-year agreement with the Freely Associated States—that would be Palau, Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands—is a high priority, and I would appreciate a status update from the Department when it's available about how we are doing with providing the kinds of services that they are now able to access.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you, Senator, and I want to congratulate and thank everyone, the members of this Committee, who are es-

essential to the reaching the COFA milestone—I know Senator Risch, Senator Manchin, yourself, Senator. And the Department is absolutely committed. If I am confirmed as Deputy Secretary, I will be committed to its implementation. It is absolutely critical, not just to meet our obligations to our affiliated states, but also for our national security in the Pacific. I mean, this is an incredibly important initiative, and it would be a high priority for me if I were confirmed as Deputy Secretary.

Senator HIRONO. I will look to your leadership on that because the COFA agreement involved three different departments, and Interior is the lead, but it obviously included the DOD and State. And one of the reasons that it took longer than I think that it should have taken is that there are three departments, and there was a lot of, I wouldn't say finger pointing, but somebody had to take responsibility for all of this happening. And so I thank your Department for your leadership, and you are going to need to continue to do that because we have thousands and thousands of COFA citizens who are living in our country who need the kind of assistance that we can provide and that should have never been taken away from them. So thank you very much for your commitment.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you, Senator.

Senator HIRONO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator.

And now we go to Senator Cassidy.

Senator CASSIDY. Thank you. Good morning, ma'am.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Good morning, Senator.

Senator CASSIDY. I was pleased to hear that you understand the economic impact of the ability of a family to work offshore in order to create an opportunity for their daughter to have a future such as you have had, because some people are just insensitive to that or don't care.

Now, you mentioned earlier, I am told, a question from Senator Manchin, that we will continue leasing, but I am going to press you on that. We will continue leasing means sometime in the distant future—ten years from now, we may have another lease. But as you know, there has to be, kind of, certainty as to the flow. Next year we are going to have a lease and the year after and the year after, because if you work for a company which serves those rigs, you can't have a two-year interruption. Everybody is laid off and you can no longer do it. So will there be a lease sale in 2024?

Ms. ESTENOZ. Senator, so, thank you very much. What I would say to you is that we have got a five-year plan. And if I am confirmed as the Deputy Secretary, my top priority—I have said a piece of this throughout the hearing—it would be to immediately, at a deeper level, understand the policy implications and our policy decisions in the energy space. And this is one of them that is very important. And I would want to work with you to understand, for example, our five-year plan, the approach to offshore leasing that we proposed.

Senator CASSIDY. So let me stop you for a second.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes, sir. Thank you.

Senator CASSIDY. In a previous hearing, an acting Deputy Secretary suggested that it would take 18 months to process this.

Well, that will put us into late 2025 and 2026. You're thinking, you have been in office for three and a half years. If you had started right off the bat, we would have something happening now, and then something happening in 2025 and 2026. So it seems as if there is foot dragging. I am just, from the outside looking in—oh, how long can we stretch it out so that yeah, we are technically doing it, but in reality, those families that depend upon this income, as your family once did, they will be left hanging out to dry, but we don't care because we don't want it to happen.

So I guess my frustration is, why is it always tomorrow that this is going to happen? Why didn't it happen when the dadgum Administration took office?

Ms. ESTENOZ. So Senator, I know this is a frustrating response to you, but I am just speaking the truth, which is that I have not been part of the policy conversation on energy since I have been in the Administration. So if I were confirmed as Deputy Secretary, I would be, and I would seek to understand the details and the implications at a deeper level at that time.

Senator CASSIDY. Well, let me just mention another observation.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes.

Senator CASSIDY. It does seem like there is a strategy of death by a thousand cuts. So there has been this latest ruling regarding the Rice's whale, in which they have found critical habitat, maybe, because there was a single, possible—maybe, kind of, we think—could-have-been sighting off of Texas, and they know they are off of Florida. And so they are putting a corridor in between. So far, not too bad, except where they have actually seen the Rice's whale, the corridor is about five miles wide, and off the coast of Louisiana, it's anywhere from 20 to 30 miles wide. That is significant because there is a ten mile per hour limitation on speed only for offshore service vehicles for the rigs, not for a power boat. So it's like a targeted, we are going to make it economically inefficient for you to actually drill offshore. Now, you have not been there while they are doing this, but that is the sort of thing that from the outside looking in, it's just hard to convince me that this isn't a strategy of death by a thousand cuts to the people who depend upon this industry for their economic livelihood.

Again, you are going to say, and rightfully so, you have not been part of that decision-making, but that will be something that I will be kind of looking at. The science seems quite convenient—"we are relying on the science," but you can't help but notice it's five miles wide here, but where there is Outer Continental Shelf drilling, it's 20 to 30 miles wide. Hmm, that science makes a lot of sense to me—no, it doesn't.

So now that I have been kind of bursting at the head, let me go here—revenue sharing. Let me just ask you about this.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes.

Senator CASSIDY. Revenue sharing. The Land and Water Conservation Fund, which I know that the Chairman has used very nicely for West Virginia and that Daines was speaking very highly of, is funded almost entirely out of oil and gas revenues. There is a cap that limits the amount coming to the Gulf states, which we use this for coastal restoration. By the time this Committee hearing is over, my state would have lost about 100 square yards of

land to relative sea-level rise. We use that money, by our state's constitution, to rebuild our coastline. Last year, Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, and Alabama missed out on BOEM, on about \$216 million that would have gone to local resiliency in these four states because there was this cap that we are trying to raise with the RISEE Act. So I am just asking you, with your experience in the Everglades, is there a nice ROI on investment in resiliency, which is to say that if we invest now, we have to spend less later?

Ms. ESTENOZ. I promise I didn't plan that question with you, Senator Cassidy. Yes, there is a tremendous ROI. You know, the numbers we have used in the Everglades for wetland and coastal restoration is something like four to one ROI, and that's an old number. It's probably higher now. I traveled to Louisiana last August and spent some time out there, looking at some of that coastal restoration. And I think, you know, I know you have got the RISEE Act. The RISEE Act is moving through and if I am confirmed as Deputy Secretary or even in my current role, my current portfolio, you know, I would welcome the opportunity to work with you. I understand, you know, that you have given me some good numbers and I would like to understand those better, about the impact when it comes to the revenue sharing cap as well. Coastal restoration is obviously essential for our coastal states.

