

# Senate Confirms Aurelia Skipwith To Lead U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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*Aurelia Skipwith visits Necedah National Wildlife Refuge.*

USFWS

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has a new director. The Senate on Thursday confirmed Aurelia Skipwith, making her the first African American to lead the agency.

As Wyoming Sen. John Barrasso [made clear](#) to fellow lawmakers on Thursday, he believes Skipwith is well qualified.

“She has a degree in biology from Howard University, a degree in molecular genetics from Purdue University, and a law degree from the University of Kentucky,” Barrasso said.

For the past few years Skipwith has served as the Interior Department’s deputy assistant secretary for fish, wildlife and parks.

“In a field where diversity is sorely needed, it is encouraging to see a woman and person of color nominated to this important and prominent leadership position,” Dan Ashe, former FWS director under President Obama and current president and CEO of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, [said earlier this year](#).

Though the mostly party-line vote of 52-39 reflects the stiff opposition Skipwith faced. In a [letter](#) addressed to senators, a few dozen conservation groups said Skipwith “undermined scientific integrity and the work of career scientists at the Service and circumvented the Endangered Species Act at the behest of the coal industry, putting numerous species at risk of extinction.”

And they noted that since 1964, every FWS director has had a degree in fisheries or wildlife management, something that Skipwith lacks.

Stephanie Kurose, of the Center for Biological Diversity, among the groups that opposed Skipwith, said, “She will now be in charge of setting the agenda for all endangered species protections, the National Wildlife Refuge System ... So she has incredible power over the trajectory of where our country is going in saving biodiversity.”

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