



EXPLORE Act Special Recreation Permitting

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated May 18, 2026

1) Overview

What is the EXPLORE Act and what does Title III do?

The Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences (EXPLORE) Act is a bipartisan federal law enacted in January 2025 that seeks to improve outdoor recreation opportunities and expand access to public lands and waters for all Americans.

Title III of the Act directs federal land management agencies, including the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), to modernize and streamline the Special Recreation Permit (SRP) program. Title III focuses on improving consistency, reducing unnecessary administrative burdens, supporting efficient permit processing, and ensuring recreation activities are managed in a way that protects public lands, resources, and visitor safety.

What is changing on and after February 2, 2026?

As of February 2, 2026, the BLM is processing and issuing Special Recreation Permits using the updated permit categories and permit types established under Title III of the EXPLORE Act.

Applicants may notice:

- Clearer permit categories and types that better reflect different kinds of recreation uses;
- A more systematic, fact-based approach to determining permit types across BLM offices;
- Revised application questions and documentation requirements; and
- Streamlined review pathways for certain low-impact, low-complexity activities where impacts are nominal and no additional terms or conditions are needed.

These changes are intended to improve consistency, transparency, and efficiency while continuing to protect public lands and visitor safety.

What is not changing?

Many fundamentals of the SRP program remain the same:

- The BLM will continue to require permits when necessary to protect resources, manage visitor use, and ensure public health and safety, including all moderate and high-risk activities.
- Permits will continue to be evaluated based on nature of activity/event, location, timing, scale, impacts, and risk.
- Environmental review, visitor-use management, and compliance with land use plans and other applicable laws will still apply.

- Permit conditions will continue to be tailored to the specific activity and site.
- The decision making of Authorized Officers and local conditions remain central to permitting decisions.

Why is BLM implementing these changes now?

Title III requires agencies to modernize SRP programs. The Feb. 2 implementation reflects BLM's aggressive timeline needed for guidance development, RAPTOR system coding, staff training, and coordination with permit holders.

2) Special Recreation Permits – Basics

What is a Special Recreation Permit?

A Special Recreation Permit is a written authorization issued by the BLM for certain recreation-related uses of public lands and waters. SRPs are used when an activity requires formal authorization to manage visitor use, protect resources, and ensure public health and safety.

Under Title III of the EXPLORE Act, SRPs are organized into permit categories and permit types that reflect the nature, scale, duration, and potential impacts of the proposed activity. These permit types help ensure that low-impact activities are reviewed efficiently, while more complex or higher-use activities receive appropriate oversight.

The SRP program includes the following permit categories and types:

Category 1 – Specialized Recreation (Noncommercial)

- **Type 1:** Organizational Camps
- **Type 2a:** Single Events (Noncommercial)
- **Type 2b:** Recurring Events (Noncommercial)
- **Type 3:** Individual Special Recreation Permits (ISRPs) for allocated public participation

Category 2 – Large Group Activities or Events

- **Type 4:** Large Group Activities or Events

Category 3 – Single or Recurring Organized Group and Single Competitive Activities or Events

- **Type 5:** Single Organized, Noncompetitive Group Activity or Event
- **Type 6:** Single Competitive Event
- **Type 7:** Recurring, Noncompetitive Small Group Activity

Category 4 – Recurring Recreation Services

- **Type 8:** Long-Term Permit for Recurring Outfitting, Guiding, or Other Recreation Services
- **Type 9:** Temporary Permit for Recurring Outfitting, Guiding, or Other Recreation Services

The BLM determines whether a permit is required and which permit type applies based on the details of the proposal and local conditions. Applicants are not expected to determine the permit type on their own.

How do I know if I need an SRP?

Whether an SRP is required depends on a combination of factors submitted in an application, including:

- **What** activity or event is being proposed;
- **Where and when** it would occur;
- **How many people** would be involved;
- **How the activity is organized and conducted**, including whether it involves structured operations, coordination, or services provided to participants; and
- **Whether there are resource, safety, or visitor-use considerations** that require formal authorization.

If you are unsure whether your proposal requires an SRP, contact the local BLM office where the activity would occur **before planning, advertising, or collecting fees**.

Are SRPs required for all organized or commercial activities?