Senator CASSIDY. Thank you. I yield.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator.

And now we have Senator Hoeven.

Senator HOEVEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to you and the Ranking Member for holding this hearing today. Secretary, I appreciate you being here.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you, Senator.

Senator HOEVEN. One of the things we have worked on very hard in the Theodore Roosevelt National Park is to maintain the horses that are there. The wild horses have been there for, obviously, a very long time. There was some attention by the Park Service to consider removing the horses.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes, sir.

Senator HOEVEN. We had a public process, a lot of input, people very, very, very much want horses in that park. I worked to secure a commitment from the Park Service to maintain horses in the park, and not only horses, but a genetically diverse herd, a large enough herd to maintain their genetic diversity. Are you committed to making sure that we continue to retain horses in the park and maintain an adequate herd so that the genetics are adequately preserved?

Ms. ESTENOZ. Senator, let me say, it was nice to speak with you on the phone when we were leading into that decision, and I want to thank you for your leadership on that issue. I want to thank you for your close communication with our regional director. Your office has a very good relationship with him. And the Park Service has decided to take a step back, you know, from its plan and look again at horses at Theodore Roosevelt, and I think, you know, my role will be to work with them and work with you to find that right management level for that herd that is the right management level for the herd, and then we also want to talk about sort of the re-

sources needed to maintain that herd by the Park Service. You know, we have got to protect all of those resources, and you know all of that. I mean, you know the unit very well. So I look forward to working together on it.

Senator HOEVEN. Thank you, and at least one or more of the tribes in the state have offered to assist in any way, shape, or form—Standing Rock, as well as the State of North Dakota, and there's a lot going on out there. So, you know, in your travels you may want to come out, but there's a ton going on in the park—

Ms. ESTENOZ. Wonderful, yes.

Senator HOEVEN [continuing]. And the horses are an important part of it. So thank you for—and the regional administrator for us has been just outstanding. We have worked with him before, as you know, on elk and other things.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes, yes.

Senator HOEVEN. And he does a fine job. He knows—

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes, I have known Bert for 20 years. He is a really easy guy to work with.

Senator HOEVEN. Yes, he is a good man. Thank you on that.

Now, one of the challenges that we have got is that you are looking at what you call a resource management plan in the Dakotas. The challenge with this, at least the way that you have proceeded so far, is that it would really close off leasing oil and gas acreage and also our coal acreage. And you have to understand in, North Dakota, maybe you do, but we have split ownership between Interior, the state, and between private individuals. So, for example, the Federal Government might not own any of the surface acres, but they might own some of the mineral acres underneath. The state might own some, and private individuals might own some. So if, in this resource management plan, you close off access or refuse to lease your minerals, all of a sudden, whether it's oil or coal or anything else, they are stopped, and you might not even own any of the surface acreage, right? And so then, they would have to go somewhere else or go around you. That disenfranchises not only the State of North Dakota, but also those individuals.

So you need to work with us on this management plan. And again, it goes back to multiple use, you know, in the grasslands and in federal lands. And so, whether it's BLM, whether it's, you know, the National Grasslands, any of these, and of course, we work with Department of Ag on that, but we have got to be able to access those so that people are not unfairly disenfranchised.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes, thank you, Senator. And if I am confirmed, I absolutely will commit to working with you on that. I have a little bit of experience, believe it or not. We have a mixed-estate situation in Big Cypress National Preserve in Florida—privately held minerals, publicly held surface estate. So I have a little bit of experience there. So yes, I look forward to working with you on that, if I am confirmed.

Senator HOEVEN. And, you know, obviously, we do an incredible amount in ag, in energy, livestock, all those kinds of things, but it's also tourism and recreation. We do it all out there. We truly follow that multiple use, but we have got to make sure that we are able to access lands properly and fairly for both the state and for individuals.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you, Senator.

Senator HOEVEN. Okay.

I guess the other thing I would want to ask about is, the Biden Administration put out numbers on drilling permits, and it said that there had been more drilling permits approved than were actually drilled, and at one time they were saying there were more drilling permits approved through the Biden Administration than for the same amount of time during the Trump Administration. Now, that has come out, and that number has been dropped significantly by something like a thousand drilling permits. And so I would like to make sure we have the accurate information. You know, we are concerned, obviously, that the price of gasoline is up, and we believe that nobody can do it—I mean, we produce over 1.2 million barrels a day just in my state, and nobody has better environmental standards. And so we can't allow Russia or OPEC or Iran or anyone else to produce for the world. We need to be producing not only for ourselves and others, but just to bring prices down, fight inflation, and really for geopolitical security.

So if you would, I would like those latest updated numbers, if you would provide those?

Ms. ESTENOZ. I will take that back, Senator, and make sure that those get to you.

Senator HOEVEN. Thank you.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you.

Senator HOEVEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator.

And I just have one more question to follow up with.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. And then Senator Barrasso does too. And I do not know if Senator Hoeven has another question or so.

But with that, mine is this: In the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which we passed, bipartisan, in 2022, the Interior Department was given a statutory deadline to issue the final offshore carbon capture and storage regulation by November 2022. Interior missed that deadline and continues to delay each year. All the science tells us we cannot meet our climate goals without carbon sequestration. But it's an oxymoron because if they don't really want to find a solution for it, they can blame the problem on fossil fuels, when we can use it with technology to make it much cleaner. So given the Administration's focus on decarbonization, the issue should be a top priority, yet a draft rule has not even been published yet. So I am asking you, if confirmed, will you commit to publishing a proposed rule before the end of this year?

Ms. ESTENOZ. Well, Senator, as we get to know each other better, you will know that I am always a little reluctant to commit to things that I don't have control over because my word is everything, right? So I do not want to set myself up for failure—

The CHAIRMAN. Do you have any idea where this is right now?

Ms. ESTENOZ. My understanding is that it is a priority. It is in development. I mean, I think, what I understand about it is that it's standing up a brand new regime, a policy and permitting regime. And so it's complicated. And I know—

The CHAIRMAN. Let me make sure I understand.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. Because you understand the politics we are dealing with.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. The Administration, or John Podesta, does not want to find a cure, okay? So that is what we are dealing with. You are required to act on the facts. We can do it. We can safely sequester. We have proven that, commercially. And all we are asking for is give us the report that shows it can be done. That is all we are asking for. I will fight the Administration. We will both fight it, whatever is going on there. But if you all will just—someone that we can count on to give us the facts that it can be done offshore.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Senator, thank you. And if I am confirmed, as I have said this morning, you know, I will work with you. I will communicate with you. And I will take responsibility to be as smart as I need to be to communicate with you in an effective way that you find useful.

