

OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

Testimony of:

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November 19, 2025

Sen. Mike Lee
Chair, Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
363 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Sen. Martin Heinrich
Ranking Member, Senate Energy and Natural Resource Committee
709 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Full Committee Hearing to Examine the Land Use Planning Process Under FLPMA

Dear Chairman Lee, Ranking Member Heinrich, and Committee members:

Thank you for the opportunity to share the outdoor recreation community's perspective on the importance of planning for supporting sound recreation outcomes on public lands and waters managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

My name is Adam Cramer, and I'm the Chief Executive Officer of Outdoor Alliance.

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of nine member-based organizations representing the human powered outdoor recreation community. The coalition includes Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, Winter Wildlands Alliance, The Mountaineers, the American Alpine Club, Colorado Mountain Club, and Surfrider Foundation and represents the interests of the millions of Americans who climb, paddle, mountain bike, backcountry ski and snowshoe, and enjoy coastal recreation on our nation's public lands, waters, and snowscapes.

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Outdoor recreation is the most common way that Americans come to know their public lands and waters and cultivate a conservation and stewardship ethic, and the Bureau of Land Management is responsible for the care of some of our country's most spectacular outdoor recreation experiences. Places like:

- Mountain biking trails outside Moab, Utah;
- Whitewater on New Mexico's Upper Taos Box;
- Idaho's Jarbridge and Bruneau Rivers;
- Climbing in Red Rocks, just outside Las Vegas, Nevada;
- Bouldering at the Volcanic Tablelands near Bishop, California;
- Copper City Mountain Bike Trails near Three Forks, Montana; and
- Paddling on Oregon's Owyhee and Rogue Rivers.

The 245 million acres of public land under BLM's management contain more than 23,125 climbing routes and bouldering problems; 25,287 miles of trail (with 10,422 miles accessible for mountain biking); and 2,379 miles of whitewater paddling, according to Outdoor Alliance's GIS database. Of these resources, approximately 63 percent of the climbing, 70 percent of the trail miles, 75 percent of the mountain biking, and 47 percent of the whitewater paddling miles are managed outside of the National Conservation Lands system, making sound multiple-use management of particular importance.

Cumulatively, these resources are the literal infrastructure of the outdoor recreation economy, which supports nearly \$1.2 trillion in gross economic output, 5 million American jobs, and 2.3 percent of our country's GDP according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis. Outdoor recreation helps support vibrant, diversified local economies, particularly in public lands communities, and it helps attract workers and businesses across a range of industries because of the quality-of-life benefits it brings to local communities.

Planning for Multiple-Use

While outdoor recreation may be the most economically and socially important use of our country's public lands, it is not the only use, and BLM has a complicated job to implement its multiple-use, sustained-yield mandate. Alongside outdoor recreation, FLPMA names livestock grazing, fish and wildlife, mining, rights-of-way,

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and timber production as “principal or major” uses of public lands.¹ FLPMA’s definition of multiple-use reads in part, “a combination of balanced and diverse resource uses that takes into account the long-term needs of future generations,” and, “harmonious and coordinated management of the various resources without permanent impairment of the productivity of the land and the quality of the environment.”²

This is a complicated balancing act, and planning is how BLM takes information from the public to help weigh sometimes-competing interests and create the “harmonious and coordinated management” that FLPMA describes. Sound planning requires community engagement and public input, and planners need the time and resources to meaningfully engage the public. They also need sound information, and to that end, I commend Congress—and this committee in particular—for the bipartisan work that led to the unanimous passage of the EXPLORE Act last year, which directs BLM and other land management agencies to inventory for recreational resources and values to support better agency decision-making.³

The outdoor recreation community also strongly supports BLM’s Public Lands Rule,⁴ which helps to develop better information on landscape health to support sound and sustainable management decisions.

Planning is essential for protecting and enhancing public land outdoor recreation opportunities. Plans lay out:

- What lands are opened or closed for energy, mining, grazing, and recreation;
- Conditions and stipulations for development activities; and
- Special designations, like ACECs, Special Recreation Management Areas, recreation route systems and focus areas, rights-of-way, and energy zones.

Plans that are outdated or vague are recipes for conflict, and planning is a huge and important investment in the success of the permitted projects that will ultimately need to tier to these plans. Clear plans—with the public support that comes from a sound and participatory process—give communities and stakeholders the certainty

¹ 43 U.S.C. § 1702(l).

² 43 U.S.C. § 1702(c).

³ See 16 U.S.C. § 8412.

⁴ Conservation and Landscape Health, 89 Fed. Reg. 40,308 (May 9, 2024) (43 C.F.R. §§ 1600, 6100).

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they need to make investments: in recreation infrastructure and businesses, as well as in other public lands uses.

