STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS, FORESTS AND MINING
REGARDING:

- **H.R.655, Dalles Watershed Development Act**
- **S.1791. Gunnison Outdoor Resources Protection Act of 2025**
- **H.R.4090, Critical Mineral Dominance Act**
- **S.4200, Douglas County Economic Development and Conservation Act**
- **S.4458, Caja del Rio Protection Act**
- **S.4561, CLOSE THE GAP Act**

July 15, 2025

Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Cortez Masto, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) on several bills pertaining to the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service). We defer to the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) for its views on those elements of the bills that would affect federal lands under its jurisdiction.

H.R. 655, "Dalles Watershed Development Act"

H.R. 655, "Dalles Watershed Development Act," seeks to simplify administrative requirements for the City of The Dalles, Oregon to operate its municipal reservoir. The bill would direct the Secretary of Agriculture to convey approximately 150 acres of National Forest System (NFS) Land from the Mt. Hood National Forest to the City following written request to the Secretary of Agriculture for conveyance of the land within one year of enactment of the bill. The bill would also require that the conveyance would be subject to valid existing rights, made without consideration, made by quitclaim deed, and subject to such additional terms and conditions as the Secretary of Agriculture determines to be appropriate to protect the interests of the United States. In addition, the bill would direct the exact acreage and description of the land to be conveyed to be determined by a survey satisfactory to the Secretary of Agriculture and would direct the city to pay all costs associated with the conveyance, including the costs of the survey.

USDA supports H.R. 655.

The City of The Dalles municipal watershed includes the Crow Creek Dam and its reservoir, a portion of which is located on NFS lands in the Mt. Hood National Forest. Due to the location of the reservoir, the city currently operates under a Forest Service special use permit for operations and maintenance activities. Conveying this land would eliminate the City's need for a special use permit and the associated work for both City and Forest Service staff. Following passage of this legislation, the conveyed land would remain primarily bordered by NFS lands which are managed as The Dalles Watershed Management Unit. Mt. Hood National Forest continues to partner closely with the City on fuels treatments to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires within the watershed.

The agency views this proposal as consistent with the City's water infrastructure upgrades and a sound course of action. The proposed acreage to be conveyed is relatively minor and serves a specific purpose to meet the City's water management goals.

S. 1791, Gunnison Outdoor Resources Protection Act of 2025

S. 1791 would establish protections and management guidelines for public lands in Gunnison County, Colorado, and surrounding areas to conserve natural, scenic, cultural, and recreational resources.

Specifically, the bill would designate a variety of different areas for distinct conservation, recreation, and research purposes, including: nine Special Management Areas (SMAs) totaling over 200,000 acres for conservation and recreation, with restrictions on motorized and bicycle use except on designated routes; eight Wildlife Conservation Areas (WCAs) totaling approximately 223,000 acres to protect wildlife habitat and natural resources; four Protection Areas: Four areas totaling approximately 20,500 acres to maintain undeveloped character and limit motorized access; two Recreation Management Areas (RMAs) totaling approximately 18,000 acres to enhance recreation while conserving resources; and one Scientific Research and Education Area of 12,250 acres for ecological and scientific research. The bill would further establish a "no surface occupancy" management restriction for nearly 50,000 acres of oil and gas development in Delta County.

S. 1791 would also add approximately 122,000 acres of wilderness to new and existing wilderness designations.

S. 1791 would also direct the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management to manage these designated areas to emphasize ecological restoration, wildfire management, and collaboration with local and state agencies, and would restrict certain uses, including: prohibiting new roads except temporary ones for restoration projects; restricting motorized and bicycle use to designated routes, and require seasonal closures for wildlife protection; and, prohibiting commercial timber harvesting, stipulating that vegetation projects must restore ecological integrity.

Finally, S. 1791 would place approximately 19,080 acres into trust for the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, while prohibiting gaming and stipulating certain protections for water rights, treaty rights, and traditional tribal uses on these trust lands.

Regarding the provisions of the bill specific to the Forest Service, the significant and restrictive management designations in the bill are contrary to the Administration's timber production, energy and mineral dominance priorities. The designations are paired with permanent withdrawals that would prevent exploration and development opportunities, and therefore the USDA opposes the bill. USDA defers to the Department of the Interior on lands and activities under their jurisdiction.

H.R. 4090, Critical Mineral Dominance Act

H.R. 4090 would require the Secretary of the Interior to submit to Congress the dollar value and the overall economic impact of the United States' reliance on imported mineral commodities, and to include this information in the 2026 United States Geological Survey's (USGS) Mineral Commodity Summaries.

The bill would mirror provisions of Executive Order 14154, Unleashing American Energy, by requiring the Secretary of the Interior to submit to Congress a list of each mining project on federal land for which a plan of operations, permit application, or other application for approval has been submitted to the Department of the Interior, identify each priority mining project that can be immediately approved, and take all necessary steps to expedite and approve each such project.

