

We only use cookies that are necessary for this site to function, and to provide you with the best experience. Learn more in our [Cookie Statement](#). By continuing to use this site, you consent to the use of cookies.



U.S. Department of the Interior

Interior Department Announces Members of Biden-Harris Leadership Team

U.S. Department of the Interior sent this bulletin at 01/20/2021 02:44 PM EST

Having trouble viewing this email? [View it as a Web page](#).



Date: Wednesday, Jan 20, 2021
Contact: Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov

Interior Department Announces Members of Biden-Harris Leadership Team

Washington, D.C — The Department of the Interior today announced key members of agency leadership who will advance the Biden-Harris administration's agenda to build back better and address the four intersecting challenges of our time: COVID-19, economic recovery, racial equity, and climate change.

"With today's announcement, President Biden is delivering on his commitment to build teams that exude talent and experience, and look like America," said **Jennifer Van der Heide, incoming Chief of Staff**. "We look forward to working with the dedicated civil servants at the Department to fulfill Interior's missions, advance President Biden's vision to honor our nation-to-nation relationship with Tribes and uphold the trust and treaty responsibilities to them, address the climate and nature crises, and build a clean energy future that creates good-paying jobs and powers our nation. We are ready to get to work on behalf of the American people."

Interior's team reflects the Biden-Harris commitment to diversity, with more than 80% of First Day appointees identifying as people of color, women, or LGBTQ. Additional members of the Biden-Harris appointee team will be named in the days and weeks to come.

The incoming leadership team possesses a broad range of expertise and perspectives — representing decades of experience in federal, state, and tribal governments; academia; and non-profit and advocacy organizations. As part of the Biden-Harris administration's commitment to the highest ethical standards, all appointees received an initial ethics training today following their swearing-in.

The leadership team is listed here in alphabetical order along with their new role:

- Robert Anderson, Principal Deputy Solicitor
- Travis Annatoyn, Deputy Solicitor for Energy and Mineral Resources
- Ann Marie Bledsoe Downes, Deputy Solicitor for Indian Affairs
- Tyler Cherry, Press Secretary
- Laura Daniel Davis, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary - Land and Minerals Management
- Shannon Estenoz, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary - Fish and Wildlife and Parks
- Morgan Gray, Deputy Director of Congressional Affairs - Senate
- Ruchi Jain, Deputy Solicitor for General Law
- Kate Kelly, Deputy Chief of Staff - Policy
- Marissa Knodel, Advisor, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
- Shantha Ready-Alonso, Director for Intergovernmental and External Affairs
- Paniz Rezaeerood, Deputy Director of Congressional Affairs - House
- Melissa Schwartz, Communications Director
- Janea Scott, Counselor to the Secretary
- Rachael Taylor, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary - Policy, Management and Budget
- Maggie Thompson, White House Liaison
- Maria (Camille) Touton, Deputy Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation
- Tanya Trujillo, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary - Water and Science
- Jennifer Van der Heide, Chief of Staff
- Andrew Wallace, Director of Congressional Affairs
- Martha Williams, Principal Deputy Director, Fish and Wildlife Service

Biographies of the new team are listed below:

Robert Anderson, Principal Deputy Solicitor

Bob Anderson is a law professor with extensive experience in American Indian law, public land, and water law. He is an enrolled member of the Bois Forte Band of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe. He taught at the University of Washington School of Law and directed its Native American Law Center for the past twenty years. For over a decade he has been an annual visiting professor at Harvard Law School. He served as the Associate Solicitor for Indian Affairs and Counselor to the Secretary under Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt. He began his career as a staff attorney for the Native American Rights Fund.

Travis Annatoyn, Deputy Solicitor for Energy and Mineral Resources

Travis Annatoyn joins the Department of the Interior from Democracy Forward Foundation, where he represented national and regional conservation organizations in novel challenges to the Trump administration's environmental agenda. He began his litigation career as a trial attorney at the Department of Justice's Environment and Natural Resources Division, and holds a B.A. from the University of Michigan and a J.D. from Columbia University.

Ann Marie Bledsoe Downes, Deputy Solicitor for Indian Affairs

Ann Marie Bledsoe Downes most recently served as the Executive Vice President of Community Impact and Engagement at Ho-Chunk, Inc. She previously served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Economic Development for Indian Affairs at the U.S. Department of the Interior and as Interim Director of the Bureau of Indian Education. She was also Executive Director of the Indian Legal Program (ILP) at ASU. She received a B.A. from Wayne State College and a J.D. from Arizona State University Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law. She is an enrolled member of the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska.

Tyler Cherry, Press Secretary

Tyler Cherry most recently served as Director of Rapid Response for the Biden-Harris Arizona coordinated campaign. Before joining the campaign, Tyler was Director of Public Affairs at the political consulting firm SKDK, where he crafted and executed strategic communications plans for dozens of political, advocacy, corporate, and legal clients. He also previously worked at Media Matters for America as a campaigns associate and researcher. Tyler is a Los Angeles native and graduated from UCLA with a political science degree. He lives in Washington, D.C. with his partner and two exuberant cats.

