

**Statement of Jon Raby
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U.S. Department of the Interior
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining
Legislative Hearing**

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Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Cortez Masto, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the bills on the hearing agenda related to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

The BLM manages approximately 245 million surface acres, located primarily in 12 western states, and approximately 700 million acres of subsurface mineral estate. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) sets forth the BLM's multiple-use mission, directing that public lands generally be managed for a broad range of uses, such as energy development, livestock grazing, timber production, hunting and fishing, and recreation. FLPMA also requires BLM to manage public land resources on a sustained-yield basis for the benefit of current and future generations.

Under the Trump Administration, the BLM is managing the nation's public lands as national assets capable of growing our economy, helping balance the budget, and generating revenue for American taxpayers. These assets benefit all Americans. By implementing Executive Order 14154, *Unleashing American Energy*, Executive Order 14225, *Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production*, and Secretary's Order 3435, *Implementation of the Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences Act*, the BLM is working to fulfill the President's vision to increase and expand responsible energy, mineral, and timber development, and recreational access, to ensure that America's public lands serve the American people.

Additionally, the Administration is focused on streamlining organizational structures and regulations. For example, there is an urgent need to address today's wildfire crisis, as fires are costing the United States hundreds of billions of dollars annually while threatening lives and livelihoods. Decades of aggressive suppression, insufficient vegetation management and delayed fuel treatments have created conditions where wildfires burn hotter, faster, and more destructively. The Department of the Interior (Department) is committed to a bold transformation of the wildfire system to meet today's wildfire crisis. Recently, the Department, along with the Department of Agriculture (USDA), announced coordinated action to implement President Trump's Executive Order 14308, *Empowering Commonsense Wildfire Prevention and Response*, by unifying the Department's fire bureaus while more closely aligning operations with the USDA. To advance this effort, Secretary's Order 3443, *Elevating and Unifying DOI's Wildland Fire Management Program*, directs the establishment of a unified U.S. Wildland Fire Service (USWFS) by January 12, 2026, which will modernize wildfire management nationwide. DOI and USDA are diligently working toward a unification of Federal wildfire response and activities

from both Departments into the USWFS at DOI and look forward to working with Congress to quickly implement this unification in support of a more efficient national wildfire response.

The Department welcomes the continued support from Congress to sustain these, and other, critical reform efforts and looks forward to further collaboration on the topics on today's agenda.

S. 90, Historic Roadways Protection Act

S. 90, the Historic Roadways Protection Act would prohibit the use of funds to finalize and implement 11 travel management plans (TMPs) required under the 2017 Settlement Agreement in *Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, et al. v. U.S. Department of the Interior, et al.* (Consolidated Case No. 2:12-cv-257 DAK) until the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) certifies to Congress that 22 individual Revised Statute 2477 (R.S. 2477) lawsuits filed by various Utah counties have been adjudicated by Federal courts.

Analysis

Since entering into the 2017 Settlement Agreement, the BLM has worked diligently to prepare the required TMPs by coordinating with a broad array of stakeholders, including state and local government agencies. To date, the BLM has finalized 5 of the 11 required TMPs. Collectively, the completed plans, which cover more than 3.37 million acres of public lands, have designated approximately 4,848 miles of routes as available for and approximately 2,174 miles as closed to public off-highway vehicle (OHV) use.

BLM travel planning does not provide evidence bearing on or addressing the validity of any R.S. 2477 assertions and does not adjudicate, analyze, or otherwise determine the validity of those assertions. BLM travel plans are subject to valid existing rights. Nothing in BLM travel plans is intended to extinguish a valid existing right or alter the legal rights the state and counties may have to assert R.S. 2477 claims. If it is established that the state or counties possess valid existing R.S. 2477 rights-of-way (ROWs), the BLM will clarify, through appropriate mechanisms and consistent with applicable law, that the route designations in a BLM travel plan are subject to those ROWs.

The R.S. 2477 litigation in Utah, which involves more than 12,000 claimed ROWs, has proceeded very slowly. Over the past 13 years, only two cases involving 16 of the claimed R.S. 2477 ROWs in Utah have been litigated through the appellate level. The BLM is currently awaiting a decision from the Federal District Court in Utah on a third case involving 17 claimed ROWs, which has been pending since 2020. Under the bold leadership of President Trump and Secretary Burgum, the BLM has re-committed to ensuring that its plans and permitting decisions reflect the input of state and local governments and the people in the rural communities who would be most affected, unlike the previous Administration. The BLM applauds the Sponsor's efforts to provide certainty to state and county governments and the public regarding their local travel networks. The Department would like to work with the Sponsor and the Subcommittee on adjusting the bill language to correct a few minor technical issues and enable the BLM to continue meeting its multiple-use and sustained yield mission under FLPMA, while complying with other statutory obligations. In addition, we would welcome the opportunity to work collaboratively with the Sponsor and the Subcommittee on ways of making the current process for resolving R.S. 2477 claims faster and more efficient.

S. 91, Western Wildfire Support Act

S. 91 seeks to improve wildfire preparation by directing the Department and USDA to report to Congress on funds obligated and used for the Wildland Fire Management account, review and regularly update existing “spacial fire management policies,” and study the integration of local firefighters in wildfire responses. The bill also requires the Department and USDA to expedite the permitting and placement of wildfire detection equipment, expand eligibility for financial assistance for the acquisition of firefighting slip-on tanker units to include Indian tribes, and study and report on drone incursions on wildfire suppression operations, and wildfire response technology development. Lastly, the bill authorizes the Department of Homeland Security, through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), to support post-disaster assistance and online resource guides, codifies the role of Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) Teams in coordinating immediate post-wildfire emergency stabilization, and establishes a prize competition for wildfire-related invasive species reduction technology advancements.

The Department supports the goals of S. 91 to support wildland fire preparation, management, and recovery, and recommends technical modifications to further enhance the Department’s wildland fire management and response capabilities. For example, the Department recommends expanding the definition of “fireshed” to better account for non-forested vegetation types on Federal lands, such as shrublands and grasslands, as they account for the majority of wildland fires on lands managed by the Department. The Department is concerned with potential impacts of associating Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) program funding, described in Section 302, with time-limited IJA (40803(c)(16)) funding, as this could decrease the level of emergency response we could support. We hope to maintain existing emergency response funding authority under annual wildfire suppression appropriations. Finally, the Department recommends it be included in the Long-Term Burned Area Rehabilitation account created by Section 303 of the bill, which is only authorized for use by the USDA as currently written.

