

**Statement of
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**Before the
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Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
On the
*“FY 2024 Budget Priorities & Mission of the Bureau of Land Management”***

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Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the FY 2024 budget priorities and mission of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The BLM’s 2024 budget proposal supports the critical role the bureau plays in achieving the environmental, conservation, and economic goals of the Biden-Harris Administration, while working in partnership with thousands of communities mostly across the American West and in Alaska, where the vast majority of our employees live and work.

Overview

The BLM’s work is immense in both scale and scope. One in 10 acres of land in the United States are managed by the BLM, as well as approximately 30 percent of the nation’s subsurface minerals. Driven by our mission, the BLM sustains the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation’s public lands for multiple uses, such as conventional and renewable energy development; livestock grazing; conservation; mining; watershed protection; and hunting, fishing, and other forms of recreation. This multiple-use, sustained yield mission, established by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976, enables the BLM to contribute tremendously to economic growth, job creation, and domestic energy production, while generating revenues for Federal and State treasuries and local economies and allowing for a thoughtful and balanced approach to management of our public lands.

The 245 million acres of land and 700 million acres of mineral estate managed by the BLM are economic drivers for the communities where these resources are located. BLM estimates in FY 2021, programs administered on public lands managed by the BLM supported an estimated \$201 billion in economic output and approximately 783,000 jobs. According to DOI’s Office of Natural Resources Revenue, public lands managed by the BLM generated more than \$8 billion for the U.S. Treasury and States in FY 2022. Equally important are the public lands and nationally significant landscapes the BLM has the responsibility for conserving, protecting, and restoring on behalf of all Americans for the benefit of current and future generations.

As the steward for more land than any other Federal agency, the BLM plays a critical role in achieving the climate and economic goals of the Biden-Harris Administration through science-based, balanced management of public lands and waters. The President’s FY 2024 budget request of \$1.7 billion for the BLM balances these responsibilities and advances the Administration’s priorities of addressing climate change; accelerating responsible renewable energy development on

public lands; creating good-paying jobs with a free and fair chance to join a union; and strengthening diversity, equity, and inclusion and related partnerships.

Landscape Health and Climate Resilience

The BLM's proposed budget for FY 2024 emphasizes investments to improve the health and resilience of BLM-managed public lands from the stresses of persistent drought and water scarcity, which have led to an influx of invasive species and wildland fires of increasing scope and intensity. The budget calls for increases in efforts to restore and conserve our shared public lands, making sure they are available for enjoyment by current and future generations. Locally-led and voluntary conservation empowered by the Administration's "America the Beautiful" initiative to conserve, connect, and restore 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030 will contribute to climate resilience in the face of rising temperatures and extreme weather.

The budget requests \$304.3 million under the BLM's Land Resources Activity, which provides for the management of forests, rangelands, and cultural resources, as well as wild horse and burro management. This includes \$12.3 million for Public Domain Forest Management; combined with a request of \$118.0 million for Western Oregon Resources Management, BLM will support timber sales and help improve forest health and resilience. The Western Oregon Resources Management funds are also used for identifying and managing carbon sinks and implementing reforestation projects, as well as for projects to protect mature and old-growth forests. The BLM will also support carbon sequestration efforts on public lands with a requested program increase of \$3.4 million in the Cadastral, Lands and Realty Management program.

The budget requests \$162.0 million for Wildlife Habitat Management to bolster efforts to identify, protect, conserve, and restore large landscapes. These efforts are necessary to support the long-term resilience of wildlife and plant populations, particularly in light of the ecological transformation occurring due to climate change. BLM will use the requested funding increase to improve habitat health and resiliency and advance efforts to identify, protect, conserve, and restore functional, landscape-level wildlife migration, dispersal, and daily movement corridors for big game, migratory birds, pollinators, and at-risk species. In a time of prolonged drought, we are working to restore nature's capacity to keep water in streams. The proposed funding level of \$73.4 million for Aquatic Resources will enhance the BLM's capacity to conserve remaining high-quality lands and waters, restore degraded land and water resources, and ensure the connectivity of these systems.

Key elements of improving the health of public lands include eradicating invasive species, re-establishing native plant communities, and carrying out other forms of restoration, which will improve habitat and support increased landscape connectivity and terrestrial and aquatic wildlife movement. Invasive species are a pervasive problem on public lands, and efforts to control invasive species are often impeded by drought conditions and wildland fire.

