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Statement of
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Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

Hearing on
"Bidenomics & Land Management: the Misguided
National Strategy to Develop Environmental Economic Decisions"

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Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Stansbury, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on how the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) lands and programs directly and indirectly benefit the health, wealth, and well-being of communities across the United States.

The Value of Public Lands

On behalf of the American people, the BLM manages approximately 245 million surface acres, located primarily in 12 western states, and approximately 700 million subsurface acres, roughly 30 percent of the nation's onshore mineral resources. The BLM is charged with stewarding a diverse array of resources for the benefit of all Americans.

Much of this work is governed by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), which sets out the Bureau's multiple use and sustained yield mission. Under that dual charge, the BLM manages public lands to support a wide range of uses, such as renewable and conventional energy development, livestock grazing, conservation, mining, watershed protection, hunting, fishing, and other forms of recreation, while protecting the health of those lands to secure the resources and benefits they provide for future generations of Americans. Balancing these priorities – ensuring appropriate uses while protecting the health of the nation's public lands – guides the Bureau in all of our work.

Activities related to the BLM's management of public lands have been and continue to be a driver of the nation's economy and a critical source of revenue and jobs for communities across the nation. BLM-managed public lands and waters supported $262.7 billion in economic output and 1 million jobs across the country in Fiscal Year 2022.[1] Resource uses authorized by the BLM generate substantial revenue for the U.S. Treasury, as well as for state and local governments.

The importance of the sustained yield component of the Bureau's dual mandate is coming increasingly into focus as the BLM grapples with changing conditions on the landscape. Much

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[1] For more information, please see: https://www.blm.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2024-01/Valuing%20America%27s%20Public%20Lands.pdf.

like communities across the nation, the BLM is responding to extended droughts, increasingly large and intense fires, an influx of invasive species, and extreme weather events. These changing conditions, largely driven by a changing climate, are making it more difficult to manage the public lands for the uses communities rely upon and wildlife require, from healthy forage to fire resilient ecosystems. BLM-managed public lands are also experiencing unprecedented use and visitation as Americans flock to the world class outdoor recreation opportunities these lands provide. Our public lands hosted over 82 million visitors in Fiscal Year 2022, an increase of 9 million visitors since 2020. These changing conditions and uses pose challenges for the management of public lands and for the BLM's capacity to deliver a sustained yield of these lands and resources for future generations of Americans.

Managing for Land Health & Balanced Use
The nation is increasingly aware of the benefits healthy public lands provide, and how important these benefits are for communities and our nation's economy: fire resilient forests and rangelands help protect homes, communities, and businesses from the impacts of wildfire; wetlands and healthy riparian areas keep water on the landscape; and habitat that supports pollinators is essential for our agricultural economy and food security – 80 percent of the world's flowering plants need a pollinator to reproduce, and those pollinators are responsible for fully one third of the food we consume.

As we come to better understand the important services healthy lands and ecosystems provide for communities and how those services are threatened by climate-driven impacts, it is imperative that the BLM continue to fully embrace and meet our sustained yield mandate and protect the health and productivity of the nation's public lands for the benefit of current and future generations of Americans. Under the Biden-Harris Administration, the BLM is using every tool available to meet our mission, leveraging the best available science and data and investing in landscapes and land health while updating our regulatory and resource management frameworks to meet the needs of 21st century land management.

Investing in Land Health
As part of President Biden's Investing in America agenda, the BLM has identified 21 Restoration Landscapes across 11 western states and has invested more than $161 million to target efforts to restore degraded or damaged public land resources. This once-in-a-generation investment from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will support collaborative and partnership-driven restoration work, coordinating investments from the Bureau's fuels management, range, wildlife, forestry, aquatics, and recreation programs where they can make the most meaningful impacts for communities and BLM-managed resources. Restoration Landscape projects will restore wildlife habitat in the sagebrush steppe of the high desert, re-create wetland meadows, and repair watersheds on former industrial timberlands.