S. 140, Wildfire Prevention Act

S. 140 provides direction for the Department’s wildfire risk reduction and hazardous fuels reduction activities. This includes setting report requirements for hazardous fuels reduction activities, requiring the use of wildland fire performance metrics, directing the development of categorical exclusions for hazard tree removal, authorizing the use of grazing for wildfire risk reduction, and guiding wildfire technology development. The Department supports the bill and recommends minor technical edits to facilitate implementation and to expand the use of the authorities provided.

Title I, Accomplishments Over Rhetoric

Title I mandates increased hazardous fuels reduction activities on “Federal land,” including both land managed by the Forest Service and the BLM. Specifically, the bill would require a 20 percent increase in treated acres in Fiscal Years 2027 and 2028, and a 40 percent annual increase in hazardous fuels treatments every year thereafter. The Department supports the goal of increasing hazardous fuels treatments on Federal lands as a wildfire risk mitigation strategy and recommends the Sponsor consider expanding these provisions to encompass all Federal lands managed by the Department and its bureaus to maximize the scope of these important activities.

Among several reporting requirements, Title I requires the Department and USDA to include information on hazardous fuels reduction activities in the materials submitted in support of the President's budget, as well as on a public website. The bill directs that the acreage reported in the budget materials counts each acre treated only once regardless of whether multiple hazardous fuels reduction activities were carried out on each acre. The Department notes that using "acres treated" as a metric for assessing wildfire risk reduction efforts may not effectively illustrate the intensive work required to successfully treat certain high-risk areas. For example, even small areas with dense fuel loads may take multiple rounds of treatment to reduce hazardous fuels but ultimately result in a significant reduction to wildfire risk to people or infrastructure. New models for better assessing the efficacy of fire risk reduction are currently in development and may ultimately provide more useful and informative metrics compared to solely using acres treated. Further, the Department recommends that the Sponsor consider amending the definition of "hazardous fuels reduction activity" to include other methods commonly used, such as manual, chemical, and biological treatments. Finally, while DOI reports on accomplishments annually, there is a delay between the end of the fiscal year and the reporting date to provide time to compile all the information. The Department recommends adjusting the reporting dates accordingly.

Title II, Forest Management

Title II of S. 140 provides specific direction for forest management activities on Federal lands. This includes expanding the definition of "hazard tree" in the Federal Land and Policy Management Act (FLPMA) to include trees or parts of trees that, if they fell, would be likely to come within 50 feet of an electric powerline, versus the current 10-foot radius. The bill also allows authorized users to cut or remove trees in certain areas, such as easements for electric utilities on Federal lands, without requiring a separate timber sale. In addition, Title II authorizes additional tools for mitigating wildland fire risk, such as a categorical exclusion for addressing high-priority hazard trees on Forest Service-managed lands and directing the development of a livestock grazing-based fuels reduction strategy.

The Department appreciates the additional authorities and direction provided by Title II and supports these provisions. To further support the goals of this title, the Department recommends that the Sponsor expand the definition of "hazard trees" to include those likely to come within 150 feet of an electric powerline. In addition, the Department notes that the bill only directs the Forest Service to develop a categorical exclusion to address hazard trees and recommends that this provision also include the Department. Lastly, the Department believes the effectiveness of the wildland fire mitigation activities covered by this title would be increased if other agencies were able to authorize special use permit holders to cut or remove trees without requiring a timber sale.

Title III, Cultural Changes in Agencies

Lastly, Title III of the bill directs the Department and USDA to undertake efforts to streamline environmental reviews using existing authorities and to develop innovative technologies for addressing wildland fire. The Department notes that authorities for Federal land management beyond those described in Section 301 exist, which may be more appropriate and more streamlined for NEPA reviews, depending on the specific nature of the proposal, ecosystem,

stakeholder groups, and land management plan. Retaining discretion at the local unit level with the direction of using the most efficient, appropriate review tool would be preferred. The title also repeals the reporting requirement from Section 502 of the Federal Land Assistance Management and Enhancement Act of 2009 (FLAME) Act (P.L. 111-88). The Department supports these provisions, with proposed technical adjustments, and appreciates the repeal of the FLAME Act reporting requirements, as the Department is no longer appropriated emergency suppression funding under the Act.

S. 451, Restoring State Mineral Revenues Act

S. 451 would eliminate an administrative fee charged to lessees for oil and gas or geothermal leases. Currently, the BLM generates revenue from fluid minerals lease sales, bonuses, royalties, and rentals. This revenue is divided 50/50 with the state where the revenue was generated. A two percent administrative fee is assessed against the state's share of the revenue. The Office of Natural Resources Revenue (ONRR) deposits this fee revenue into the Treasury as miscellaneous receipts. This bill will eliminate the fee which would lower the amount of money going to Treasury but would increase the amount of money distributed to states. The Department would not be directly impacted by S. 451 and the Department does not have a position on the bill.

S. 764, Colorado Outdoor Recreation & Economy Act

S. 764 designates over 150,000 acres of new wilderness, recreation, and conservation management areas, including designating approximately 8,900 acres of public lands as the McKenna Peak Wilderness, while providing for the release of the remainder of the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness Study Area (WSA) from further wilderness study. In addition, the bill withdraws approximately 252,000 acres of Federal lands near Carbondale and east of Paonia, Colorado, including the Thompson Divide, from operation of the public land, mining, and mineral leasing laws, subject to valid existing rights, and provides for the relinquishment of certain mineral leases within this area. The bill further requires the BLM to inventory methane emissions from coal mines and creates a commercial coal mine methane emission capture program.

The bill also establishes a legislative boundary for the existing Curecanti National Recreation Area managed by the National Park Service (NPS), expands the area to encompass a total of approximately 50,300 acres, directs the transfer of certain lands currently managed by the BLM and Bureau of Reclamation to the NPS for inclusion into this area, and reduces the potential wilderness area boundary of the NPS-managed Rocky Mountain National Park.

