

**Statement of
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**Before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
House Natural Resources
On the “*Spending Priorities & Mission of the Bureau of Land Management*”
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Madam Chair and Members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to be here today to discuss the spending priorities and mission of the Department of the Interior (DOI)’s Bureau of Land Management (BLM) of particular interest to this Subcommittee.

Background

The BLM manages approximately 245 million acres of surface land and over 700 million acres of subsurface mineral estate on behalf of the American people. The BLM’s mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for multiple uses – including conventional and renewable energy development; livestock grazing; conservation; mining; watershed protection; hunting, fishing, and other forms of recreation. This multiple-use, sustained yield mission, mandated in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), enables the BLM to contribute to economic growth, job creation, and domestic energy production, generating revenues for Federal and state treasuries and local economies.

The President’s FY 2021 budget request for the BLM advances Administration priorities, such as increasing energy security, promoting efficient land management, expanding opportunities for outdoor recreation, promoting job creation, and providing conservation stewardship for public lands while reducing regulatory burdens. The request also supports the Administration’s active forest management reforms, including legislation that supports efficient land management decision-making to help reduce fire risk. The Budget includes resources to maintain land stewardship commitments, promote conservation of public lands and water, expand access to outdoor recreation opportunities, and ensure safety and security on public lands, all while reducing unnecessary regulatory burdens and streamlining BLM operations to better serve the American public.

Providing Conservation Stewardship for Public Lands

The BLM’s proposed FY 2021 budget reflects the priority placed on expanding access to public lands, enhancing public and stakeholder trust, being a good neighbor in the communities that are home to BLM lands, and restoring regulatory balance. Balancing habitat conservation and responsible development of public land resources ensures the best outcome for the people and wildlife that rely on these lands.

Active Forest Management

The FY 2021 budget supports the Administration's commitment to active forest, and rangeland health management reform is highlighted in the BLM's proposed FY 2021 budget. Close to 65 million acres of forest and woodlands are managed by the BLM across 12 western states and Alaska. These forests provide food and habitat for wildlife, trails for hiking and biking, clean abundant water for communities and a variety of different wood products including timber, and firewood. The BLM manages forests and woodlands in accordance with the multiple-use, sustained yield mandate of FLPMA.

The BLM continues to prioritize active forest and rangeland management to combat the threats posed by insect infestation, invasive species, and disease contributing to the potential for catastrophic wildfire. Consistent with Executive Order (E.O.) 13855, *Promoting Active Management of America's Forests, Rangeland, and Other Federal Lands to Improve Conditions and Reduce Wildfire Risk* and Secretarial Order (S.O.) 3372, *Reducing Wildfire Risks on Department of the Interior Land Through Active Management*, the BLM Fuels Management program accomplished 846,000 acres of fuels treatments using a variety of active management vegetation treatments including mechanical, biological, and chemical tools, as well as prescribed fire in FY 2019. This total exceeds the targets directed under E.O. 13855, which sought 750,000 total acres of treatment from all of DOI's agencies.

The FY 2021 budget proposes investments of \$10.3 million for forest management on public lands and \$112.8 million in the Oregon and California Grant Lands appropriation. This funding would allow the BLM greater flexibility in addressing fire resiliency in forest stands that have lower commercial viability, but are located within high-risk areas or the wildland urban interface.

Rangeland Management

The President's FY 2021 budget requests \$94.6 million for the BLM's Rangeland Management program. To better leverage resources and focus funding on complex grazing permit processing requirements, the BLM will continue to use the authority provided under section 402(c) of the FLPMA, which allows expiring permits to be renewed more efficiently.

BLM plans to expand the use of Outcome-Based Grazing Authorizations and investment in vegetation management projects to improve rangeland habitats. The BLM is currently managing 11 demonstration projects in six states as part of the outcome-based grazing authorizations initiative. These demonstration projects provide BLM, working in partnership with ranchers and other partners, with opportunities to improve our guidance and best management practices to use when issuing grazing permits. Lessons learned from developing cooperative monitoring plans and land health evaluations under this initiative may also be incorporated into this regulatory process.

The BLM oversees 26.9 million acres of land used by wild horses, wild burros and other species. Under the current growth rate, herds double in size approximately every four years due in part to a lack of natural predators and limits on BLM's management tools. To prevent overpopulation and overgrazing, the BLM gathers excess animals and offers them for adoption or sale to a good home. The FY 2021 budget seeks \$116.8 million for the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program

– a \$15.3 million increase over the FY 2020 enacted level – to address wild horse and burro herds on public lands, and proposes a non-lethal management direction to mitigate the unsustainable growth rate. The budget request follows on the heels of a major boost in funding provided in FY 2020, and is consistent with Congressional direction to pursue a non-lethal management strategy. A workable solution to this problem will require cooperation from all affected entities, and the Administration looks forward to working constructively with the Congress and stakeholders to ensure the long-term viability of wild horse and burro herds while meeting BLM’s land management obligations.