In Arizona, for example, the BLM is focusing on projects in the mountainous Sky Islands to reduce fuel loads, improve groundwater management in the San Pedro River drainage (in partnership with Cochise County and the Department of Defense), protect critical wildlife migration corridors, and support recovery of threatened and endangered wildlife. In New Mexico, the BLM is continuing its long-term restoration investment through partnerships in the Lower Pecos River landscape. Restoration efforts will remove mesquite, which has invaded this

landscape and damaged fragile soils, reduced native grasses, and decreased groundwater recharge. Restoring this landscape will improve water quality, increase forage for livestock and wildlife, and enhance recreation and hunting opportunities for rural communities in southeast New Mexico and west Texas.

Policy & Planning Updates
The BLM is engaging in several key planning and regulatory updates that, when finalized, will help guide future decision-making in an effort to balance uses on public lands while protecting land health. This work benefits from accurate data on the conditions of the public lands and how management decisions will affect natural resources and different uses. Efforts like the proposed update of the Western Solar Plan and the ongoing Sage Grouse Planning Amendments will help the BLM more effectively manage the public lands, driving development to the most appropriate areas while avoiding conflicts with sensitive habitats and resources that might delay or derail projects. Helping guide development will allow the BLM to maximize agency resources to review appropriate projects while responsibly stewarding the public lands. Similarly, regulatory updates like the proposed Fluid Minerals Leases and Leasing Processes Rule covering onshore oil and gas, and the proposed Rights-of-Way, Leasing, and Operations for Renewable Energy Rule will help meet BLM's statutory obligations under the IRA and provide a more consistent framework for project applications and reviews, while avoiding development conflicts.

The BLM's proposed Conservation and Landscape Health Rule would update the Bureau's regulatory framework, ensuring balance through multiple use and sustained yield management. The proposed rule would acknowledge conservation as being on an equal footing with other public land uses, thereby enshrining Congress's direction in FLPMA, while establishing a framework to ensure healthy landscapes, abundant wildlife habitat, clean water, and balanced decision-making on our nation's public lands.

The concepts of the proposed rule are consistent with strategies used by other state and federal land management agencies to ensure the federal government has tools and direction to identify areas in need of restoration or protection, as well as the ability to encourage investments in public lands to help balance the impacts of development. The proposal would direct land managers to make management decisions informed by empirical assessments of land health conditions. The proposal would also give the BLM new tools to work with appropriate entities interested in performing restoration or compensatory mitigation work on public lands.

The proposed Conservation and Landscape Health Rule would also further improve the BLM's use of science and data, supporting the expanded application of land health requirements and better incorporating the best available information into decision-making on the ground.

Incorporating the Best Available Science & Data into Land Management
Across all its work, the BLM gathers and considers the best available science, data, and information to inform decision-making. Ensuring that robust information and public input are incorporated into Bureau decisions helps to inform and improve BLM management, and also helps protect the important resources and values communities expect from their public lands.

On January 19, 2023, the Biden-Harris Administration released the *National Strategy to Develop*

Statistics for Environmental-Economic Decisions (National Strategy), which initiated a multi-year effort to help the federal government understand and consistently track changes in the condition and economic value of land, water, air, and other natural assets, which underpin businesses, enhance quality of life, and act as a stabilizing force for economic prosperity and opportunity. Ultimately, the National Strategy will help bridge the gap between economic statistics and the environment, with an emphasis on better data to understand nature's critical contributions to the U.S. economy and to guide policy and business decisions moving forward.

While full implementation of the National Strategy will take a number of years, its key, foundational concept – gathering the best available science, data, and information to make reasonable decisions – is something that the BLM has been doing for decades. Moreover, as conceived, this effort will help ensure greater consistency across agencies in the collection and use of environmental data, which could help improve inter-agency coordination and decision-making.

While the BLM was not involved in the development of this National Strategy, the Bureau welcomes efforts that will contribute to better understanding of the value of BLM-managed public lands and waters. Nature has delivered natural assets to us for millennia. It is our job to ensure those assets are available to future generations. By continuing to collect and improve data and information on these resources, and by incorporating that information in all of its decision-making, the agency will be better equipped to ensure that public lands continue providing the exceptional resources that Americans know and love for generations to come.

Conclusion

The BLM is committed to managing America's public lands in a balanced, science-based manner for the benefit of current and future generations. The decisions we make about how we manage public lands will have a profound impact on Americans across the country, and the BLM takes that responsibility and its multiple use and sustained yield mission seriously. Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today. We look forward to working further with Congress on this issue, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.