Analysis

The Trump Administration has made unleashing American energy one of its priorities in a broader agenda aimed at strengthening the economy and bringing down the cost of living. Under Secretary Burgum's leadership, the Department is setting the foundation for a renewed focus on responsible resource management and economic growth, while ensuring the responsible stewardship of the nation's public lands and resources. This includes several actions in support of the Trump Administration's goal of American Energy Dominance with a renewed focus on coal, as well as the removal of barriers to oil and gas exploration and development.

S. 764 proposes significant and restrictive management designations that are contrary to the Administration's energy and mineral dominance priorities, as the designations are coupled with permanent withdrawals that would eliminate future exploration and development opportunities. The Biden Administration withdrew the Thompson Divide for a period of 20 years and S. 764 would make the withdrawal of these historic oil and gas producing areas permanent, which would unnecessarily limit energy and mineral development potential in the region. The Department is further concerned that the methane inventory and commercial lease requirements imposed by the bill would not result in a meaningful expansion of the Administration's energy dominance initiatives. Given these concerns, the Department opposes S. 764.

The Department notes that its bureaus, including the BLM, do not regulate air quality, and thus are not the most appropriate agency to be tasked with monitoring methane emissions from coal mines as required by the bill.

Regarding the management designations, the bill does not address the status of the remaining 11,000 acres of the McKenna Peak WSA not proposed for designation. The Department recommends releasing these lands from WSA status. The 1991 Colorado Statewide Wilderness Study Report did not recommend these lands for designation and found that the wilderness would limit the methods used to improve water quality and riparian habitat in the area and impede improvement projects for the benefit of livestock grazing and wildlife. Additionally, Section 204 also provides for the release from WSA status for only a portion of the Dominguez Canyon WSA, and the BLM recommends releasing the remaining 3,035 acres. Releasing the remainder of the WSA would benefit the BLM's ongoing management by removing narrow strips and scattered tracts of WSA. These areas remain within the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (NCA) and would be managed consistent with the rest of the NCA.

In addition to these needed WSA releases, the Department recommends that the Sponsor release other WSAs and Instant Study Areas (ISAs) in Colorado that were not included in previous wilderness designations, including the Bill Hare Gulch, North Sand Hills, Needle Rock, and High Mesa Grassland ISAs. Each of these areas are challenging for the BLM to manage because of their small size and proximity to existing development and were not found to possess wilderness characteristics when studied for eligibility in the Colorado Wilderness Study Report. The BLM does not find that wilderness is the best mechanism for managing the resources on these lands. Further, the Colorado Wilderness Study Report recognized moderate resource potential for uranium occurrences within the Black Ridge Canyon WSA along with 386 mining claims. Mineral development would be exceptionally limited, if not impossible, if the Black Ridge Canyon WSA is not released. At a time when our national and economic security are threatened by our reliance upon hostile foreign nations for mineral production, we must take action to facilitate domestic mineral production to the maximum extent possible.

S. 790, Barbara L. Cubin National Historic Trails Interpretive Center Redesignation Act

S. 790 would redesignate the National Historic Trails Interpretive Center, located in Casper, Wyoming, as the Barbara L. Cubin National Historic Trails Interpretive Center. The Department supports the bill.

Analysis

Between 1840 and 1890, around 500,000 emigrants followed the North Platte River through the present-day location of Casper, Wyoming, on the Oregon, Mormon Pioneer, and California Trails. Most of these “overlanders” were seeking land, religious freedom, or gold. Their experiences along the way were life-changing, defined by adventure, determination, suffering, and loss. The BLM manages the National Historic Trails Interpretive Center in Casper, which allows visitors to experience the drama of life along America’s historic trails.

Barbara Cubin represented Wyoming’s at-large district in the House of Representatives from 1995 until 2009. The Bureau of Land Management, the City of Casper, and the National Historic Trails Foundation began work to create, manage, and sustain a National Historic Trails Interpretive Center to interpret the historic trails in 1992. Rep. Cubin introduced legislation to authorize the National Historic Trails Interpretive Center, which became law in 1998 (P.L. 105-290). The center opened in 2002 and since then has hosted hundreds of thousands of visitors.

S. 888, Oregon Recreation Enhancement Act

S. 888 would establish two new recreation areas encompassing nearly 130,000 acres of public lands managed by the BLM and expand the Wild Rogue Wilderness by adding approximately 60,000 acres of BLM-managed lands in western Oregon and directs the development of a wildfire mitigation plan. The bill would also withdraw approximately 101,000 acres of Federal lands managed by the Forest Service and the BLM in southwestern Oregon from the operation of the public land, mining, and mineral and geothermal leasing laws.

S. 888 runs counter to the Administration’s timber production and energy dominance goals as it would impede management and harvest of timber and limit potential development of domestic critical minerals. The Department does not support the bill.

Background

The Oregon and California Revested Lands Sustained Yield Management Act of 1937 (O&C Lands Act) placed 2.4 million checkerboard acres of Oregon and California Railroad and Coos Bay Wagon Road grant lands (the O&C lands) under the jurisdiction of the Department. Under the O&C Lands Act, the Department manages O&C timberlands for permanent forest production in conformity with the principle of sustained yield for “the purpose of providing a permanent source of timber supply, protecting watersheds, regulating stream flow, and contributing to the economic stability of local communities and industries, and providing recreational facilities.” The Act also provides that the 18 counties containing O&C lands receive yearly payments equal to 50 or 75 percent of receipts from timber harvests on O&C lands in these counties. In addition to the O&C lands, the Department manages approximately 212,000 acres of public domain forests and other acquired lands in western Oregon.