The CHAIRMAN. Since I won't be here after January, I will rely on my friend here to make sure—

Ms. ESTENOZ. Mr. Barrasso.

The CHAIRMAN [continuing]. That you are reporting back to us.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Absolutely. Thank you, Senator.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Barrasso.

Senator BARRASSO. Yes, thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Just a couple other things. You know, in November 2022, Laura Daniel-Davis, the Acting Deputy Secretary, she signed a decision memo that raised royalty rates on oil and gas leases, raised the rates. According to the memo, they said lowering rates would actually encourage more oil and gas development and offer greater energy security. We are worried about energy security for the country. But she went ahead and chose to impose higher royalty rates so that, she said, "the oil and gas production would move to a lower," and she said, "more socially optimal level." So that the socially optimal level is not what is most interesting for the country in terms of greater energy security. Totally divergent positions.

Do you believe that less American oil and gas production is socially optimal for our nation?

Ms. ESTENOZ. So Senator, I am not sure I know what socially optimal is, but what I would say is that—

Senator BARRASSO. Well, it sounds like it's a religion by this Administration and the Department right now.

Ms. ESTENOZ. What I would say is that, you know, I know that the Administration is pursuing a clean energy transition, and that addressing the climate crisis, lowering greenhouse gas emissions, this is something that is a high priority for us. And we have said this morning that we know that oil and gas production is going to be a part of the energy mix for a long time. And if I am confirmed as Deputy Secretary, you know, the energy portfolio would be—and my understanding the nature of the debate and really understanding what are the contours of the debate—you know, that is going to be my number one priority.

Senator BARRASSO. In addition to the contours, it's the long-term consequences of the debate. We had a hearing here a couple of weeks ago that the Chairman called talking about long-term energy needs and AI. And even according to the New York Times, the

energy needs of this nation five years from now because of AI, because of electrification of vehicles, because of crypto, all of those things is going to be like adding a whole new California to the grid. And China is committed to having all the energy that they need for AI, and it doesn't seem like this Administration is committed to having the energy needed to be able to compete against China. And that was the result of the hearing here. So I am just talking in terms of the long-term consequences.

So you know, under the current Secretary, the Department has leased, on average, 96 percent less onshore acreage for oil and gas production each year than the three prior Administrations—even the Obama Administration—much, much less. It has also issued, on average, 93 percent fewer onshore oil and gas leases each year compared to the prior Administrations, including the Obama Administration. In your view, is the Department headed in the right direction when it comes to oil and gas leasing?

Ms. ESTENOZ. Well, so, you know, again, Senator, I have not been in the policy discussion on energy. Thus far, I would say that the Administration is confident that our plan is going to meet our energy needs into the future. I understand there is disagreement, and if I am confirmed as Deputy Secretary, I would be then part of that debate and those discussions and I would look forward to, you know, understanding your perspective on them.

Senator BARRASSO. I think what you just said is true—the Administration believes we are on the track to do that. We have had, here testifying, the FERC—the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission—and NERC—the reliability—they all say the Administration is wrong on that viewpoint. So I look forward to you getting deeper into that from a scientific standpoint to see there.

The average time under Secretary Haaland to take to get an oil and gas permit has nearly tripled when compared to the Obama Administration. In one of the BLM field offices in Wyoming, the average wait time is now more than a year and a half. If confirmed, you would be the person overseeing the Bureau. Does nearly tripling the time it takes to receive an oil and gas permit sound reasonable to you?

Ms. ESTENOZ. Well, Senator, we talked a little bit about permitting this morning across the board, and we know that the permitting process across the board can take longer than any of us really wants it to take. And certainly, if I am confirmed, you know, I would look into concerns, if there are, you know, as you have expressed concerns into the time it takes to process oil and gas permitting or any permitting.

Senator BARRASSO. So it gets into the discussion of what we consider reasonable because the federal law requires the Bureau of Land Management to issue oil and gas leases to winning bidders within 60 days. I mean, that is the current law. The Bureau has refused to issue leases to winning bidders of its 2020 lease sale. It is now 2024. The Bureau has sat on these leases for three and a half years. I mean, those are the facts.

If confirmed, you would oversee the Bureau. Is this a good example of an issue that would merit at least your personal time and attention?

Ms. ESTENOZ. Indeed. I mean, certainly. Any issue that is raised by a United States Senator would be worth my time and attention, and this is one of them, certainly. And you know, again, this is the perfect example of, you know, where the Deputy Secretary would step in and say, all right, what's happening, and then, you know, communicate directly with you on that point.

Senator BARRASSO. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Let me just follow up real quick on that.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. For an example, a drilling permit needed for a proposed lithium project on BLM-managed land has taken more than two years versus less than six months to secure the same permit on private lands. You don't have to reinvent the wheel here. All you have to do is basically reverse engineer. How are we doing it four times faster on private land than where we have total control on BLM land? That makes no sense to us.

Ms. ESTENOZ. You know, thank you, Senator. And I will just say this—which is perhaps a little bit more substantive—which is that, you know, I mentioned earlier that in my current portfolio I have intersected, you know, with some of these issues, as overseeing a regulatory agency now. And you know, one of the lessons that—a couple of the lessons that I learned is that in some of these efforts, you know, engaging with the regulatory agency early and often, you know, that is an important thing to do. In our case, it was Fish and Wildlife Service, right? Engage leadership from the very beginning. The bigger and more complex the project, the more important it is to have certain leadership driving us to milestones, helping deconflict, helping getting over disagreements in stuck places. So I have learned some of these lessons and I would certainly bring those into the Deputy Secretary.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, let me just make one final comment and then we will close out here.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. The Department of the Interior seems to take stewardship to a whole new level. The Department of the Interior is not the owner of this land. It's the people of America, every one of us sitting here, we all own BLM land. And we are appreciative of good stewardship, but the bottom line is, it should be for our benefit, and this is what is not happening. We are fighting with ourselves to get the best results. That is what is frustrating, sitting here as a U.S. Senator, trying to have a dialogue with people who—you are a steward, you don't own it. It's not yours. This seat is not mine. It's not John's. We understand that. We are stewards. We are representing the people and we are asking you all to do the same.

