

**Statement of  
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**Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee  
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining  
S. 1295, Federal Land Asset Inventory Reform Act  
September 16, 2020**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on S. 1295, the Federal Land Asset Inventory Reform Act. The bill directs the Department of the Interior (Department) to develop and maintain a current multipurpose cadastre of Federal real property and provide a report to Congress on Federal property.

Under the Administration's leadership, one of the guiding principles of the work of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is to pursue excellence in business practices, improve accountability to our stakeholders, and deliver better service to our customers across the bureau's diverse uses. The BLM supports the goals of S. 1295 and welcomes the opportunity to work with its sponsors and the Committee on language that would help realize the cost savings, efficiency, and accessibility outcomes they wish to achieve.

**Background**

Cadastral surveys create, restore, mark, and define boundaries and subdivisions of land. First proposed by Thomas Jefferson and enacted into law by the Land Ordinance of 1785, cadastral surveys provide the public and public land managers with the essential information needed to correctly determine ownership rights and privileges and facilitate good land management decisions.

As our nation grew, Congress created the General Land Office in 1812 to handle the rapidly increasing surveys, public land sales, patents, and land entries. The BLM assumed responsibility for cadastral surveys in 1946, when the merger of the General Land Office and the Grazing Service formed the BLM. Today, the BLM's Cadastral Survey Program maintains the official records of more than 200 years' worth of title and cadastral survey records, 12 million of which have been scanned, indexed, and published online by the BLM for use by the public and Federal land managers since 1992.

In 1994, an executive order established the interagency Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC), which provides managerial and advisory direction for geospatial initiatives across the Federal government. The FGDC is tasked with promoting the coordination and dissemination of geospatial data nationwide and was codified under the Geospatial Data Act of 2018. The Secretary of the Interior serves as the Chair of the FGDC and the BLM leads the FGDC Cadastral Subcommittee, which coordinates cadastral data-related activities among Federal, state, tribal, and local governments, and the private sector. The BLM publishes two key datasets through the FGDC: 1) the Public Land Survey System (PLSS), which is a coordinate dataset

based on cadastral survey information used for parcel level mapping; and 2) the Surface Management Agency (SMA) dataset, which captures the best available Federal ownership information. Both of these datasets support large scale depiction of Federal ownership information. The FGDC was also tasked to develop and manage a National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI), which is comprised of the technology, policies, and resources necessary to improve utilization of geospatial data.

As part of these efforts, the BLM is responsible for the surveying of Federal lands and maintaining the associated land title records. In total, the Federal government manages approximately 640 million surface acres of the nearly 2.3 billion acres that constitute the United States. In addition to these surface lands, the Federal government also manages subsurface estate, and hundreds of thousands of buildings, structures, and other properties. Of all the Federal agencies, the BLM administers the largest portfolio of land and interests, with 245 million surface acres and approximately 700 million acres of onshore Federal mineral estate. Management decisions for BLM lands and resources are made through individual Resource Management Plans, which are developed with full public participation at the local level.

### *Modernizing Record Systems*

The Department is committed to the continued development of geospatial data and technology as critical investments for our nation and is involved in many efforts to modernize cadastral and geographic data to better serve a variety of users. In 2019, the BLM initiated an effort to consolidate and modernize its land status records systems through the development of the Mineral and Land Records System (MLRS). The MLRS will replace the current systems used by the BLM, including the Legacy Rehost 2000 (LR2000) case management system; the Alaska Land Information System (ALIS); and the older status records, such as master title plats, historical indexes, and tract books. The MLRS will be a customer-centric, geospatially-enabled land information system that employs standardized business practices. The new system will help ensure the quality and accuracy of land and mineral records, while securely making them available to the public and land managers.

### **S. 1295, the Federal Land Asset Inventory Reform Act**

S. 1295 directs the Department to develop and maintain a multipurpose cadastre of all Federal real property, including land, buildings, crops, forests, and other resources, as well as information about the use, assets, and infrastructure of all parcels. Under the bill, the cadastre must be made publicly available on the internet in a graphically geo-enabled and searchable format.

The BLM supports the goal of modernizing inventory and cadastre systems and is currently in the process of developing a new records system with capabilities that align with some of the requirements of the bill. The BLM notes that the scope of the project proposed in S. 1295 – which would span across every Federal agency – extends beyond current resources of the Department and BLM and would require extensive new resources to fulfil the bill’s objectives. The BLM welcomes the opportunity to work with the sponsors of S. 1295 to determine the necessary authority and capacity to consolidate Federal real property inventories of cadastre data consistent with applicable laws. We would also like to work with the sponsors to refine a

number of the bill's definitions, including those for real property and assets, as well as to clarify the role of the Department and the BLM in engaging with other agencies to ensure alignment with the requirements of the Geospatial Data Act and compatibility with their FGDC responsibilities.

### *Report to Congress*

The bill also requires the Department to submit a report to Congress, within 180 days of enactment, that describes the existing Federal real property inventory and cadastre, and whether these existing inventories should be eliminated or consolidated into the new multipurpose cadastre required under S. 1295. The bill specifies that the report should include all real property owned or maintained by the entire Federal government, including land; resources such as crops or forests associated with the land; buildings or structures; and any interest or rights in these properties. Furthermore, under the bill, the Department must include the anticipated cost savings that will be achieved as part of the creation of the new multipurpose cadastre, as well as a plan for the implementation of the new multipurpose cadastre.

The BLM is cognizant of its duty to be responsive and accountable to Congress. Given the magnitude of real Federal property and records that must be identified in the report required by S. 1295, which includes real Federal property maintained by Federal agencies outside of the Interior Department, the Department would like to work with the sponsors to narrow the scope of the report to DOI jurisdiction to help ensure successful completion.

Finally, as part of the requirements of the report, the Department would need to provide legislative recommendations to increase the cost savings and enhance the effectiveness of consolidating Federal real property inventories into one multipurpose cadastre.

The BLM stands ready to provide assistance and input on proposed legislation, while also respecting Congress' primacy in the legislative process. The BLM has traditionally accomplished this through a variety of methods, including providing data and information, and supplying technical assistance. The BLM welcomes the opportunity to work with the sponsors to ensure this specific provision is in keeping with the Bureau's and Congress' roles in the legislative process. The Bureau will also continue to provide assistance to members of Congress as they craft legislation on this issue.

### **Conclusion**

The BLM is proud of its involvement with the nation's cadastre and appreciates the Committee's interest in this important topic. The BLM looks forward to working further with the sponsors of S. 1295 to achieve the bill's objectives. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would welcome any questions you may have.