Timber harvests and the associated payments to counties decreased significantly in the mid-1990s, after the historic highs experienced in the late 1980s. The decrease was caused, in part, by management measures seeking to address the conservation and recovery of threatened and endangered species such as the northern spotted owl, coho salmon, and marbled murrelet. The Department manages the O&C lands, public domain forests, and other acquired lands in western Oregon under the 2016 western Oregon Resource Management Plans (2016 RMPs). Under the

2016 RMPs, the BLM estimated it would be able to offer for sale 278 million board feet per year in total timber volume.

Under the direction of President Trump provided in Executive Order 14225, *Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production*, the BLM is working to ensure reliable, secure, and resilient domestic supply chains of timber, lumber, and their derivative products. Further, in implementing the One Big Beautiful Bill Act the BLM will utilize long-term contracts and increase timber sales by 25%. This amounts to an increase of 20 million board feet per year, up to 400 million board feet of total timber offered for sale in 2029. In support of this ambitious effort, timber offered for sale on O&C lands will increase to 291 million board feet next fiscal year and increase year over year.

Analysis

Oregon Recreation Areas (Section 3)

Section 3 of S. 888 establishes the Rogue Canyon and Molalla Recreation Areas on nearly 128,000 acres of intermixed O&C lands and public domain forests in western Oregon, provides guidance for the management of each area, and withdrawals these lands from the public land, mining, mineral leasing, and geothermal leasing laws. The Department estimates that the recreation designations would prevent timber harvest of approximately 38.3 million board feet per decade on approximately 1,000 acres from the proposed Molalla Recreation Area as well as approximately 26 million board feet per decade, on approximately 5,300 acres from the proposed Rogue Canyon Recreation Area.

Section 3 designates certain areas of Oregon as recreation areas and directs the Secretary to manage the lands for recreation purposes. It also directs the Secretary to conduct a wildfire risk assessment of the proposed recreation areas and Wild Rogue Wilderness as well as a wildfire mitigation plan. Although the Department supports efforts to increase access to and facilitate and enhance recreational opportunities on BLM-managed lands in western Oregon, we have concerns with the impacts on forest production and public access if Section 3 were to be implemented. Further, we do not support the proposed withdrawal as it conflicts with the goal of energy dominance.

Additionally, the BLM notes that these designations involve O&C lands within the harvest land base established under the 2016 RMPs. The bill's language limiting road construction would limit the extent to which forest health and wildfire resiliency activities could be implemented, especially where these activities necessitate decreasing the density of commercially viable materials. This language is inconsistent with the goals of Executive Order 14223 and our commitment to sustaining and creating recreational access and improving forest health and reducing wildfire risk through active management.

Wilderness (Section 4)

Section 4 of S. 888 would add approximately 60,000 acres of BLM-managed public lands to the existing Wild Rogue Wilderness in southwestern Oregon. This wilderness expansion overlaps O&C lands and could impact timber-harvest levels and related county receipts associated with any prescribed forest health, species habitat, and wildfire resiliency treatments and the implementation of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act and Executive Order 14223. The BLM does

not find that wilderness is the best mechanism for managing the resources on these lands. Motorized vehicle use, popular recreational opportunities like mountain biking, and developing infrastructure would be limited under a wilderness designation therefore making a wilderness designation inconsistent with the full range of uses and activities permitted on other BLM-managed lands in the area.

Withdrawal (Section 5)

Section 5 of S. 888 permanently withdraws approximately 101,000 acres, encompassing approximately 5,200 acres of BLM-managed O&C lands and public domain forests and approximately 95,800 acres of USFS-managed National Forest System lands, from the public land, mining, mineral leasing, and geothermal leasing laws. These lands were administratively withdrawn for 20 years by Public Land Order 7859 on December 30, 2016.

Nickel and chromium, which were determined by the U.S. Geological Survey to be critical minerals in 2022 and are again proposed for inclusion in the list of critical minerals in 2025, are the most important mineral resources in the lands proposed for permanent withdrawal. The Department notes that there are approximately 235 existing mining claims located within this area, including both National Forest System lands and BLM-managed lands. If Section 5 of S. 888 were enacted, as with other administrative and legislative withdrawals, these mining claims could only be developed for mining if they are determined to be valid existing rights after conducting lengthy and costly validity examinations. As directed by the President in Executive Order 14241, *Immediate Measures To Increase American Mineral Production*, the Department is committed to ensuring access to and efficient development of critical minerals and does not support this withdrawal.

S. 902, Wildfire Response and Preparedness Act of 2025

S. 902 establishes national goals for wildfire response times, mandates faster deployment of firefighting resources to support wildland fire incident response, and requires a comprehensive report to Congress addressing wildfire preparedness and resource needs. The bill further directs the Department, USDA, and the Department of Homeland Security, through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), to establish a standard response time metric of under 30 minutes for all wildfire ignitions, as practicable, as well as a three hour standard timeframe for deployment of fire suppression assets. The bill also directs that DOI provide a single point of contact for all DOI fire bureaus, and that DOI and USDA jointly provide Congress a unified budget that covers all wildland fire activities. The Department is pleased to report that some of the unification and reporting requirements are already in progress under President Trump's and Secretary Burgum's leadership. As I mentioned earlier, DOI is unifying its internal wildland fire activities under a single command structure at the new US Wildland Fire Service.

The Department appreciates the Sponsor's interest in promoting timely and effective responses to wildland fire incidents. As provided in the 10 Standard Firefighting Orders, the safety of firefighters and the public is always the highest priority of wildland fire management agencies. Each wildland fire incident is unique and particularly hazardous incidents may require the delay of suppression efforts until conditions allow for a safe response. The Department notes that the establishment of a standard response timeframe could inadvertently reduce firefighter safety in an effort to meet the bill's benchmark deadlines. For example, many wildland fires occur in

remote terrain that requires the deployment of aerially delivered resources for effective suppression. During high winds, deploying aerially delivered resources becomes unsafe; therefore, it is crucial to postpone suppression efforts until conditions allow for a safe response, which may fall outside of the legislation's timeframe. With these factors in consideration, the Department looks forward to working with the Sponsor and the Subcommittee to promote timely, safe, and effective wildland fire responses.

S. 1005, Southern Nevada Economic Development & Conservation Act

S. 1005 directs several actions for the management of Federal lands in Clark County, Nevada. Specifically, the bill authorizes several land conveyances under the Recreation and Public Purposes (R&PP) Act, amends certain provisions of the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA), takes lands into trust for the benefit of two Tribes, designates six new and expands five existing wilderness areas, expands two NCAs, creates nine Special Management Areas (SMAs), and designates four off-highway vehicle (OHV) Recreation Areas, among other provisions.