The bill also codifies portions of Executive Order 14154 by requiring a review by the Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with the Secretary of Agriculture, of all existing agency actions that impose an undue burden on the exploration, identification, development, or operation of domestic mining projects, and to begin implementing an action plan to suspend, revise, or rescind each agency action identified as unduly burdensome. It also directs the Secretary of the Interior to solicit industry feedback on regulatory bottlenecks and recommended strategies to expedite approval of mining projects on federal lands, and to begin implementing an action plan to implement industry feedback received. Further, H.R. 4090 requires the Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with the Secretary of Agriculture, to submit a report to Congress that includes recommendations for changes in law necessary to review and rescind or revise unduly burdensome agency actions, and a nationwide review of state and local statutes, regulations, and ordinances the Secretary determines impede the development of domestic mining and mineral exploration projects.

The bill would additionally support Executive Order 14241, Immediate Measures to Increase American Mineral Production, by requiring the Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with the Secretary of Agriculture, to submit to Congress a list of each mining project on federal land that has the potential to increase production of hardrock minerals or byproducts, expand operations to include hardrock mineral byproducts, or produce hardrock minerals from mine tailings. In addition, the Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with the Secretary of Agriculture, would be directed to identify all land managed by the Department of the Interior, or by the Department of Agriculture, which may be leased for the exploration, development, or production of hardrock minerals, or is open to location under the Mining Law of 1872, and where: 1) exploration is being conducted, 2) hardrock minerals may be present, or 3) known economically recoverable hardrock minerals are present.

Finally, the bill directs the Secretary of the Interior to prioritize efforts to accelerate the ongoing, detailed geologic mapping of the United States, with a focus on mapping previously unknown deposits of hardrock minerals. Within a year of enactment, the Secretary of the Interior is required to submit a Report to Congress regarding the progress and estimated completion date of the comprehensive mapping and data integration effort directed by section 40201 of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (43 U.S.C. 311).

USDA supports H.R. 4090 and looks forward to working with the Committee and bill sponsor on this bill moving forward. USDA defers to the Department of the Interior on lands and activities under their jurisdiction.

S. 4200, "Douglas County Economic Development and Conservation Act"

S. 4200, the "Douglas County Economic Development and Conservation Act" contains multiple provisions that impact management of National Forest System lands on behalf of the American public. These include conveyance or disposal of National Forest System lands, transfer of National Forest System lands to DOI to be held in trust for the Washoe Tribe, provisions impacting the management of Santini-Burton Act parcels near Lake Tahoe, and the creation of congressionally directed special use permits. The Department supports the intent of the bill to provide for economic development in Douglas County, Nevada and would like to work with the committee and sponsor to make technical corrections that will assist in the implementation of the legislation. USDA defers to the Department of the Interior on lands and activities under their jurisdiction.

Title I would convey or dispose of Bureau of Land Management and National Forest System lands managed by the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest and the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit to the State or Douglas County.

The Department would like to work with the sponsor and committee regarding parcels proposed for conveyance or disposal, as well to provide technical assistance and revise language regarding conveyances and disposal processes and the terms surrounding these, such as reversionary interest acquisition. We would appreciate the opportunity to review the legislative map and develop legislative maps to ensure accuracy and support implementation.

Title II would transfer lands managed by the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest to the Department of the Interior (DOI) to be held in trust for the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, and authorizes DOI to carry out fuels reduction and landscape restoration activities. In total, DOI would hold approximately 2,470 acres of Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service lands in trust for the Tribe. We would like to work with the sponsor to develop legislative maps for this section to ensure accuracy and support implementation.

We recognize that Federal lands and waters managed by the Department are the traditional homelands of American Indians and Alaska Natives and we support Tribal self-determination. The Department supports transferring the National Forest System lands identified in Title II to DOI to be held in trust for the Tribe. We would like to work with the sponsor to develop legislative maps for this section to ensure accuracy and support implementation.

Title IV would require the Forest Service to determine if lands acquired under the Santini-Burton Act (Pub. Law 96–586) are suitable for conveyance if the State or Douglas County requests. It does not explicitly require the Forest Service to convey lands that are located within the boundaries of the area acquired under the Santini-Burton Act. The Department must manage these environmentally sensitive lands in alignment with the Santini-Burton Act to maintain undeveloped open space; preserve the land's natural characteristics; and protect water quality, stream environment zones, and important wildlife habitat. The Department believes these lands should be retained under National Forest System management.

Title IV would also require the Forest Service to issue special use permits on 188 acres within one year if the County or a local government entity submits a proposal and application. The Forest Service has sufficient existing authority to issue special use permits and, therefore, does not support Sec. 402 as written. The Forest Service would still be required to conduct National Environmental Policy Act analyses, comply with the Endangered Species Act and the National Historic Preservation Act Section 106, and meet other standard requirements.