So with that, we do appreciate you being here. We appreciate your responsiveness to our questions, which I think you have been straightforward and I appreciate that very much and your willingness to take on this important role, which is so, so important to our country.

Ms. ESTENOZ. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. So with that, our members will have until 6:00 p.m. tomorrow to submit additional questions for the record.
And with that, the meeting is adjourned.
[Whereupon, at 11:34 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

APPENDIX MATERIAL SUBMITTED

Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Hearing to Consider the Nomination of Shannon A. Estenoz
to be Deputy Secretary of the Interior
Questions for the Record Submitted to Ms. Shannon A. Estenoz
July 10, 2024

Questions from Ranking Member John Barrasso

Question 1: During the Fiscal Year 2025 budget hearing before this Committee on May 2, I asked Secretary Haaland how the National Park Service (NPS) was leveraging private-public partnerships to address its bed gap. The Secretary did not give a clear answer.

- a. What specific statutory authority does NPS already have to proactively engage in private-sector partnerships for employee housing?

Response: In addition to its general authorities, the Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996 (54 USC 101331 et seq.), provided the National Park Service with the authority to enter into agreements with entities to develop, construct, rehabilitate, or manage housing located on or off public lands for rent or lease to NPS employees. This authority was intended to leverage the private sector in providing an adequate supply of housing for NPS employees and reduce the need for appropriations.

- b. What is currently preventing NPS from engaging in public-private partnerships across the National Park System for the purposes of employee housing?

Response: NPS has found that the statutory framework created by the Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996 creates challenges in the implementation of this authority, such as with respect to occupancy percentages and rent collection limitations, among others. The housing issue is complex and NPS has been exploring multiple approaches to addressing the problem. This has been, and will continue to be, a priority for the Department, and if I have the honor of being confirmed, I commit to continuing to work with you toward affordable housing solutions.

Question 2: In his testimony before the House Committee on Natural Resources, NPS Director Sams stated that the National Park Centennial Challenge Fund (Fund) can be “instrumental in garnering and fostering strong partnership” by matching philanthropic contributions with federal funding for certain agency activities. Recently, NPS staff has expressed an interest to include employee housing as an eligible program or project of the Fund in order to “leverage partner donations” to address the agency’s housing shortage.

- a. Why is NPS simultaneously advocating for expanded authority of the Fund to address the housing shortage, while reducing its operating budget by \$2 million to fund “Administration priorities”?

Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
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- b. Which unlisted “Administration priorities” will be funded with the \$2 million reduction of the Fund?

Response to a and b: The President’s FY 2025 budget request includes \$13 million, an increase of \$1 million above the FY 2024 enacted level, to leverage partner donations for signature projects and programs at national parks. While the Centennial Challenge requires a philanthropic match, the NPS has broad authority to match virtually all of its federal funding and will continue to identify leveraging opportunities across its federal appropriations. The President’s Budget Request for the NPS addresses a number of priorities, including housing and park operational capacity.

Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Hearing to Consider the Nomination of Shannon A. Estenoz
to be Deputy Secretary of the Interior
Questions for the Record Submitted to Ms. Shannon A. Estenoz
July 10, 2024

Questions from Senator John W. Hickenlooper

Question 1: We know that partnerships between state, Tribal, and federal agencies are essential to ensuring the health of our forests as fire vulnerability increases across the West. The Colorado State Forest Service has been a leader in executing on the promise of Good Neighbor Authority, partnering with the BLM to accomplish more cross-boundary work. They have also begun conversations with the Colorado State BLM office about partnership opportunities in the National Seed Strategy and other federal reforestation efforts.

I recently introduced two bipartisan bills with Senator Marshall to help us build on partnerships like these, helping support implementation of state forest action plans as well as boosting our reforestation capacity.

Ms. Estenoz, when it comes to building wildfire-resilient landscapes, how will you ensure that Interior works to encourage shared stewardship of our public lands between federal, state, and tribal agencies?

Response: As I stated at my confirmation hearing, I have found the best way to advance policy is through partnerships. That includes partnerships with states, Tribes, local governments stakeholder groups and this Committee. The Department faces a host of challenges in wildland fire management, including wildfire suppression and shoring up the wildland firefighting workforce. Our partners are essential to the Department's success in carrying out fuels management work and restoration efforts. If confirmed, I look forward to continuing to strengthen our partnerships and to working with you to better understand the details and implications of your legislation to support implementation of state forest action plans and reforestation capacity.

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Questions from Senator James E. Risch

Question 1: As I am sure you are aware, I have repeatedly asked every representative from the Department of the Interior about the Lava Ridge Wind Energy Project in Idaho. Neither the Director of the BLM nor the Secretary could name a single Idahoan who is in favor of this project. It has been widely opposed by affected counties, local governments, Tribes, the Japanese American community, and the Idaho legislature, and yet, the Department of the Interior still seems dead-set on pushing it through.

- a. If you are confirmed, can you commit to delaying all work on this project until Idahoans' concerns are properly considered?

Response: I appreciate the time you spent talking with me about this issue – I heard you loud and clear and will relay your message to Departmental leadership. With the issuance of the Final Environmental Impact Statement for this project, the BLM is considering its decision on the project. If I am confirmed, I will learn more about this project and commit to listening to and working with you and stakeholders on these issues moving forward.

Question 2: There is currently an understanding between the Fish and Wildlife Service and the state of Idaho regarding the Endangered Species Act listing status of grizzly bears in the lower 48 states. Do you know what the status of this directive is, and what markers are being used to determine the scientific status of grizzly populations?

Response: I know this is a priority for you. As I mentioned in the hearing, we have had multiple petitions from states pertaining to grizzly bears that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is continuing to work through. The best available science tells us that grizzly bears in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem have met and exceeded their population recovery goals. But the question before us isn't just whether the populations have met their biological recovery goals, it's also the legal requirements for delisting and the path we take to any delisting decision that matter when it comes to whether a court will uphold or overturn it. I would like to reiterate that we want grizzlies to be recovered and delisted. We are committed to and proud of our partnership with state wildlife managers to steward grizzly bears. This remains a top priority for FWS leadership and FWS is working through the process on the petitions for delisting. I will continue to work diligently and will maintain open communication with you on this issue.