Transitioning to a Clean Energy Economy

The BLM has a significant role in advancing the development of renewable energy by providing sites on public lands for environmentally sound renewable energy production and transmission projects. With excellent solar, wind, and geothermal energy potential on public lands, renewable energy development on BLM lands provides an important contribution to the Administration's goal

of permitting 25 gigawatts of renewable energy on public lands by 2025. This is part of the broader strategy to rapidly reduce U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50 percent by 2030 and achieve a zero-carbon electric power sector by 2035. Consistent with the Energy Act of 2020, the BLM continues to accelerate responsible permitting of renewable energy projects on public lands. The BLM permitted over 2,800 megawatts of clean energy projects in 2021 and 5,700 megawatts in 2022. The complexities involved with authorizing bulk energy generation and transmission line facilities require extensive stakeholder engagement, coordination, and environmental review, all of which the BLM works diligently to carry out.

To ensure we achieve the goals of the Energy Act, the 2024 budget proposes funding that will allow the BLM to facilitate increased renewable energy development, including \$72.5 million in our Renewable Energy Management program, a 77 percent increase over the 2023 enacted level, and a program increase of \$11.0 million in the Resource Management Planning program. Currently, the BLM has prioritized the review of 50 solar, 4 wind, and 10 geothermal and 9 transmission interconnect projects which, if approved, represent roughly 37 MW of renewable energy capacity. In addition to the 73 priority applications, BLM has approximately 124 additional applications (107 solar, 12 wind, and 5 electricity transmission gen-ties) that are in the preliminary adjudication phase. The funds requested in the budget will support the siting, leasing, and processing of right-of-way applications, and oversight of renewable energy projects and associated transmission lines. The BLM anticipates continued demand for renewable energy generation from public lands over the coming years, given Administration efforts and as States and utilities also seek to increase their use of renewable power sources. Further, investments from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) will help make clean energy more affordable and accessible, and lower energy costs by hundreds of dollars per year for households.

A substantial part of the BLM's energy portfolio is oil and gas production from public lands. Since January 21, 2021, the BLM has approved almost 7,000 new drilling permits – over 3,000 in 2022 alone, and onshore oil production from Federal lands is at an all-time high. The Department is implementing the oil and gas provisions in the IRA, updating regulations and policy guidance to implement the law, and also incorporating the recommendations in the Department's November 2021 Report on the Federal Oil and Gas Leasing Programs. The Administration is committed to the responsible and sustainable development of Federal energy resources as the nation transitions to a low-carbon economy, and such reforms are a critical component of this effort.

Implementing Historic Investments in America's Public Lands

In 2024, the BLM will continue to put people to work on our public lands through investments from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the IRA: plugging orphaned oil and gas wells, restoring watersheds, and addressing and reducing the risks from wildfire. By the end of calendar year 2022, the BLM obligated nearly \$21 million in contracts and cooperative agreements for various BIL projects nationwide. The BLM will work with its partner agencies, external partners, stakeholders, and Tribes to achieve meaningful outcomes envisioned in these two historic laws. In addition, the BLM will also continue to implement the Great American Outdoors Act to address BLM's deferred maintenance backlog to support public safety, visitor access, and visitor enjoyment more effectively. The BLM anticipates that approximately \$91.8 million in deferred maintenance will be addressed upon completion of the proposed FY 2024 projects. Fully implementing these laws will help restore the balance on public lands amid the increasing demands of an ever-growing Western population. Together, these laws are a historic investment in

clean water, clean air, and wildlife habitat that will benefit people, landscapes, and local economies for generations to come.

Wild Horses & Burros

The Wild Horse and Burro program continues to present significant challenges for the Bureau, with on-range populations far in excess of the statutory allowable management level, and off-range holdings severely straining BLM's capacity. As of the end of FY 2022, there were approximately 82,000 wild horses and burros across the 177 Herd Management Areas that BLM manages – exceeding the nation-wide AML of 27,000 animals by over 55,000. Of the 177 Herd Management Areas, 85 percent are above AML.

The budget requests \$154.8 million for the Wild Horse and Burro Management program, which will help to offset rising program costs and conduct on-range and off-range management activities for wild horses and burros. The BLM is focused on addressing the management challenges with this program, notably through use of fertility control treatments and permanent sterilization efforts and through private placements of animals. However, significant increases in the cost of off-range holding caused by recent price increases for feed, fuel, labor, and related costs have slowed the BLM's ability to deliver fertility treatments or remove wild horses and burros while balancing the obligations to ensure the wellbeing of the 60,000 horses off range in our care. On-range costs such as for contracted gather and removal operations will continue to be similarly impacted, which impacts our ability to gather horses and implement an aggressive program of fertility control. The program's budget supports the BLM's commitment to continued efforts to manage the on-range populations as it is critical to prevent permanent damage to public lands and resources.

