

Opinion: Feds redefine endangered species protections

By Maya L. Kapoor, High Country News

In March, Susan Combs became temporary assistant secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, in charge of overseeing both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Parks Service. Combs, a Texas rancher and politician with a history of hostility toward protected species, fought to avoid protecting dwindling Texas species when she served as comptroller.

Her appointment happened quietly on a Saturday and had been not announced on the department's website as of this writing. Environmental advocacy groups believe her appointment invalid, because Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, not President Donald Trump, appointed her. The nonprofit Natural Resources Defense Council commented, "In typical Trump administration fashion, (Combs) now oversees what she hopes to dismantle."

Combs' controversial appointment comes as the Fish and Wildlife Service is quietly but radically altering its approach to the Endangered Species Act, from species protection to habitat management.

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