Question 3: If action is taken to introduce new populations of grizzly bears, can the Department guarantee that this reintroduction effort will not delay or forestall the delisting efforts of presently recovered grizzly bear populations elsewhere?

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Response: Establishing a population of grizzly bears in other locations, including for example, the North Cascades recovery area, will contribute positively toward recovery of the species, which in turn will benefit future assessments of the status of grizzly bears in the lower 48 states. Consequently, reintroduction efforts would not delay or forestall delisting efforts elsewhere. I will continue to work diligently on this issue and will maintain open communication with you on this issue.

Question 4: The Bureau of Land Management is currently updating sage grouse management plans across the West. These individualized, state-led plans are great examples of the successes of local wildlife management.

- a. If confirmed, will you commit to prioritizing local leadership when it comes to sage grouse?

Response: In my career, I have worked countless hours on the ground in Florida wearing many hats including as a state water manager, a stakeholder, a gubernatorial appointee, and as a senior career federal executive. These experiences have taught me that working closely with local leadership is critically important, particularly when working to resolve wildlife management issues. I have not worked directly on the sage grouse management plans in your state as those are managed by BLM, but I know voluntary state programs to manage habitat are critical. In my role as Assistant Secretary, I have overseen the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and have ensured that FWS is coordinating with BLM to provide data on the conservation status of the species to assist BLM in its plans, as protecting species, and the ecosystems that support them is a collaborative effort. If confirmed, working closely with local governments, Tribes and states on issues before the Department will remain a priority for me.

- b. How will you work alongside states and industry stakeholders to ensure mineral and energy projects may still operate successfully?

Response: The President has made it clear that affordable, reliable energy for American homes and families, as well as development and production of critical minerals, are priorities for the country. If I am confirmed, I will follow what I have done throughout my career -- I will work collaboratively with, and listen to, states, stakeholders, Tribes, and communities to address the myriad issues we face together.

- c. What is your plan to ensure grazing is protected as a beneficial conservation practice within sage grouse management plans?

Response: I understand that the sage grouse conservation plans reflect a lot of work and a lot of compromise from many stakeholders, including habitat protections that struck a balance with other land uses. It is my view, based on my work with ranchers in Florida, that grazing can result in positive conservation benefits to those lands when carried out responsibly. If confirmed, I will

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bring that experience with me as I learn more about these land management plans, among other issues.

Question 5: The Bureau of Land Management finalized the Public Lands rule earlier this year. However, it still has not been made clear how conservation leases will be awarded, utilized, or will interact with other existing, productive uses.

- a. Is it your understanding that conservation can coexist with other multiple uses?
- b. How would you plan to ensure this, if confirmed?
- c. What safeguards would you implement to prevent serial litigants and other activist conservation groups from leasing federal lands simply to prevent productive uses?
- d. Under this rule, do you believe there are any requirements of a conservation leaseholder other than to “conserve” the leased lands?
- e. If conservation leased lands are degraded by the actions – or lack of actions – of a conservation leaseholder, do you believe a leaseholder should be held responsible for restoring the leased lands?
- f. How do you plan to ensure this rule will not drastically impair our domestic mineral production goals?
- g. Do you believe grazing should be considered an accepted conservation tool under this rule?

Response to a - g: I understand BLM’s mission regarding multiple use land management as set forth in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, and that multiple uses must be managed appropriately in accordance with FLPMA to sustain public lands for the benefit of future generations. With respect to the BLM’s Public Lands Rule, I have not been involved in the development of this rule, or with conversations about the implementation of the rule. I know from my experience in Florida, however, that restoration work can go hand in hand with other land uses including, for example, recreation and grazing. However, if I am confirmed, I will be in a position to learn more about this rule to ensure its successful and collaborative implementation, including providing clarification on the issues you have raised.

Question 6: FLPMA is clear that only Congress has the constitutional authority to designate or dedicate federal lands for specified purposes, such as conservation. Do you believe the BLM’s action to add conservation as a use is lawful in light of FLPMA’s clear direction and recent congressional precedent?

Response: My understanding is that BLM’s Public Lands Rule recognizes conservation as a component of public lands management, on par with other uses like energy and timber production, recreation and grazing, consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act. If I am confirmed, I will be in a position to learn more about this rule to ensure its successful and collaborative implementation, consistent with the law.

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Question 7: Much like with oil and gas development pipelines, it often takes decades for federal permitting processes and litigation to play out in mineral projects. Benchmark Mineral Intelligence has forecasted that, based on average mine size, 384 new mines are needed by 2035 to meet the demand for electric vehicles and energy storage batteries. Secretary Haaland recently told the House Natural Resources Committee that since 2021, the Biden Administration has approved five new mines requiring an Environmental Impact Statement, or the type of mines that Benchmark is referring to in their forecasting. The record has since been corrected by indicating that one of the mine approvals was actually done under the prior administration.

- a. With only four mines approved since 2021, if confirmed, what would you do to advance the pipeline of projects needed to meet energy transition goals?
- b. Are the restrictions placed on mineral development by the administration sufficient to attract the investment needed to meet energy transition goals?

Response: As I noted during the hearing, in my career, I have been a customer of permitting programs and have spent a lot of time talking to regulated industry and permit applicants. When it comes to permitting, I believe there are pillars of customer service that we need to drive towards: consistency, transparency, predictability, and timeliness. If confirmed, I would certainly approach my decision-making around this issue with these principles at front of mind.

The President has made clear that development and production of critical minerals are priorities for the country and this Administration. America's public lands have long been – and will continue to be – an important source of the minerals, including critical minerals, that we use in our advanced technologies and for national security. If confirmed, I will look to take a balanced approach to oversee mining on our public lands and waters. I believe we can use our natural resources, create new jobs, and protect our environment.

Question 8: There is a tremendous backlog of infrastructure maintenance and development that needs done on federal public land. With the recent influx of federal funds and exponential increase in recreation on public lands, it is frustrating to see existing roads and infrastructure in such disrepair.

- a. What will you do to expedite the dispersal of maintenance and development funds in Idaho?