Recreation

The BLM's neighbors, particularly in the American West, count on public lands managed by the BLM as a beloved recreation destination. More than 86 million people live within 100 miles of BLM-managed public lands in the western United States, making the BLM a key part of connecting Americans to the outstanding and unique outdoor opportunities that contribute to and preserve the social fabric of the nation, bond families across generations, and preserve the character of the rural American West and Alaska. Public lands are open to use for pursuits such as camping, off-highway vehicle riding, mountain biking, river running, hiking, horseback riding, hunting, and fishing—and the vast majority of the public lands managed by BLM are open to visitors without any fees. In 2022, BLM-managed public lands attracted approximately 81 million visitors, which is an increase of 8 million visitors from 2020. The increased interest in recreating on our public lands is outpacing BLM's ability to keep up. Meeting America's diverse recreational needs requires new, innovative, and collaborative management. The budget request in FY 2024 for the Recreation Resources Management program is \$65.4 million, an increase of \$9.8 million over the FY 2023 budget. The FY 2024 budget request will also help the BLM further the priorities of the Biden-Harris Administration and Secretary Haaland, such as investing in America's infrastructure by providing access to public lands for all Americans.

National Conservation Lands

National Conservation Lands protect resilient ecosystems, provide opportunities for research and self-discovery, and create a refuge for biodiversity. The BLM-managed National Conservation

Lands currently encompass over 900 units covering about 35 million acres, including National Monuments, Wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rivers, National Conservation Areas, and National Scenic and Historic Trails. Designated by Congress or the President, these components of the BLM's National Conservation Lands represent some of the nation's most spectacular landscapes and provide abundant recreational opportunities, important scientific research grounds, and outstanding ecological and cultural resources. They are also the current and ancestral homelands of Tribal Nations and Indigenous peoples, many of whom have deep cultural, historic, and spiritual connections to these places. Conserving these lands means collaborating with local, State, and Tribal governments and other Federal partners; enhancing and maintaining recreational access; and engaging communities to foster shared stewardship efforts. An estimated 11 million visitors each year come to these sites, providing significant economic benefits to surrounding communities and supporting long-term jobs by promoting multiple-use activities, tourism, and the service industry. The ever-increasing interest in the BLM's National Conservation Lands requires additional support, and the FY 2024 budget request for the National Conservation Lands program is \$11.3 million above the FY 2023 enacted level. This includes a program increase of \$3.0 million for the Department's Increasing Representation in our Public Lands initiative, which will provide support for recent or potential new designations that preserve important places and tell the stories of those that have been historically underrepresented.

Jobs & Equity

The impacts of climate change and environmental degradation in the United States are not evenly distributed in our society. Communities of color, low-income families, and rural and Indigenous communities have long suffered disproportionate and cumulative harm from air pollution, water pollution, and toxic sites. The BLM, as part of its work, dedicates time and resources to engage a wide range of stakeholders and communities in all its land management decisions, as well as to conduct formal consultation with Tribes in recognition of the Federal Government's trust responsibilities.

The FY 2024 BLM budget request will advance the Administration's efforts to create good-paying jobs through its program to remediate and reclaim orphaned wells and abandoned mines. These jobs may also serve to ease the transition for oil and gas field workers, coal miners, and conventional energy and mining communities as the market transitions toward cleaner energy sources. The proposed budget will help support underserved communities that have been adversely impacted by energy and mining activities in the past. The budget also includes an increase of \$12 million to enhance BLM capacity to support various youth corps programs, allowing the BLM to employ young adults and veterans, drawing on their skills to improve the public lands while training the next generation of public land stewards.

The budget also invests in the BLM's Seeds of Success program, which employs Tribal youth in the collection and preservation of culturally important native plant species. This program is conducted in partnership with the Fort Belknap Indian Community and the Society for Ecological Restoration. Seeds of Success is part of a larger interagency National Seed Strategy that works in partnership with a network of seed collectors, farmers and growers, nurseries, and seed storage facilities to develop science-based native seed mixes to restore resilient ecosystems.

Conclusion

The BLM's FY 2024 proposed budget reflects the Administration's continued commitment to striking the right balance of land conservation and sustainable use of resources. It is incumbent on us as professional land managers to ensure the use of public lands is sustainable and beneficial to all Americans, regardless of where they live, and to future generations. The decisions we make about how we manage and shape this development now and into the future will have a profound impact on Americans across the country, and we take that responsibility seriously. I look forward to working with the Subcommittee to provide the BLM with the tools and resources necessary to achieve these important objectives. Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today.