When RMPs identify areas off-limits for development—migration corridors, high-value recreation hubs, cultural landscapes—developers are steered away before investing in un-permittable projects. When RMPs establish right-of-way corridors and renewable energy zones, projects face fewer protests and shorter NEPA reviews. Clear plan objectives let BLM craft defensible permit conditions and reduce litigation risk. The cheapest, fastest place to fix conflicts is in resource management plans.

Importantly, planning is part of the democratic management of our public lands and a part of what makes public lands truly public. Sound planning efforts are responsive to local interests, as well as national interests. They rarely leave all stakeholders entirely satisfied, but at their best, sound plans help eliminate unnecessary conflict and produce a compromise around unavoidable conflict where all interests feel that they have been heard and that the final plan to some degree reflects their needs and interests.

Oil & Gas

Up-to-date and sound resource management plans are made even more important by recent changes to the oil gas leasing process enacted through the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act.”⁵

Since 2018, Outdoor Alliance has worked to monitor new oil and gas lease sales in six western states (Colorado, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming), screening our recreation database (rock climbing sites; mountain biking, hiking, and skiing trails; and whitewater paddling runs) against new oil and gas lease parcels to identify potential recreation conflicts and important places that might be at risk. Over the life of the program, we have flagged more than 100 parcels and more than 160,000 acres of public land made available for oil and gas leasing and containing recreational resources.

⁵ See 30 U.S.C. § 226.

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Prior to the enactment of the Big Beautiful Bill, BLM had authority and direction to generally defer nominated leases that contained recreation conflicts. Additionally, BLM had discretion to adjust lease stipulations (e.g., no surface occupancy) to help protect recreation resources and recreation experiences. The Big Beautiful Bill mandates, however, that BLM make available to leasing any parcel in an area identified as open under an RMP and bars BLM from adjusting leasing stipulations contained in the RMP.

This makes planning more important than ever. It is critically important that BLM have up-to-date RMPs that accurately take into account the recreation and conservation values of public lands. Without up-to-date and sound RMPs, BLM will inevitably produce conflicts by leasing public lands with important recreation values. These conflicts will also take a toll on local communities that are investing in recreation infrastructure and the recreation economy.

As an example of what these conflicts can look like, in early 2020 BLM proposed to lease parcels that overlapped with Moab's world-renowned Slickrock mountain biking and OHV area. Following overwhelming outcry from the outdoor recreation community and the Governor of Utah, these parcels were deferred. These outcomes may no longer be possible based on the changes passed through the Big Beautiful Bill without sound RMPs that place areas with these sorts of conflicts off limits to development.

Land Disposal

Part of the resource management planning process directed by FLPMA is the identification of lands appropriate for disposal. While the outdoor recreation community is vehemently opposed to the large-scale transfer or sale of public lands, we are open to the limited transfer of public lands identified through planning and sound public process and done in accordance with existing authorities like the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act. It is essential, however, that any transfers be screened for recreation and conservation conflicts, and this requires up-to-date plans that account for contemporary public land uses and values.

Outdoor Alliance maintains a geospatial data layer that represents the "footprint" of outdoor recreation on public lands. The layer comprises climbing sites, trails, and

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whitewater paddling sections, buffered by ¼ mile to account for the impact of the immediate environment on the recreation experience. An analysis of the overlap between the recreation footprint and lands identified for disposal through the RMP process indicates that an overlap between recreation opportunities and disposal lands is more than four times as likely on RMPs older than 15 years.⁶ Timely information that accounts for changing use patterns over time is essential for sound decision-making on the potential small-scale transfer of public lands.

Congressional Review Act

Finally, recent efforts to use the Congressional Review Act to rescind resource management plans are uniquely harmful. These efforts wipe away years of stakeholder engagement in plan development, making communities less likely to participate and provide the information these plans truly depend on. Worse, because the CRA bars “substantially similar” efforts in the future, it will make sound future management decisions for these landscapes overwhelmingly more difficult.

* * *

Currently, approximately 134 of BLM’s 169 Resource Management Plans are out of date.⁷ Congress currently funds BLM Resource Management Planning at just under \$70 million per year through the appropriations process—significantly less than needed to address this substantial backlog of outdated plans, which BLM estimates cost around \$3.5 million per plan to update.⁸ Successfully managing our public lands— to speed permitting efforts, and also to protect and improve recreation opportunities—requires up-to-date and modern management plans. Moving forward, I would ask the Committee to support BLM in investing in the future of resource management planning to make these efforts participatory and successful.

⁶ Our analysis finds an overlap of 68,673 acres of the recreation footprint within 4,190,465 acres identified for disposal in RMPs more than 15 years old (1.64%), and an overlap of 32,651 acres of the recreation footprint within 8,336,023 acres of land identified for disposal through RMPs completed in the last 15 years (.39%).

⁷ United States Department of the Interior, *Budget Justifications and Performance Information Fiscal Year 2025: Bureau of Land Management*, V-135 (Mar. 2024), <https://www.doi.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2024-03/fy2025-508-blm-greenbook.pdf>

⁸ *Id.*

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Best regards



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