S. 4458 Caja del Rio Protection Act

S. 4458 would establish new protective designations on Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management land in New Mexico. The USDA defers to the Department of Interior on all elements of this bill impacting federal lands under its jurisdiction.

Specific to the Forest Service, this bill would designate 67,163 acres of land in the Santa Fe National Forest as the Caja del Rio Special Management Area to protect the area's cultural and ecological values and enhance opportunities for Tribal engagement. The bill stipulates that the Special Management Area be withdrawn from mineral development, but permits ecological restoration, activities to control wildfires, insects, and disease, and the continuation of existing livestock grazing. It also ensures Tribal access and cultural uses and encourages contracts with Tribal entities to perform administrative or management functions.

Within three years of enactment S. 4458 requires creation of a comprehensive plan for long-term management in coordination with Tribes, states, and federal agencies. The bill requires the agency to incorporate indigenous knowledge, ensure adequate law enforcement, and include a travel management plan to decrease unauthorized road access and motorized use. S. 4458 restricts motorized vehicle use to roads designated in the travel management plan, requires decommissioning of roads not designated in the plan, and prohibits construction of new permanent roads except to access valid existing rights. Additionally, the bill allows for flexibility around motorized access and temporary roads to support health and safety, facilitate cultural uses, and allow access to private property.

The Santa Fe National Forest works closely with local partners, including Tribal partners, on management of this area. For instance, in 2024 the forest entered into a co-stewardship Memorandum of Understanding with the Pueblo of Tesuque and the Bureau of Land Management to support collaborative management of the Caja del Rio landscape, strengthen Tribal partnerships, and advance shared stewardship responsibilities in the area.

Motorized vehicle travel is relatively easy in this area and existing public motor vehicle access is shown on current Motor Vehicle Use Maps. Temporary access, access to private property, and tribal access may be authorized under permit and without designation of additional roads, trails, or areas on these maps. Road decommissioning and prevention of future damage by off-road vehicles will require implementation of additional barriers and signage.

The USDA opposes S. 4458.

The restrictive management designation of National Forest System land in this bill is contrary to the Administration's energy and mineral dominance priorities. Although mapping of the area does not show potential for mineral development, and there are no current operations in the area, the USDA does not support the permanent withdrawal of public lands. The USDA defers to the Department of Interior on portions of the bill pertaining to the Bureau of Land Management.

S. 4561, Closing Long Overdue Streamlining Encumbrances To Help Expeditiously Generate Approved Permits Act" or the "CLOSE THE GAP Act

S. 4561, the Closing Long Overdue Streamlining Encumbrances To Help Expeditiously Generate Approved Permits Act" or the "CLOSE THE GAP Act, would require Federal land management agencies to issue new regulations intended to streamline the process for broadband applications on Federal land.

Specifically, the bill would: standardize and accelerate permitting for communications facilities across federal land management agencies; require uniform application processes, competitive neutrality, and annual cost based fee structures; direct agencies to track and report permit-processing data and delays; designate broadband/communications projects as high priority "covered projects" under FAST41 to improve transparency and speed; directs agencies to establish categorical exclusions under the National Environmental Policy Act for certain safety improving upgrades to existing communications facilities; waive additional NEPA/historic preservation review for applications on previously analyzed or existing infrastructure; require online portal development for electronic submission of SF-299 forms; allow agencies to collect and retain cost recovery fees to support communications site permitting; establish a Federal Land Management Agency Working Group to coordinate application reviews and collaborate with the Federal Communications Commission on identifying unserved areas.

USDA supports S. 4561 and appreciates Congressional efforts to streamline the permitting process, which aligns with the efforts of the administration and the Department to ensure federal agencies consider environmental impacts while maintaining the flexibility needed for efficient permitting and faster delivery of critical USDA services and funding relied on by farmers, ranchers, loggers, and rural communities. We would appreciate the opportunity to work with the bill sponsor and Committee staff on technical edits to ensure the bill achieves its intended purpose. USDA defers to the Department of the Interior on interests under their jurisdiction.

In April 2026, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins announced the U.S. Department of Agriculture had finalized a rule modernizing the NEPA regulations. This revised rule is intended to align NEPA with its Congressionally mandated dimensions, reflecting guidance given by the

President and the Supreme Court, and making review under it faster, more flexible, and more efficient and effective. The new rule ensures a more standardized approach to NEPA compliance where necessary, while also allowing flexibility where appropriate, and will equip the Forest Service to streamline permitting and the delivery of essential forest health, infrastructure, and energy projects to safeguard communities and support rural prosperity.

In addition, the Forest Service is already taking actions aligned with the intent of this bill, adopting multiple categorical exclusions from other agencies related to broadband and communication facilities.

Conclusion

The USDA appreciates the opportunity to share our view on these bills and looks forward to working with the bill sponsors and Committee moving forward.