

Written Testimony from:
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Chairman Lee, Ranking Member Heinrich, and members of the Committee—thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Greg Sheehan, and I serve as the President and CEO of the Mule Deer Foundation, a national conservation organization whose mission is to ensure the conservation of mule deer, black-tailed deer, and their habitats. Further, our interests include sportsman access in order to ethically hunt these iconic species. Each year we engage with more than 420,000 hunters, members, volunteers, and supporters. We speak for the millions of sportsmen and women who depend on healthy public lands, intact migration routes, and wild places. I too am a passionate hunter and angler.

My testimony also reflects a lifetime in state, federal, and nonprofit conservation service. I served 25 years with the Utah Department of Natural Resources, including five as Director of the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources; later as Acting Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and subsequently as Utah State Director for the Bureau of Land Management, serving under both the Trump and Biden administrations while overseeing 22.8 million acres of federal land. During my time at BLM, I oversaw a broad portfolio of on-the-ground programs including oil and gas, mining, national monuments, recreation and conservation areas, wild horses and burros, fire and fuels, travel management, and grazing among others. That work provided me with a practical understanding of how planning decisions shape day-to-day management and how critical it is to work effectively with state, local, and Tribal governments, permittees, industry, and nonprofit partners.

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) provides the framework for this stewardship. FLPMA's multiple-use and sustained-yield principles recognize that conservation, recreation, grazing, energy, mining, habitat, public access, and the preservation of wild and undeveloped landscapes are all legitimate uses of the land. As President Theodore Roosevelt said, “conservation means development as much as it does protection.” To be clear, multiple use does not mean every use, everywhere, but it does require a planning system capable of balancing these needs while keeping landscapes healthy for future generations.

Today, however, many of BLM's Resource Management Plans or RMP's—some written in the early 1980s on typewriters—no longer reflect modern wildlife science, migration data, wildfire conditions, recreation growth, energy and mineral needs, or other current demands on the land. Updating these plans is essential for both conservation and responsible use, but revising an RMP today takes two to three years—sometimes even up to ten-- and costs \$2–6

million. BLM has stated that 134 of its 169 plans are outdated. Because funding doesn't meet all the planning needs, only the most prioritized plans are updated, while many landscapes continue to be managed under frameworks that no longer match on-the-ground realities.

Another factor is the cumulative use of administrative designations. The BLM now has more than 26 planning and management tools—including Wilderness Study Areas, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Lands with Wilderness Characteristics, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Research Natural Areas, Visual Resource Management Classes, mineral withdrawals, and travel management planning. Each tool can serve an important purpose, yet when layered together or left in place indefinitely, they can limit the flexibility needed to manage habitat, address wildfire risk, sustain local communities, and maintain access. At the same time, society increasingly depends on BLM lands for solitude, energy production, mining of rare earth and other critical minerals, transmission lines, and other public access.

Thoughtful planning is essential to ensure these projects can proceed responsibly while also protecting wildlife habitats, migration routes, and the wildland values that matter to millions of hunters, anglers, and recreationists.

Travel management planning illustrates this balance. Well-designed route networks help protect habitat and reduce unnecessary wildlife disturbance. But outdated or overly restrictive route systems can also limit access needed for water developments, habitat treatments, migration-corridor projects, or energy and transmission infrastructure.

FLPMA's requirement in Section 202(c) to coordinate with state and local governments and with Tribes is an important tool for improving planning outcomes, although the statute is vague about what meaningful coordination should look like. Strengthening early and consistent engagement would help ensure plans better reflect wildlife science, habitat needs, water availability, infrastructure realities, and Tribal indigenous knowledge, resulting in more practical and durable decisions.

Finally, I want to emphasize that land stewardship matters deeply to America's hunters and anglers. Protecting wild places, migration corridors, watersheds, and healthy habitat is fundamental to our mission at the Mule Deer Foundation. A planning system that is timely, collaborative, science-based, and flexible will better support wildlife, rural communities, and the other diverse uses Congress intended under FLPMA.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be pleased to answer any questions from the Committee.