Response: I am committed to ensuring that every dollar provided by Congress to the Department for these critical purposes is spent as efficiently and wisely as possible. The resources that Congress has provided through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Inflation Reduction Act, and Great American Outdoors Act to address our infrastructure needs on public lands, including the deferred maintenance backlog, have been transformational. For example, we have GAOA projects planned, underway, or completed in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and each of

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the territories, including BLM's Boise District Road Repairs. For the bureaus currently under my purview, I am pleased that we have been able to get more than \$2.2 billion at NPS and more than \$170 million at FWS from GAOA funding out the door under my leadership. If confirmed, I will draw upon the lessons that I have learned as a leader in the Department and in the state of Florida and as a customer of government services when I was a stakeholder to ensure that projects get the funding they need.

Question 9: We have seen extremely concerning moves by this administration, including this Department of Interior, to dismantle our federal hydropower system. Do you support the Federal Columbia River Power System?

- a. If yes, how will you preserve the system benefits and prioritize hydropower if confirmed to this position?
- b. Do you recognize that only Congress has the authority to remove or substantially change the purpose of federal dams?

Response: I recognize hydropower as an important source of domestic clean, renewable energy that contributes to this Administration's clean energy initiatives and helps consumers. If confirmed as Deputy Secretary, I commit to working with you and stakeholders in the Columbia River Basin and my colleagues in the Bureau of Reclamation and other bureaus to better understand the decisions around hydropower and implications of those decisions.

Question 10: Do you support hydropower production and expansion?

Response: I support hydropower and I recognize that hydropower is one of our country's largest sources of clean, renewable energy and it is an important part of our energy portfolio. If confirmed, I will work to support hydropower on our public lands, including supporting Reclamation's work to seek new environmentally friendly hydropower projects, and I will be committed to ensuring the safety and efficiency of our dams and responsibly managing our hydropower projects.

Question 11: Do you believe it is the responsibility of the Bureau of Reclamation, and Department of the Interior as a whole, to support hydropower to preserve our nation's energy security?

Response: I understand that the Bureau of Reclamation is the second largest producer of hydropower in the United States. As a renewable and reliable energy resource, hydropower will continue to be a critical component of our efforts to develop a robust and sustainable clean energy economy to tackle climate change and enhance America's energy security and protect consumers.

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Question 12: It was recently announced that Laura Daniel-Davis, who has failed to pass this Committee but is still currently acting Deputy Secretary, will co-chair the recently announced Columbia River Task Force.

- a. If confirmed, will you be replacing Ms. Daniel-Davis on this task force? If not, please explain why an unconfirmable political appointee should serve in this role instead of the Deputy Secretary.
- b. What, in your view, is the intent and purpose of this task force? What does the administration believe it will achieve?
- c. What would your priorities be as co-chair?

Response to a - c: The Columbia River Task Force was established by the White House to coordinate efforts across federal agencies, to work in partnership with Tribes and states to restore salmon and other native fish populations, to support Tribally sponsored clean energy production, and to develop a long-term strategy to meet the clean energy, transportation, and other key needs of the Columbia River Basin. This Task Force complements many of the Department's programs, from protection of endangered species, to working with Tribal communities to honor our federal commitments to Tribal Nations, to helping make communities more resilient. At Interior and throughout my career, strengthening existing partnerships and building new ones has been central to my leadership. While I can't speculate on what specific positions I may assume if confirmed, I expect that the Department will be represented in this process and others at the appropriate leadership level.

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Questions from Senator Lisa Murkowski

Question 1: In response to Chairman Manchin’s questions on energy independence, you stated, “American energy is good. American energy independence is critical.... Its important to seek affordability and reliability for the American people.”

- A) Can you please expand on what you mean when you say ‘American energy independence?’
- B) Can you please explain your reasoning when you stated “American energy independence is critical”?

Response to (A) and (B): The President is committed to energy independence and moving towards a clean energy future that protects consumers and our national security. As I said during the hearing, oil, gas and coal are going to be a part of our energy mix for some time to come during this clean energy transition. To me, American energy independence means responsibly developing our own natural resources, including from public lands, to protect our national security and American consumers while creating good-paying jobs and bolstering our economy. I believe that we can do that together.

Question 2: In response to Senator Barrasso’s question on the decision memo titled “Recommendations for Decisions on the Final Notice of Sale (Final NOS) for the Cook Inlet Planning Area Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Lease Sale 258 (scheduled for December 30, 2022),” you stated that you were unfamiliar with the definition of socially optimal. That makes at least two of us... According to the decision memo under the section ‘Royalty Rate Recommendation Rationale’, it states:

BOEM’s recommended royalty rate of 18 ¾ percent accounts for the social costs of greenhouse gas emissions (SC-GHG) during upstream oil and gas activities, as encouraged by section 208 of Executive Order (E.O.) 14008. The recommended royalty rate of 18 ¾ percent is equivalent to the sum of the minimum royalty rate of 16 ⅔ percent established by the IRA, plus a royalty rate surcharge of 2 ⅓ percent. BOEM estimates that a royalty rate surcharge of 2 ¼ percentage points would account for the social cost of upstream greenhouse gas emissions from production. This estimate is described in BOEM’s draft paper entitled “Options for Incorporating the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gas Emissions,” which analyzes options to incorporate the upstream SCGHG into royalty rates in accordance with E.O. 14008. This draft paper finds that a 2 ¼ percent royalty rate surcharge would meet the administration’s objectives stated in E.O. 14008. A 2 ¼ percentage surcharge plus 16 ⅔ percent would equal 18 11/12 percent and exceed the statutory maximum royalty allowed by the IRA; thus, BOEM is recommending the maximum-allowed royalty of 18 ¾ percent.

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The purpose of incorporating the SC-GHG into the royalty rate is to provide a mechanism that factors the social cost of greenhouse gas emissions into operators' decision-making process. As lessees internalize the costs associated with carbon emissions, OCS activity and corresponding production could move toward a lower, but more socially optimal level.

- A) Now, with a greater understanding of how President Biden's Department of the Interior defines 'socially optimal', do you believe that less American oil and gas production is socially optimal?