The Department supports the goals of the proposed land conveyances, as these actions align with the Trump Administration's priorities to further economic growth and ensure land management strategies are effective and in the public interest. In addition, the Department is committed to fulfilling its trust responsibilities to tribal nations and supporting tribal self-determination and has no objection to the provisions taking land into trust for the benefit of the Moapa Band of Paiutes and the Las Vegas Paiute Tribe. Regarding the provisions directing the designation or expansion of wilderness areas, NCAs, SMAs, and OHV Recreation Areas, the Department opposes these portions of S. 1005, as the Department has sufficient authorities to manage these lands without additional designations or restrictions.

The Department defers to the United States Forest Service regarding lands under their jurisdiction.

Red Rock NCA Expansion & Wilderness Provisions

S. 1005 would expand the Red Rock Canyon NCA near Las Vegas by adding approximately 51,000 acres of BLM-managed lands and authorize the use of fees for the public parks designated under the Clark County Conservation of Public Land and Natural Resources Act of 2002 (Public Law 107-282). In addition, Section 301 of S. 1005 designates over 1.5 million acres of wilderness on lands managed by the BLM, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and NPS. This section also expands the BLM's existing Bridge Canyon, Eldorado, Ireteba Peaks, Muddy Mountain, Nellis Wash, South McCullough, and Spirit Mountain Wildernesses by a total of approximately 140,000 acres.

Since his confirmation, Secretary Burgum has been committed to restoring balance in federal land management by prioritizing multiple-use access, empowering local decision-making, and supporting responsible development and recreation across America's public lands. The Department believes that the designations proposed by S. 1005 are not necessary for stewardship of these lands, may be inconsistent with current uses, and would present management challenges. As such, the Department opposes these provisions.

Sloan Canyon NCA Expansion & Lateral Pipeline Authorization

Section 209 of S. 1005 would direct the Secretary to grant a free and permanent ROW through the Sloan Canyon NCA to the Southern Nevada Water Authority for the construction of a water pipeline critical to meeting the needs of Las Vegas Valley communities. In addition, this section would expand the Sloan Canyon NCA by approximately 9,000 acres. The Department notes that the majority of the lands identified for inclusion in the Sloan Canyon NCA are currently being used for dispersed recreation, OHV use, and recreational shooting.

The Department supports the authorization and development of the water pipeline and appreciates the efforts of the Sponsor to balance the needs of rapidly growing communities with responsible stewardship of the landscapes managed within the Sloan Canyon NCA. The Department, however, does not support the proposed expansion of the Sloan Canyon NCA, as the additional designation is not necessary to appropriately manage these public lands.

Lower Las Vegas Wash Weirs

Sec. 702 of S. 1005 directs the Secretary to construct erosion control weirs on the lower Las Vegas Wash within the Lake Mead National Recreation Area. The Department would like to work with the Sponsor and Subcommittee in order to identify what Federal or non-Federal entity or entities will construct and fund the weirs, including continued operations and maintenance after construction is completed.

Special Management Areas & Ivanpah Area of Critical Environmental Concern

Section 204 of S. 1005 designates approximately 359,000 acres of BLM lands as SMAs, and directs the Secretary to withdraw these lands from entry and appropriation under the public land laws, location and entry under the mining laws, and operation of the mineral leasing laws, subject to valid existing rights and ROWs for the construction, maintenance, and operation of certain Moapa Valley Water District facilities. In addition, this section revokes any portion of the existing Ivanpah Area of Critical Environmental Concern that overlaps with the SMAs designated by the bill, and limits OHV use within the SMAs to roads and trails designated for their use.

Section 205 further requires that the BLM-managed lands designated as SMAs in Section 204 be used as a mitigation measure credit to fully or partially offset additional incidental take impacts resulting from the development of additional land within Clark County under its Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) framework. The section also authorizes the Secretary to extend the existing MSHCP and associated Incidental Take Permit for the “maximum authorized duration” upon receipt of a complete application for an amendment to the MSHCP.

The Department appreciates the Sponsor’s interest in ensuring the MSHCP is able to facilitate the future growth of southern Nevada but cannot support the designation of the SMAs and the withdrawal of the BLM lands within them. The proposed designations are not necessary for the continued management of these public lands, as the BLM currently possesses sufficient authorities for appropriate stewardship of their resources and values.

OHV Recreation Areas

Section 701 establishes four OHV Recreation Areas on approximately 117,500 acres of BLM-managed public lands. The bill would also withdraw the four proposed OHV Recreation Areas, along with the existing Nellis Dunes OHV Recreation Area from entry and appropriation under the public land laws, location and entry under the mining laws, and operation of the mineral leasing laws, subject to valid existing rights. Lastly, the bill would limit operation of OHVs to only those roads and trails designated for their use in the applicable management plan.

The Trump Administration understands that America's connection with our public lands is strengthened through expanded access and is strongly committed to promoting outdoor recreation nationwide. The Department is working to further the Administration's outdoor access priorities by opening more areas to hunting and outdoor recreation, including OHV use, by working with state and local leaders, and recreational users who know the communities and landscapes best. The Department is concerned that the withdrawals included in these provisions would restrict multiple use of these areas that are compatible with OHV and other recreational users and cannot support them.

Federal Land Conveyances

Section 210 of the bill directs the conveyance of approximately 35 acres of BLM-managed public lands near Sloan, Nevada, to Clark County for use as part of a "Job Creation Zone." The section further states that after conveyance, the county may sell, lease, or otherwise convey, for fair market value, the lands within the Job Creation Zone for nonresidential development, with the proceeds to be distributed in accordance with section 4(e) of SNPLMA. In addition, the County is authorized to retain parcels within the Job Creation Zone for public recreation or other public purposes consistent with the R&PP Act. Lastly, Section 210 requires any parcels not conveyed per the section within 30 years of enactment, as well as any parcel found to be used in a manner that is inconsistent with the uses specified, to revert to the United States.