Laura Daniel Davis, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary - Land and Mineral Management

Laura Daniel Davis has more than two decades of experience in the public and non-profit sectors. She served as Chief of Staff to Interior Secretaries Sally Jewell and Ken Salazar in the Obama administration. She was most recently the Chief of Policy and Advocacy for the National Wildlife Federation.

Shannon Estenoz, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary - Fish and Wildlife and Parks

Shannon Estenoz most recently was the Chief Operating Officer of The Everglades Foundation. Previously, Shannon served as Interior's Director of Everglades Restoration Initiatives and Executive Director of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force. Shannon's twenty four-year career in conservation includes roles with the World Wildlife Fund and the National Parks Conservation Association, and appointments by three Florida Governors including to the Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District. Shannon is a fifth generation native of Key West, Florida, and holds degrees in International Affairs and Civil Engineering from Florida State University.

Morgan Gray, Deputy Director of Congressional Affairs - Senate

Morgan Gray has nearly two decades of experience in the Senate and House of Representatives working on climate, energy and environmental policy. Prior to joining the Department, he served as Legislative Director for Senator Edward J. Markey, where he oversaw the Senator's policy agenda. Morgan previously served as Senator Markey's Senior Policy Advisor, directing his climate and energy policy, and before that as a senior staffer on the House Natural Resources Committee and on the staff of the House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming. Morgan graduated from Pomona College and is originally from Lincoln, Massachusetts.

Ruchi Jain, Deputy Solicitor for General Law

Before joining Interior, Ruchi Jain was the Pro Bono Counsel for the Washington, D.C. office of Kirkland & Ellis LLP. Previously, Ruchi served as Special Assistant to President Obama, where she worked with other senior White House officials on federal agency management, Executive Branch nominations, and personnel matters. She held several other roles in the Obama-Biden White House and the Department of Justice. She began her career in private law practice. Ruchi has a J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center and a B.A. from Rice University.

Kate Kelly, Deputy Chief of Staff - Policy

Kate Kelly most recently was the Public Lands Director at the Center for American Progress. During the Obama administration, Kate served as senior advisor to then-Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell and also served as communications director on behalf of Secretary Jewell and former Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar. Prior to joining the Interior Department, Kate worked in the U.S. Senate. Kate received her bachelor's degree from Washington University in St. Louis and hails from Colorado.

Marissa Knodel, Advisor, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management

Marissa Knodel is a passionate advocate for climate and environmental justice through a just and equitable transition to a clean energy-based society, and resilient adaptation to a changing climate. As Legislative Counsel with Earthjustice, her area of expertise included federal onshore, offshore, and Arctic oil and gas leasing and regulations. Prior to joining Earthjustice, Marissa managed a campaign at Friends of the Earth to stop new fossil fuel development on federal lands and waters. Marissa holds a dual J.D. and Master of

Environmental Management degree from Vermont Law School and the Yale School of the Environment.

Shantha Ready-Alonso, Director for Intergovernmental and External Affairs

Shantha Ready-Alonso served as Executive Director of Creation Justice Ministries, Community Mobilization Manager for NETWORK Catholic Social Justice Lobby, and Director of the National Council of Churches Poverty Initiative. Shantha is listed among the 2018 "Grist 50 Fixers" and is the recipient of the 2020 National Council of Churches USA J. Irwin Miller Excellence in Ecumenical Leadership award. Shantha holds a Master of Social Work from Washington University in St. Louis and a Master of Pastoral Studies from Eden Theological Seminary. She did her undergraduate studies at the University of Notre Dame.

Paniz Rezaeerood, Deputy Director of Congressional Affairs - House

Paniz Rezaeerood previously served on the staff of Rep. Joe Cunningham (SC-01), where she was responsible for legislation to ban offshore drilling, protect irreplaceable natural resources, and secure full and permanent funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund through the Great American Outdoors Act. Prior to Rep. Cunningham's office, Paniz worked for the House Financial Services Committee and for CoBank. A first-generation American born in Iran and raised in South Carolina, Paniz is a graduate of Sewanee: The University of the South.

Melissa Schwartz, Communications Director

Melissa Schwartz is a strategic communicator and adjunct professor with two decades of experience in government, the private sector, and at nonprofit organizations. She most recently served as Senior Advisor to Dr. Jill Biden. As Chief Operating Officer at The Bromwich Group for nine years, projects included coordinating communications strategy to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, raise awareness of the rape kit backlog and gender-based violence, defend national monuments and the ocean, and facilitate a just transition for coal communities. Melissa is a former senior spokesperson for the U.S. Departments of Justice and Interior, and Senator Barbara Mikulski.