Response: As I stated at my hearing, I don't know what that term refers to. What I can say is that America is producing more oil than ever before and that is a good thing for our energy security. This Administration is committed to American energy independence and transitioning to a clean energy economy that protects consumers and combats the climate crisis, but oil and natural gas are going to be with us for some time while this transition is underway. In my current role, I have not delved into the nuances of royalty rates, or the various laws and requirements, including the Inflation Reduction Act, that have informed these decisions. If I am confirmed, it will be a priority for me to learn the contours of this discussion, and to understand your perspective on this issue.

- B) Laura Daniel-Davis, in her role as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Land and Minerals Management, agreed with the recommendations of BOEM Director Amanda Lefton, to assess the highest possible royalty rate of 18 2/3 percent even though "a 16 2/3 percent royalty may be more likely to facilitate expeditious and orderly development of OCS resources and potentially offer greater energy security to residents of the State of Alaska, a reasonable balancing of the environmental and economic factors for the American public favors the maximum 18 3/4 percent royalty for Cook Inlet leases."

With a simple yes or no, please state whether you agree with the recommendation of BOEM Director Amanda Lefton and the decision by Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Daniel-Davis to assess the maximum royalty rate 18 3/4?

Response: I appreciate that the decision to set royalty rates for offshore oil and gas development is an issue of importance to producers, consumers, taxpayers, and local communities. Again, I am not involved in the processes for setting royalty rates in my current position at the Department, however, I have spent a lot of time over my 30-year career talking to, and understanding, regulated industries and other stakeholders. If confirmed as Deputy Secretary, on issues like this I will use the tools that have served me best in my career – communication,

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transparency, and intellectual honesty – to learn about this issue and engage with you and your constituents to understand your perspectives, and I commit to doing so.

Question 3:

- A) In response to the Chairman’s question related to energy, you stated ‘It is important to seek affordability and reliability for the American people.’ Please explain whether you believe the decision to assess the highest royalty rate under law for lease sale 258 aligns with your views stated during the hearing that ‘it is important to seek affordability and reliability for the American people?’
- B) During the hearing you stated that “American energy is good. American energy independence is critical.” If BOEM is able to determine that a royalty rate of 16 ⅔ for a Cook Inlet lease sale would be expected to increase federal and state government revenues, provide greater energy security for the State of Alaska, and help ameliorate the long-term supply challenges facing the Anchorage area would you have concern approving a royalty rate at 18 ¾ percent?
- C) Do you believe that Alaskans should face ‘an appropriate surcharge’ that results in higher energy prices, lower state revenues, and greater energy insecurity ‘because of the serious challenges facing the Nation from climate change’?

Response to (A) – (C): This Administration is committed to responsibly developing American resources to produce affordable and reliable energy for consumers while ensuring a fair return for taxpayers. I understand that the issues facing Alaska are different than the issues facing those in the lower 48 due to the unique circumstances in Alaska, with its unique statutory framework. Again, I have not been involved in setting royalty rates. If I am confirmed as Deputy Secretary, I will bring my 30 years of experience listening to perspectives from all sides to decision-making at the Department, including pertaining to energy development, and I will take responsibility to communicate with you and other Members in a constructive and effective way.

Question 4: ANILCA contains what is known as the “no more” clause—under the no more clause, the agency cannot put another conservation system with Alaska, at least over five thousand acres, without the consent of Congress. Congress really does have to decide if there are going to be more conservation lands in Alaska. It’s not something that the agencies can decide on their own.

- A) Is that your reading of the ANILCA ‘no more’ clause?
- B) How would you treat the no more clause, if confirmed as Deputy Secretary?

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Response to (A) and (B): Although I am not an attorney, my understanding is that the "no more" clause of ANILCA restricts certain Departmental actions related to areas over five thousand acres without Congressional approval. As I said at my hearing, Alaska is a special place, with a unique statutory framework. If confirmed, I will bring my leadership style to the job -- reviewing data and understanding the issue before us at a deep level. I also commit to working closely with you and your team and stakeholders to understand the issues and, in particular, the views of Alaskans on the issues, before us. This is the approach I have used throughout my career in Florida and at the Department, and, if confirmed, will continue to use to ensure that my decisions are well-informed in accordance with law.

Question 5: The administration's 2023 report on the 30x30, the pledge to preserve 30% of U.S. lands and waters by 2030 claims that: "President Biden used his executive authority to complete protections for the entire Beaufort Sea Planning Area in Alaska from future extractive development. The withdrawal ensures protections for important habitat for whales, seals, polar bears, as well as subsistence purposes."

- A) Do you believe that President Biden's unilateral executive action to withdrawal 2.8 million acres of the Beaufort Sea is in line with congressional intent of the "no more" clause? If so, please explain your reasoning.
- B) Do you believe the Department can fulfill the conservation protections for 30 percent of lands and waters by 2030 without breaking the 'no more' clause of ANILCA?

Response to (A) and (B): The America the Beautiful initiative is a locally led and voluntary conservation effort that honors private property rights and supports the voluntary stewardship of private landowners, with the goal of conserving 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030. I understand that the President issued his proclamation in accordance with the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act, ANILCA, ANCSA and other applicable laws. I believe that all decisions made by the Department must be made in accordance with applicable law, and this includes decisions made relating to the America the Beautiful initiative.

Question 6: When signing ANILCA, President Carter promised that "A hundred percent of the offshore areas and 95 percent of the potentially productive oil and gas and mineral areas will be available for exploration and drilling." --assuring us that Alaska would remain a resource production state with the partnership of the Department.

- A) Do you believe those remain accurate today?
- B) Can you please provide estimates for how much of Alaska's onshore and offshore are available for oil, gas, and mineral exploration and development?

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Response to (A) and (B): Alaska is home to an abundance of resources that are both significant nationally and vital to Alaska Native people and rural communities for subsistence. Balancing conservation of these resources, particularly in the face of climate change, and the needs of the communities that rely on them while providing appropriate access for development on public lands remains a priority for the Department. If I am confirmed, I look forward to becoming well-versed in the Department's leasing process and working with you to learn your perspectives, and the perspectives of stakeholders, including the state of Alaska, Alaska Native Tribes and Corporations, and industry.

Question 7:

- A) Can you explain what 'NPR-A' stands for?
- B) Can you explain the intended purpose of the NPR-A?
- C) Can you explain why Congress and President Ford felt the need to create the NPR-A?
- D) Do you believe that development of the resources in the NPR-A has had a positive impact on the lives of those that live in the communities within the NPR-A?
- E) How does the establishment of special areas within the NPR-A promote American energy independence or bolster energy security?