The BLM generally requires fair market value for public lands or interests transferred out of public ownership in accordance with FLPMA. The Department supports the objective of this conveyance but notes that the conveyances would not provide fair market value to American taxpayers. In addition, as a general policy matter, the Department believes that administrative costs related to the conveyance should be borne by the benefiting entity.

Sections 401-405 of S. 1005 direct the Secretary to convey approximately 18,000 acres of Federal lands to local government entities within Clark County, Nevada, upon request. These conveyances are to be used for a variety of specified public purposes, and would revert to the Department, at the discretion of the Secretary, if not used for their intended public purpose.

The BLM regularly leases and conveys lands to state, local, and Tribal governments and nonprofit entities for a variety of public purposes. These leases and conveyances are typically accomplished under the provisions of the R&PP Act or through direction supplied by specific Acts of Congress. Conveyances directed by the R&PP Act help states, Tribes, local communities, and nonprofit organizations obtain lands at nominal cost for important public purposes. The Department supports the conveyances proposed in these sections.

Finally, Section 601 of the bill amends the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (Public Law 111-11) to convey approximately 740 acres of BLM-managed lands to the city of Henderson, Nevada, for public purposes such as affordable housing. This section also directs that the land be made available for sale or conveyance by the city at fair market value if no longer needed for public purposes. The Department supports this conveyance and looks forward to continued collaboration with Congress to address affordable housing needs.

Amendments to SNPLMA – Enlargement of Land Disposal Boundary & Affordable Housing Changes

Section 203 makes several amendments to SNPLMA, including making an additional 25,000 acres of BLM-managed lands available to be set aside for disposal after joint selection by the BLM and Clark County. The section also amends section 7(b) of SNPLMA, which provides for development of affordable housing, by directing the Secretary to prioritize applications for affordable housing purposes over other pending land disposals authorized by SNPLMA.

Enacted in 1998, SNPLMA authorizes the sale of public lands managed by the BLM within a congressionally designated boundary in Clark County. Under SNPLMA, revenue from the sale of public lands within the boundary is split between the State of Nevada, the Southern Nevada Water Authority, and a special account within the Department. The Secretary may use these SNPLMA funds for a variety of uses, including public purposes such as parks, trails, and natural areas; hazardous fuel reduction; capital improvements; and conservation initiatives. SNPLMA also directs certain land sales and procedures, including authorizing the sale of public land for affordable housing projects.

The Department supports these provisions that would make public land available for acquisition and development of affordable housing. The Department is committed to working with Congress to explore further opportunities for addressing America's housing crisis, particularly in states and communities surrounded by federal lands that limit their ability to grow and prosper.

S.1175, Small County PILT Parity Act

Under the Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program, the Department annually distributes payments to local governments to compensate for non-taxable federal land in their jurisdictions and offset the costs for essential local services. Since PILT payments began in 1977, the Department has distributed more than \$12.6 billion to local governments.

S.1175 would lower the population threshold for eligibility for PILT payments from 4,999 to 999 residents for qualifying low-population counties. Additionally, it would create a tiered payment system. Under this new formula, counties with populations starting at 1,000 would receive \$394.15 per person, with payments capping at \$90.12 per person for counties with more than 50,000.

Analysis

PILT payments help fund critical services including local search and rescue operations, road maintenance, law enforcement, schools, and emergency services. These expenditures also help local governments meet the demands of millions of visitors who enjoy our federal lands every year.

Based on 2025 payment information, the Department estimates S. 1175 would impact more than 300 newly eligible counties for PILT payments and increase payments made under PILT by approximately \$5 million. The Department supports local communities impacted by the presence of nontaxable federal lands within their boundaries and looks forward to continuing to ensure efficient and effective management of this program to help rural Americans.

S. 1195, Pershing County Economic Development and Conservation Act

S. 1195 would authorize public land sales, exchanges, and conveyances of approximately 451,000 acres of land managed by the BLM in Pershing County, Nevada, and would designate approximately 136,600 acres of BLM-managed lands as seven new wilderness areas. The bill also releases approximately 48,600 acres of BLM-managed WSAs from further study. In addition, the bill directs the Secretary to take approximately 10 acres of BLM-managed lands into trust for the benefit of the Lovelock Paiute Tribe.

Analysis

The Department recognizes the challenges presented by the checkerboard-pattern of land ownership in this region and believes that land sales and exchanges are an important tool to ensure BLM land-management strategies are effective and in the public interest. The BLM supports the goals of the proposed land sales, exchanges, and conveyances in the bill, as these actions could help address management challenges and create economic growth opportunities for communities in northern Nevada. Regarding the provisions directing the Secretary to take approximately 10 acres into trust for the benefit of the Lovelock Paiute Tribe, the Department is aware of the intended use as a tribal cemetery and has no objection to the proposal.

As a matter of policy, the Department supports Congressional action to resolve wilderness designation and WSA release issues on public lands across the West, and we welcome opportunities to further those efforts. While the Department supports the proposed release of WSAs in S. 1195, the Department cannot support the wilderness designations proposed by the bill, as the BLM has sufficient authorities to appropriately manage these areas without unnecessarily impeding public access, limiting outdoor recreational opportunities, and, in some cases, mineral development.

S. 1228, To amend the Public Lands Corps Act of 1993 to modify the cost-sharing requirement for conservation projects carried out by a qualified youth or conservation corps, and for other purposes

S. 1228 proposes to amend the Public Lands Corps Act of 1993 by modifying the cost-sharing requirements for projects carried out by qualified youth or conservation corps. The Public Lands Corps provides education, training, and career-building experiences by performing a wide array of projects related to federal lands resource enhancement and facility maintenance, such as trail building, seed collection, and invasive species control. Under current law, the Federal government covers 75 percent of the costs for projects performed by Public Lands Corps, while non-federal entities are responsible for 25 percent of the costs. This bill would increase the Federal share to 90 percent and reduce the non-federal share to 10 percent.

Analysis

President Trump is committed to creating more opportunities for young Americans to develop valuable skills and prepare for meaningful careers, while also ensuring that taxpayers dollars are used efficiently. America needs more skilled workers, and the Department is proud to advance the President's vision, outlined in Executive Order 14278, *Preparing Americans for High-paying Skilled Trade Jobs of the Future*.