Janea Scott, Counselor to the Secretary

Janea A. Scott was most recently a Commissioner and Vice Chair of the California Energy Commission. Janea also served as the Vice Chair of the Western Interconnection Regional Advisory Body and is a member of the Western Interstate Energy Board and the Department of Energy's Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Technical Advisory Committee. Janea previously worked at Interior as the Deputy Counselor for Renewable Energy and at Environmental Defense Fund as a senior attorney. She earned her J.D. from the University of Colorado Boulder Law School and her master's of science and bachelor's of science in earth systems from Stanford University.

Rachael Taylor, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary - Policy, Management, and Budget

Rachael Taylor most recently served on the U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations for nearly 16 years. In her role as Democratic clerk of the Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies, she negotiated a \$38 billion annual appropriations bill and oversaw the budgets of Federal environmental, Tribal and cultural agencies. Rachael has also served in several other legislative and executive branch roles during her career, including in the Office of Vice President Al Gore. A West Virginia native, she received a B.A. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a Master in Public Administration from American University.

Maggie Thompson, White House Liaison

Maggie Thompson was most recently the North Carolina State Advisor and Chief of Staff for the Biden campaign and currently serves on the campaign's Education Unity Task Force. Maggie was also the State Director for Elizabeth Warren's presidential campaign. She is the former Executive Director of Generation Progress, the youth engagement arm of the Center for American Progress. Maggie also worked in the Obama administration at the White House Council on Environmental Quality and in the office of the Director at U.S. Citizenship

and Immigration Services. She graduated with a degree in economics and classical archaeology from Macalester College.

Maria (Camille) Touton, Deputy Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation

Camille Calimlim Touton returns to Interior after serving as Professional Staff for the U.S. House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. She was the staff lead on the resiliency provisions enacted as part of the Water Resources Development Act of 2020. Camille's congressional experience also includes serving as Professional Staff for Interior's authorization committees: the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and the House Natural Resources Committee. Camille also served as Interior's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Water and Science under the Obama administration. Camille holds a BS in Engineering (Civil), BA in Communication Studies, and a Master of Public Policy.

Tanya Trujillo, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary - Water and Science

Tanya Trujillo is a water lawyer with more than 20 years of experience working on complex natural resources management issues and interstate and transboundary water agreements. She most recently worked as a project director with the Colorado River Sustainability Campaign. Before then, she served as the Executive Director of the Colorado River Board of California. She has served as Senior Counsel to the U.S. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and as Counselor to the Assistant Secretary for Water and Science at Interior. A native New Mexican, Tanya attended Stanford University and the University of Iowa College of Law.

Jennifer Van der Heide, Chief of Staff

Jennifer Van der Heide has over 25 years of federal, state and local experience in legislative, legal and electoral sectors. She most recently served as Chief of Staff for Congresswoman Deb Haaland, and had been Chief of Staff and Political Director for Rep. Mike Honda. Jennifer previously served as the Washington Director and on-reservation Tribal Attorney for the Hoopa Valley Tribe; Tribal Attorney for California Indian Legal Services; and in private litigation practice in CA. She has a B.A. in International Relations from Tufts University, and a J.D. from UC Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco, with a focus on public interest law.

Andrew (Drew) Wallace, Director of Congressional Affairs

A native of Houston, Texas, Drew Wallace has worked in senior policy roles in both houses of Congress. Over the last twelve years, he has served in the office of former Senator Tom Udall (D-N.M.), finishing as Chief of Staff. Drew has a record of significant contributions to bipartisan legislative successes across a range of issues, in particular energy, the environment, and conservation. He received a B.A. in Political Science from Kenyon College in Ohio and a J.D. from George Mason University School of Law in Virginia. Drew lives in Arlington, Va. with his wife and two sons.

Martha Williams, Principal Deputy Director, Fish and Wildlife Service

Martha has spent her career fostering a love of the outdoors. Growing up on a farm, she gained an appreciation for place and all that comprises it. This passion led her to the wild places of the West where she focused on public lands and wildlife - first as attorney for the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks, then as Deputy Solicitor Parks and Wildlife at the Department of the Interior, as a professor at the Blewett School of Law at the University of Montana, and most recently returning to the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks as its Director.

About the U.S. Department of Interior

The Department of the Interior (DOI) conserves and manages the Nation's natural resources and cultural heritage for the benefit and enjoyment of the American people, provides scientific and other information about natural resources and natural hazards to address societal challenges and create opportunities for the American people, and honors the Nation's trust responsibilities or special commitments to American Indians, Alaska Natives, and affiliated island communities to help them prosper.



U.S. Department of the Interior | 1849 C Street NW, Washington, DC

[Update subscription](#) | [Unsubscribe](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#)

Subscribe to updates from U.S. Department of the Interior

Share Bulletin



Powered by



[Privacy Policy](#) | [Cookie Statement](#) | [Help](#)