Response to (A) - (E): My general understanding is that under the Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act, Congress directed the BLM to balance oil and gas development with the protection of fish and wildlife, subsistence, recreational, and other values in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A). In my current role, I have not been involved in decisions regarding the management of the NPR-A. If I am confirmed, I commit to working with you on these issues moving forward. I understand Alaska is unique and has a special relationship with the Department and I look forward to building a relationship with you to help serve your state and your constituents.

Question 8: In a 2006 BLM report to Congress directed by my legislation, the Alaska Lands Transfer Acceleration Act, BLM found that d-1 withdrawals on 152.18 million out of 158.96 million acres – 95 percent – “have outlived their original purpose” and “could be lifted consistent with the protection of the public’s interest.” BLM recommended that PLOs be lifted on 50.1 million acres of land it manages in Alaska, with PLOs remaining in place on 6.8 million acres “until a more appropriate withdrawal or land management prescription can be put into place through the land planning process.” Yet, that is not happening.

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- A) Do you believe it is fair to the State of Alaska, ANCSA Alaska Native Corporations, or residents of Alaska to have these conveyances arbitrarily held in limbo?
- B) Is it fair to the American taxpayers who have funded decades of analysis on the impact of revoking these PLO's and who now run the risk of funding duplicative analysis of these areas should the BLM fail to a timely decision?

Response to (A) and (B): I have a deep appreciation for the importance of close communication and transparency with states, localities, Alaska Native Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, and other stakeholders affected by Departmental actions. I also understand, having been a state regulator and a stakeholder, the frustration of feeling that actions that are expected are not happening. If confirmed, I will be briefed on the status of this issue and I am fully committed to maintaining open communication with you and being responsive to your requests for engagement.

Support for the Nomination of Shannon Estenoz as Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior

Wednesday, July 10th, 2024

The Honorable Joe Manchin
Chair
Senate Energy and Natural Resources
Committee
306 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Barrasso
Ranking Member
Senate Energy and Natural Resources
Committee
307 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Chairman Manchin, Ranking Member Barrasso, and members of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources:

On behalf of millions of members and supporters from across the country, including hunters, anglers, outdoor enthusiasts, businesses, and land stewards from all fifty states, the undersigned organizations urge you to support Ms. Shannon Estenoz's nomination to serve as Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI). We urge your committee to support and advance her nomination expeditiously for full Senate floor consideration.

Ms. Estenoz's conservation expertise and experience through her public service career, including at the current Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, demonstrate a strong commitment to stakeholder engagement and local and state collaboration. Ms. Estenoz served as a political appointee to three Florida Governors from both parties, and to the Governing Board of The South Florida Water Management District and served as Director of Everglades Restoration Initiatives and Executive Director of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force under the Obama Administration. She understands the importance of meaningful engagement with Tribal Nations, communities, elected officials, corporate partners, and other stakeholders to advance solutions.

During her earlier tenure at DOI, she played an instrumental role in securing a \$90 million partnership with the state of Florida and led the effort to rebuild a portion of the Tamiami Trail Bridge to allow water to flow into Everglades National Park. She also launched a dynamic program alongside private landowners, the Department of Defense, and the National Park Service to preserve lands and waters around military installations. This innovative interagency effort leveraged a \$80 million investment from the Land and Water Conservation Fund to sustain native wildlife and habitats, and guard against climate impacts for at-risk species.

For 30 years, Ms. Estenoz's profound knowledge of wildlife and parks management and her civil engineering background has helped communities and agencies across the country work together to protect rivers, landscapes, and wildlife while maintaining critical energy and infrastructure needs. Ms. Estenoz's balanced and bipartisan approach to conservation, stakeholder engagement, and leadership makes her an excellent choice to lead DOI's conservation and energy efforts.

Our collective organizations and businesses strongly urge your committee to support and advance Ms. Shannon Estenoz's nomination this session so the full Senate can act quickly and confirm her as the next Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Alaska Wilderness League | 33. National Ocean Protection Coalition |
| 2. America the Beautiful for All Coalition | 34. National Parks Conservation Association |
| 3. American Bird Conservancy | 35. National Wildlife Federation |
| 4. American Rivers | 36. Natural Resources Defense Council |
| 5. American Sustainable Business Institute | 37. New Mexico Wildlife Federation |
| 6. American Whitewater | 38. Ocean Conservancy |
| 7. Animal Wonders KC | 39. Ocean Defense Initiative |
| 8. Azul | 40. Park Watershed |
| 9. Bat Conservation International | 41. Potomac Valley Audubon Society |
| 10. California Outdoors | 42. Program for the Study of Developed Shorelines |
| 11. CalWild | 43. Project Eleven Hundred |
| 12. Chesapeake Conservancy | 44. Rachel Carson Council |
| 13. Clean Energy Action | 45. Resource Renewal Institute |
| 14. Coalition to Protect America's National Parks | 46. Rural Coalition |
| 15. Committee on the Middle Fork Vermilion River | 47. Save the Manatee Club |
| 16. Conservation Lands Foundation | 48. Sierra Club |
| 17. Defenders of Wildlife | 49. Smith River Alliance |
| 18. Earthjustice | 50. Society of Conservation Biology North America |
| 19. Empower our Future | 51. Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance |
| 20. Endangered Habitats League | 52. Superior Watershed Partnership and Land Conservancy |
| 21. Endangered Species Coalition | 53. Taunton River Stewardship Council |
| 22. Energy and Environment Initiative | 54. Taunton River Watershed Alliance |
| 23. Friends of Blackwater, Inc. | 55. The #RelistWolves Campaign |
| 24. Friends of Merrymeeting Bay | 56. The Conservation Fund |
| 25. Friends of the Kalmiopsis | 57. The Wei LLC |
| 26. Great Egg Harbor Watershed Association | 58. The Wilderness Society |
| 27. Great Old Broads for Wilderness | 59. The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation |
| 28. Healthy Ocean Coalition | 60. Tropical Audubon Society |
| 29. Howling For Wolves | 61. West Virginia Rivers Coalition |
| 30. International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) | 62. Western Watersheds Project |
| 31. League of Conservation Voters | 63. Wyoming Wildlife Advocates |
| 32. National Audubon Society | |