The Department supports opportunities for youth and corps participation and to increase the number of projects completed on Federal lands. However, rather than a blanket reduction of the non-Federal cost-share to 10 percent for all projects, the Department recommends amending the bill to provide the Secretary discretion to reduce the non-Federal share to not less than 10 percent under certain circumstances. This targeted approach ensures flexibility for projects where meeting the 25 percent match is a demonstrated barrier, particularly for smaller corps, Tribal partners, and organizations working in rural or underserved communities, while preserving incentives for cost-effective partnerships where non-Federal entities have the capacity to contribute more.

S. 1319, Pecos Watershed Protection Act

S. 1319 would withdraw, subject to valid existing rights, approximately 166,600 acres of Federal land located near Pecos, New Mexico, from the operation of public land and mining laws, and all laws pertaining to mineral and geothermal leasing or mineral materials. The lands proposed for withdrawal include approximately 165,000 acres of Federal lands managed by the USFS and approximately 1,600 acres of public land managed by the BLM and are within and adjacent to the USFS-managed Sante Fe National Forest. While the BLM manages the subsurface Federal mineral estate, the BLM defers to surface managing agencies regarding potential development activities on Federal lands not managed by the BLM.

Analysis

President Trump has made it clear that strengthening America's economic and national security means securing the resources that fuel our way of life by expanding domestic production, unleashing American innovation, and reducing our dependence on foreign adversaries. With the direction of Executive Order 14241, *Immediate Measures to Increase American Mineral Production*, the Department has taken action to prioritize the responsible development of domestic minerals, which supports jobs, economic growth, and national security interests.

The Department is aware that these lands proposed for withdrawal under S. 1319 contain potential for a variety of minerals, including gold, zinc, lead, copper, and silver. Because the proposed withdrawal would permanently limit the management and potential development of important mineral sources, the Department opposes S. 1319.

S. 1363, Land Grant-Mercedes Traditional Use Cooperation and Coordination Act

S. 1363 would require the Department and USDA, in consultation with the New Mexico Land Grant Council, the governing bodies of qualified land grant-mercedes, and Indian Tribes, to develop within two years written guidance pertaining to the management of lands within certain land grant-mercedes in New Mexico. The guidance would describe the historical-traditional uses a community user or governing body of a qualified land grant-mercedes may conduct for noncommercial use on Federal land, as well as the activities that would require a Federal permit.

S. 1363 also provides for additional consideration for historical-traditional uses by qualified land grant-mercedes when developing land use plans. Under the bill, the Departments would be required to provide for and evaluate impacts to historical-traditional uses in developing, maintaining, and revising land management plans under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and the National Forest Management Act.

The Department understands the importance of working closely with New Mexico's land grant-mercedes and appreciates the cultural and historical role they have played and continue to play throughout New Mexico. The BLM engages in outreach and coordination efforts with land grant-mercedes, which includes inviting those that are political subdivisions of the State of New Mexico to participate as cooperating agencies on planning efforts, and interfacing with the New Mexico Land Grant Council. The Department supports the goal of S. 1363 to better enhance the BLM's coordination with land grant-mercedes in New Mexico and has no objection to the bill.

The Department defers to the USDA regarding any changes to the management of lands under its jurisdiction.

S. 1468, To amend the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act to provide that Alexander Creek, Incorporated, is recognized as a Village Corporation under that Act, and for other purposes

S. 1468 would amend the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) to legislatively designate the Alexander Creek Inc. as a Native village under the provisions of ANCSA.

Congress enacted ANCSA in 1971 to establish the framework to settle aboriginal land claims in Alaska. Through Section 4 of ANCSA, Native claims in Alaska were extinguished in exchange for 46 million acres of land and \$962.5 million in compensation. ANCSA established specific entitlements for allocating this settlement among Native-owned regional corporations, Native villages and Native groups. Native villages (required to have a Native population of 25 or more, as determined by a 1970 census) received greater entitlements than Native groups. Native villages were entitled to a minimum of 69,120 acres from the public domain. In contrast, communities determined to have fewer than 25 Natives could be certified as Native groups and were entitled to a maximum of 7,680 acres.

ANCSA listed nearly 200 Native villages and directed the Secretary to determine if additional Native communities qualified as villages. Alexander Creek was not listed as a village in ANCSA. It applied for eligibility as an unlisted village, but its application was contested by the State of Alaska, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and other parties.

Alexander Creek's eligibility as a Native village was ultimately resolved in a Stipulated Agreement in 1979 (Agreement) and codified in Section 1432 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). The Agreement between Alexander Creek, the ANCSA regional corporation Cook Inlet Region, Inc. (CIRI), and the Department settled three issues: Alexander Creek's eligibility, its entitlement to surface estate, and CIRI's entitlement to associated subsurface estate. In signing the Agreement, Alexander Creek withdrew its application to be recognized as a village, accepted certification as a Native group, and agreed that the lands

conveyed under the Agreement “constitute a full and final settlement” of its land entitlement under ANCSA. The Department has fulfilled its responsibilities to Alexander Creek under the Agreement.

Analysis

The bill allows for further negotiations with Alexander Creek, Inc., which may result in the conveyance of additional public lands to Alexander Creek, Inc., through the regular ANCSA process. The Department understands the continuing desire of Alexander Creek, Inc., to be recognized as a Native village under ANCSA, and notes that the bill does not assign an acreage entitlement, include selection deadlines, or provide withdrawal authority.

It appears that S. 1468 may not affect any other ANCSA corporation entitlement, as it primarily points to the transfer of excess real property from the General Services Administration to Alexander Creek, Inc. The Department would appreciate clarification on this point from the Sponsors.

The Department supports the intent of the bill and would like to work with the Sponsors to ensure the bill contains the specificity needed to fulfill Alexander Creek’s entitlement under ANCSA and provide for successful implementation.

S. 1476, M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act

S. 1476 would designate nearly 450 miles of rivers and creeks in the Gila River system managed by the BLM and the USFS in New Mexico as components of the National Wild and Scenic River (WSR) System. The BLM-managed sections include 2.1 miles of the Gila River in the area known as the Gila Lower Box to be designated as a recreational river; 6.1 miles of the Gila River in the Gila Lower Box as a wild river; and 2.4 miles of the Gila River in the area known as the Gila Middle Box as a wild river.

