

Trump Appoints Endangered Species Foe to Oversee Protection of America's Most Imperiled Wildlife

By [Center For Biological Diversity](#)

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The Trump administration has quietly named Susan Combs — an outspoken foe of endangered species and a climate change denier — as acting assistant secretary for fish, wildlife and parks. She now oversees the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the endangered species it protects.

“Putting Combs in charge of the Fish and Wildlife Service is like appointing an arsonist as the town fire marshal,” said Stephanie Kurose, endangered species specialist at the Center for Biological Diversity. “Combs will only work to strip away critical protections for our most vulnerable animals, not protect them. As long as her industry pals make a profit, she won’t think twice about letting a species go extinct.”

As a former Texas state comptroller, Combs wrested control of the state’s endangered species program from the Department of Parks and Wildlife to her office, which managed state fiscal and tax matters, not biology. She used her authority to oppose any Endangered Species Act protections, often teaming with the oil and gas industry.

Combs was nominated in 2017 to be the U.S. Department of the Interior’s assistant secretary for policy, management and budget, where she would have controlled the purse strings over the entire department, including the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Her nomination was approved on a party line vote in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. However, the full Senate did not take up her nomination and sent it back to the White House at the end of 2017. In 2018, the Trump administration re-nominated Combs to the same position. More than 70 conservation organizations sent a [letter](#) to the Senate opposing her nomination.

Combs is the third political appointee named as “acting” assistant secretary for fish, wildlife and parks since Trump took office. Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke appointed Aurelia Skipwith, a former Monsanto employee, to the role in April 2017. Then in January, Zinke appointed Jason Larrabee, the former chief of staff for Rep. Jeff Denham (R-Calif.), to the position.

The Federal Vacancies Reform Act limits which political appointees can serve in an acting capacity in particular Senate-confirmed offices to a period of up to 210 days, and only for a limited time after a new president is sworn in. Once 300 days or more have passed since a position becomes vacant, the ability to appoint acting officials is severely limited. To date, Trump has not named a person for the Senate to confirm in the assistant secretary for fish, wildlife and parks job.

“Trump’s dereliction of duty to even offer names for key officials for the Department of the Interior is damaging our nation’s natural heritage,” said Kurose. “It has allowed a parade of unqualified political cronies to occupy the highest levels of the Interior Department and cause even more harm behind closed doors.”

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1.6 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

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