Wildlife & Aquatic Habitat Management

Within the BLM’s Wildlife and Aquatic Habitat Management activity, the FY 2021 budget includes \$83.5 million for Wildlife Habitat Management and \$31.7 million for Aquatic Habitat Management. These funds will focus on the highest priority habitat conservation and restoration efforts, such as habitat and population inventories, monitoring, and assessments. Projects supporting wildlife management, public outreach enhancement, and collaboration with state agencies will continue to be a priority for the BLM in FY 2021.

Planning

E.O. 13807 (*Establishing Discipline and Accountability in the Environmental Review and Permitting Process for Infrastructure Projects*) prompted an Administration-wide assessment to determine how best to address inefficiencies in current infrastructure project decisions that delay investments, decrease job creation, and are costly to the American taxpayer. In response, the Department and the BLM have improved environmental reviews and permitting authorizations. One such example is S.O. 3355 (*Streamlining National Environmental Policy Act Reviews and Implementation of Executive Order 13807*), which provides a number of internal Departmental directives to increase efficiency of environmental reviews, including setting page and time limit goals on all National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis. In years past, BLM Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) had an average preparation time of approximately five years. The BLM has implemented S.O. 3355 by establishing policy that directs a new internal review and approval process for generally completing EISs and their associated Federal Register notices within 12 months of initiating scoping. Implementation of S.O. 3355 has resulted in enhanced coordination with elected officials, Tribes, other Federal agencies, and the public, as well as faster review times for our NEPA documents.

Enhancing the Visitor Experience on Public Lands & Expanding Outdoor Recreation

The BLM is committed to the Administration’s priority of expanding access for the American people to the vast recreation opportunities on BLM-managed public lands, including hunting, fishing, and many other uses. Currently, the BLM manages over 3,600 developed recreation sites and areas; administers over 4,500 permits for commercial, competitive and organized group activities; and provides the public with thousands of miles of motorized and non-motorized trails. Visitor satisfaction remains high, with 96 percent of visitors surveyed reporting overall satisfaction with the quality of their experience.

Dingell Act Implementation & Recreation Resources

On March 28, 2019, Secretary Bernhardt signed S.O. 3374, *Implementation of the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act*, to facilitate and prioritize

implementation of Public Law 116-9. This Act established many conservation and recreation special management designations, provided for a number of land sales, transfers, and exchanges, and resolved many long-standing and complicated tenure issues on lands managed by the Department. The BLM will support the Act through the Recreation Resources Management, National Monuments and National Conservation Areas, and other programs. These funds will also help manage designated historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest on the public lands while supporting outstanding recreational opportunities and increased public access.

Wilderness Management & Cultural Resources Management

The BLM is responsible for managing 260 wilderness areas and 491 wilderness study areas in the western States and Alaska. From primitive hunting locations to remote fishing spots, wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas provide unparalleled opportunities for spending time outdoors. The FY 2021 budget proposes \$16.6 million for Wilderness Management to support the protection and conservation of wilderness areas through activities such as monitoring, public use oversight, and invasive weed management. The BLM will support opportunities to maintain and increase public access to those areas for grazing and recreation, including access to hunting and fishing areas.

The Cultural Resources Management program, which supports the inventory, protection, and stabilization of BLM cultural sites will receive \$15.3 million in FY 2021. In addition to providing opportunities for heritage education and recreation, the Cultural Resources Management Program will continue to provide support and guidance on consultation with Tribes to other BLM programs. Consultation with Indian tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, and Native Hawaiian organizations is a critical component for addressing identification, treatment, and disposition of Native American cultural items.

Promoting Administrative Efficiencies & Collaborative Conservation

The BLM continues to identify opportunities, such as the move of its headquarters to the West, which will maximize efficiency and service to the American people by increasing BLM presence closest to the communities and lands we serve, to improve overall operations, internal communications, customer service, and stakeholder engagement. The FY 2021 budget supports the Secretary's vision for a reorganized Department of the Interior that aligns its regional boundaries to provide better coordination across the Department, improve mission delivery, and focus resources in the field. To this end, the FY 2021 request includes \$4.8 million for the Joint Communication Infrastructure Improvement Project in the Southwest border region to provide shared infrastructure and complete communication with other Interior agencies along the border.

The proposed FY 2021 budget also supports necessary reforms to strengthen the culture of ethics within Interior. This past summer, Secretary Bernhardt advanced his commitment to transform Interior's ethics program by signing S.O. 3375, *Improving the Department of the Interior's Ethics Programs Through Consolidation*, which restructures the ethics program by unifying disparate bureau ethics programs into a centrally-managed office under the Solicitor.

Conclusion

The BLM's FY 2021 budget reflects the Administration's continued commitment to striking the right balance of land conservation and sustainable use of resources in a way that increases energy

security, enhances the safety of our communities, and allows America to prosper while providing proper conservation stewardship of our land and resources consistent with the law. The BLM takes pride in its collaborative efforts to promote responsible energy production, increase access and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities nationwide, and maintain productive working landscapes for grazing and timber production. I look forward to working with the Subcommittee to provide the BLM with the tools and resources necessary to achieve these important Administration objectives.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.