The bill requires the Department and USDA to consult with tribal governments, applicable political subdivisions of the state, and interested members of the public when preparing the comprehensive management plan for such segments. Any nonfederal land within or adjacent to a WSR segment designated by the bill that is acquired by the United States would be incorporated in and administered as part of the applicable segment. Further, the bill prohibits the United States from acquiring such land without the owner’s consent.

S. 1476 does not limit mining activities or mineral processing facilities outside the boundaries of covered segments. Further, the bill allows for the continued authority of Secretary or the state to operate, maintain, replace, or improve a native fish habitat restoration project (including fish barriers) in existence at the time of enactment within a covered segment while also allowing for the construction of native fish habitat restoration projects to enhance the recovery of threatened or endangered species. Lastly, the bill would transfer 440 acres of land from the Gila National Forest to the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument, which is administered by the NPS.

Analysis

The Department is focused on prioritizing the Trump Administration’s commitment to American energy dominance and boosting economic growth. The Department does not support expanding

wild and scenic river designations during the national energy emergency as it may limit critical development activities in these areas.

The bill also proposes to transfer the administrative jurisdiction of 440 acres of federal land in the Gila National Forest in New Mexico from the USFS to the NPS. These lands encompass support facilities for the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument (Monument). The Monument is an NPS managed site that is surrounded by the Gila National Forest, managed by the USFS. Established in 1907 by President Theodore Roosevelt, the National Monument protects the largest known Mogollon cliff dwellings site and interprets for the public well-preserved structures built more than 700 years ago.

The NPS and the USFS have co-managed the Monument and its support facilities for almost 60 years. The USFS administers the lands where the support facilities are located. The NPS administers approximately 540 acres, which include the Monument and other culturally significant resources. To improve efficiency and reduce duplication between the two agencies, the NPS and the USFS support the transfer of administrative jurisdiction over the USFS lands containing the Monument to the NPS. These lands include the Gila Center and two campgrounds. The NPS depends upon these support facilities for housing, maintenance, a visitor center, and a contact station to maintain visitor services at the Monument. The Department notes that an updated legislative map of the lands proposed for transfer is available through the NPS.

The Department defers to the USDA regarding the bill's provisions affecting the management of lands under their jurisdiction.

S. 2016, Chugach Alaska Land Exchange Oil Spill Recovery Act

S. 2016 would direct a land exchange between the Federal government and the Chugach Alaska Corporation (CAC) within one year of enactment. The Federal government would acquire over 231,000 acres of subsurface estate from the CAC, the majority of which underlies Federal and State of Alaska surface lands with conservation easements managed by the Federal government, or village corporation-owned lands with timber easements managed by the Federal government. In exchange, the CAC would receive the fee estate, both surface and subsurface estates, for nearly 64,000 acres managed by the U.S. Forest Service, approximately 1,200 acres managed by the Bureau of Land Management, and 760 acres managed by the National Park Service.

The Department notes that there appear to be lands contemplated in the bill that were not identified in the Chugach Region Land Study as potentially available for exchange, and, as written, it is not clear whether the proposed exchange would need to be of equal value.

This exchange would protect sensitive ecosystems, fulfill the policy goals of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and restore economic opportunity to Chugach shareholders. The Department supports the intent of S. 2016 and looks forward to working with the Sponsor and the Subcommittee on some technical issues, including legal land descriptions, as well as considerations for survey timelines and terms of the proposed exchange, to ensure effective implementation. The Department defers to the U.S. Department of Agriculture regarding the disposition of lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service under this bill.

S. 2033, Cross-Boundary Wildfire Solutions Act

S. 2033 directs the Comptroller General of the United States to conduct a study on existing Federal programs, rules, and authorities that enable or inhibit wildfire mitigation from being completed across land ownership boundaries on Federal and non-Federal land and identify opportunities to increase capacity, efficacy, or to access funding to mitigate wildfires. However, the Department notes that the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 is only one of the authorities under which Federal wildfire mitigation efforts are conducted and recommends broadening the focus of the bill accordingly. The Department supports the bill and its objective of identifying and addressing barriers to effective cross-boundary wildfire mitigation across both Federal and non-Federal lands.

S. 2262, American Voices in the Federal Lands Act

S. 2262 would amend FLPMA to define “public involvement” as the opportunity for affected citizens “of the United States,” rather than citizens generally, to participate in rulemaking, decision-making, and planning with respect to the public lands. Additionally, the bill requires the Department and the USDA, when promulgating rules and regulations, to take into consideration only public comments received from citizens of the United States and to establish and implement a process commonly known as ‘Completely Automated Public Test to tell Computers and Humans Apart (CAPTCHA)’ to deter attempts at public involvement via artificial intelligence (AI). The Department recognizes that maintaining the integrity of our federal agency rulemaking and regulatory review process is critical and must include safeguards against misuse by foreign adversaries and AI “bots” and supports the bill.

Recent rulemakings have received exceptionally voluminous numbers of comments which raises questions about the accuracy of the associated identity information along with serious concern that the voices of those most impacted by an agency decision could be overwhelmed by foreign adversaries and interest groups attempting to manipulate American decision-making. The Department recognizes that there will be significant challenges associated with verifying citizenship and identity information as the agency accepts comments in a variety of ways including paper mail, email, Regulations.gov, ePlanning, and other Department systems. However, the Department is committed to continuous process improvement to prevent inappropriate influence of foreign adversaries and artificial intelligence. The Department welcomes discussions with the Sponsor to clarify whether it is the intent of the bill to move all comments to electronic submissions utilizing CAPTCHA or if the bill’s CAPTCHA requirements are intended to apply solely to electronic submissions while paper mail may continue to be accepted.

S. 2273, Wyoming Education Trust Modernization Act

S. 2273 would amend Wyoming’s State Act of Admission to provide the state’s permanent school land fund with additional investment flexibility. The bill does not apply to any policies or lands under the Department’s jurisdiction.