

**Statement for the Record
U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management**

**House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Federal Lands**

H.R. 5131, Public Lands Military Readiness Act

September 18, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this Statement for the Record on H.R. 5131, the Public Lands Military Readiness Act, which would extend the reservation of public lands used for military purposes in Alaska, California, and New Mexico for an additional 25 years and continue the withdrawal of these lands from all forms of appropriation under the general land laws, including the mining laws and mineral and geothermal leasing laws. The bill's provisions mirror the extensions requested in the Department of the Army's (Army) withdrawal applications, which were developed in cooperation with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Specifically, H.R. 5131 would amend the Military Lands Withdrawal Act of 1999 (P.L. 106-65) to reauthorize the withdrawal and reservation for the Yukon Training Area and the Donnelly Training Areas East and West at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, and the McGregor Range at Fort Bliss, New Mexico, for a period of approximately 25 years, expiring on November 6, 2051. In addition, the bill would amend the Fort Irwin Military Land Withdrawal Act of 2001 (P.L. 107-107) to reauthorize the withdrawal and reservation for use by the Fort Irwin Training Center, California, until December 31, 2051. Finally, H.R. 5131 makes minor technical changes to the land descriptions for the McGregor Range and Fort Irwin withdrawals to reflect updated acreage amounts determined by surveys, and to reference the most current version of a map for the Fort Irwin withdrawal.

The Department of the Interior (Department) supports H.R. 5131, as the proposed extensions would continue to support the Army's mission and operations. Regarding the extension of the withdrawals for Fort Wainwright, the Department notes that the bill language refers to these areas as "Fort Greely and Fort Wainwright Training Ranges," while the Army referred to these ranges as the Yukon Training Area and Donnelly Training Area East and Donnelly Training Area West in its withdrawal application, respectively. Although it would likely not impact implementation, the BLM recommends that the Sponsor consider amending the bill language to match the range names used in the Army's withdrawal application.

The Department defers to the Department of War and the Army regarding the military interests under their jurisdiction.

Background

Currently, several laws and regulations provide the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) the authority to "withdraw" lands in federal ownership. A withdrawal action can remove an area of Federal land from use under certain laws, such as those governing mineral development, to limit

or prohibit such activities. Withdrawals can also be used to reserve an area for a particular purpose, or to transfer jurisdiction of Federal land from the Department to another Federal agency.

Military withdrawals and reservations set aside Federal lands for defense purposes, including training and testing missions. Since enactment of Engle Act (P.L. 85-337) in 1958, except in time of war or national emergency, any withdrawal of more than 5,000 acres for military purposes must be authorized by an Act of Congress. The BLM processes withdrawal applications submitted by the military on behalf of the Secretary of the Interior and works with the requesting military branch to develop proposed legislation effecting the withdrawal. The legislative proposal is submitted to Congress for consideration, along with the recommendation of the Secretary on the application. The Department has the responsibility to process Department of War applications for national defense withdrawals, reservations, or restrictions of more than 5,000 acres; however, only Congress can decide to enact, extend, or expand such a national defense withdrawal. Military withdrawals are typically for a set period, and may require extension every 15 to 25 years, depending on the terms in the enacted legislation.

Fort Greely & Fort Wainwright Training Ranges, Alaska

Located in the Fairbanks North Star Borough in the interior of Alaska, Fort Wainwright is home to the U.S. Army Garrison Alaska and units of the U.S. Army Alaska. Through enactment of the Military Lands Withdrawal Act (P.L. 106-65) in October 1999, Congress authorized the withdrawal of 869,862 acres of public land and reserved them for use by the Army as part of the Yukon Training Area (formerly Fort Wainwright Yukon Training Range) and the Donnelly Training Areas East and West (formerly Fort Greely East and West Training Ranges) until November 6, 2026. Unless extended by Congress, the current withdrawal and reservation will expire on that date.

Fort Irwin Military Land, California

In December 2001, through enactment of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2002, Congress authorized the withdrawal of approximately 117,710 acres of public lands in San Bernadino County, California, and reserved the land for the Army's use at the Fort Irwin Training Center. The withdrawal currently supports combined arms military training and the development and testing of military equipment. Unless extended by Congress, the 25-year withdrawal will expire on December 27, 2026.

McGregor Range, Fort Bliss, New Mexico

In addition to authorizing the withdrawal and reservation for the training areas at Fort Wainwright, the Military Lands Withdrawal Act of 1999 also authorized the withdrawal and reservation of approximately 608,385 acres of public lands for the Army's use at McGregor Range in Otero County, New Mexico. The McGregor Range is part of the Fort Bliss Training Complex and is jointly managed by the BLM and the Army in accordance with the authorizing legislation and the McGregor Range Resource Management Plan, developed in 2006. The current withdrawal will expire on November 6, 2026, unless extended through an Act of Congress.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a Statement for the Record on this important piece of legislation. The Department is proud to work with our Armed Forces to further military readiness, training, and testing. We look forward to continuing to work with the Subcommittee and our military partners to ensure the protection of the American people and our homeland.