

Opening Statement for Tom Strickland
Environment and Public Works Hearing
Thursday, March 26, 2009 at 10:00am

Thank you Chairman Boxer, Senator Inhofe and members of the committee. I am honored to be here with you today as President Obama's nominee for Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. Earlier this week I also appeared before the Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee.

I am joined here today by my wife Beth, and I would like to thank her for all of her love and support over many years. Not able to be here today, but with us in spirit, are our three daughters, Lauren, Annie and Callie.

Like each of you, I have a deep commitment to public service and consider it a privilege to have the opportunity, if confirmed, to return to government service. As I will briefly describe in a few moments, I have had the opportunity during my career to serve in both state and federal government, and these experiences have been the highlights of my professional life.

The responsibilities of this position include oversight of two very important parts of the Interior Department – the National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service. As I will address in my brief remarks, I believe my passion and experience qualify me for this position at this important moment in time. A lawyer by training, I have spent the majority of my career in Colorado where I have worked in both the public and private sector. Following a judicial clerkship with a federal judge, in 1979 my wife and I moved to Denver. In 1982, I was asked by Governor Richard Lamm to join his office as his chief policy advisor. In this role, I dealt extensively with the Interior Department and other federal agencies regarding many important natural resource issues. Because one third of Colorado is federal land, the decisions made in Washington have a profound impact on the state and consumed much of our attention. I believe this perspective will be valuable in helping me understand and work with state and local governments.

After I left the Governor's office and returned to private law practice, I was asked by Governor Lamm to serve on and eventually chair the Colorado Transportation Commission, where I had the opportunity to once again work with the federal land management agencies. My civic and community work included volunteering on many environmental and natural resource issues. A crown jewel of my work was helping create the Great Outdoors Colorado program and serve on its original organizing board. We now proudly look back at the Great Outdoors Colorado program - \$600 million invested and 600,000 acres protected in state parks, open space and wildlife since 1993.

In 1999 I was appointed by President Clinton and confirmed by the Senate as United States Attorney for Colorado. I was sworn in the day after the Columbine tragedy and spent my first day on the job at the school with the Attorney General. During my tenure as U.S. Attorney I had the responsibility of representing the United States in all civil and criminal matters in Colorado, and I worked closely with the Interior Department as well as other federal agencies. Once again, this experience gave me a valuable perspective on the role and impact of the federal government.

While these professional experiences contribute to my qualifications for this position, I believe my passion for the mission of the Department of the Interior is equally relevant. I grew up hunting and fishing with my father and brother and bring the perspective of a sportsman to this task. After law school, my wife Beth and I moved to Colorado and quickly fell in love with the West – the mountains, rivers, deserts, the parks and the wildlife.

I recognize and appreciate that our system of national wildlife refuges span all 50 states and play an invaluable role in preserving and protecting countless species and habitats. Yet these vital lands face enormous pressures from population growth and climate change. I believe we must develop a strategic plan to assure that these challenges are addressed so that we have a vibrant 21st century wildlife refuge system.

Another significant responsibility of the Fish and Wildlife Service is the implementation of the Endangered Species Act, a critically important law to ensure the conservation of plant and animal species and their habitats. My commitment to you is that, if confirmed, I will work to see that the decisions of the Service are based on science, not politics.

The other primary area of responsibility of this position is to oversee the National Park Service. Like many families before us, many years ago our family bought a book on the national parks and set out to visit all of them. We are still working on it, but from Acadia to Yosemite, we've enjoyed most of them.

They are, as Wallace Stegner famously said, "America's best idea," and it is time for our generation to be responsible stewards for these treasured icons. As the park system approaches its 100th anniversary, the parks are in great need of significant investment. Just as President Lincoln didn't let the Civil War keep him from protecting Yosemite Valley, we must not use our current economic circumstances as an excuse for inaction. If confirmed, I will do everything in my power to protect and enhance our incomparable park system.

In the work I will do at the Department, I pledge to listen to the broad diversity of voices that care about our national parks and fish and wildlife resources. That inclusive approach is one that I have always embraced and one that is consistent with how Secretary Salazar has always conducted himself.

In closing, I would be deeply honored to serve as Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. I have a deep passion for the mission of these two services and great respect for Secretary Salazar, a friend for 28 years, and his vision for the Department. Thank you for the opportunity to present this statement.