SRPs are not required for all organized or commercial activities. Whether a permit is required depends on the nature of the proposed activity, not solely on whether an entity is commercial. Under Title III of the EXPLORE Act, the BLM evaluates proposals based on factors such as:

- Risk level (e.g., low vs. moderate or high);
- Potential impacts on public lands, resources, or infrastructure;
- Potential conflicts with other authorized uses or visitors; and
- Operational characteristics, including how the activity is organized and conducted, and the duration and frequency of the proposed activity or event.

In some cases, a commercial entity may propose an activity that is low-impact, low-risk, and not recurring for a defined term and does not require a permit. In other cases, a permit may be required to ensure appropriate management, safety, or resource protection.

Commercial operators and organized groups are strongly encouraged to submit their proposal through RAPTOR, including a pre-consultation request if needed. This allows the BLM to evaluate the proposal against EXPLORE Act requirements and determine whether no permit is required based on a nominal effects determination, or an SRP is required and, if so, which permit type applies.

Early coordination helps ensure proposals are evaluated consistently and reduces uncertainty for applicants.

Can BLM deny a permit even if I meet the criteria?

Yes. SRPs are discretionary authorizations. Even if an activity meets eligibility criteria, the BLM may deny or condition a permit to protect resources, manage visitor use, address administrative capacity, or ensure public health and safety.

3) Applying for a Permit

How do I apply for an SRP?

SRP applications should be submitted online through RAPTOR at <https://permits.blm.gov>.

If you need help determining whether a permit is required, you may submit a pre-consultation request through RAPTOR. A local BLM Permit Administrator will follow up to discuss your

proposal and help clarify next steps. Early coordination is encouraged and can help avoid delays later in the process.

What information should I have ready before I apply?

Be prepared to describe:

- The activity or event (what you plan to do);
- Where and when it will occur (location and dates);
- Expected group size and level of use;
- Whether and how participants will be charged a fee (if applicable);
- Safety considerations and logistics; and
- Whether any sales or vendors are proposed in connection with the activity.

Providing a clear description of how the activity or event will be conducted can greatly assist the Permit Administrator in evaluating your proposal, determining whether a permit is required, identifying the appropriate permit type, and streamlining review.

How does BLM decide which permit type applies?

BLM determines the appropriate permit type based on the nature of the activity, level of impact, duration, group size, and applicable requirements. Applicants do not need to select the permit type on their own. BLM will determine the appropriate permit type once they review your complete application.

Can I talk to BLM before submitting an application?

Yes. Early coordination is encouraged, especially if you are unsure whether a permit is required, which permit type may apply, or whether there are site-specific considerations to be aware of.

You can request early coordination by submitting a pre-consultation request through RAPTOR or by contacting the local BLM office where the activity would occur. Early coordination can help clarify requirements, identify potential issues, and streamline the application and review process once a formal application is submitted.

Early coordination does not constitute permit approval, but it can help applicants prepare a more complete and accurate proposal.

Can I advertise my trip or event before my SRP is issued?

No. Do not advertise, collect fees, or begin operations until you receive written authorization from the BLM.

4) Processing Time and Reviews

Will permit processing be faster under Title III?

Title III emphasizes more efficient processing, particularly for low-impact activities. Actual processing time still depends on the specific site requested, compliance requirements, and application completeness. Once the BLM has received a complete application, the office must

acknowledge receipt and either issue a final decision or notify the application of a projected date for a final decision within 60 days.

Using BLM's RAPTOR online permitting system will expedite the application and processing of SRPs. Applicants are strongly encouraged to utilize RAPTOR to ensure their application is processed as fast as possible and to receive the most transparent, real-time status updates on their application, any additional information needs, and next steps.

Does Title III guarantee my permit will be approved?

No. Title III does not guarantee approval. It establishes clear pathways for review and permit status. Permit approval remains discretionary upon BLM review of all relevant information and site-specific management considerations.

What factors affect how long processing takes?

Permit processing time can vary depending on several factors, including:

- **Complexity of the proposal**, including the type of activity, duration, group size, number of locations involved, and whether the proposal includes events, services, or vendors.
- **Visitor-use considerations**, such as existing capacity limits, allocations, or conflicts with other authorized uses.
- **Safety and operational considerations**, including risk level, emergency response planning, and site-specific hazards.
- **Completeness and clarity of the application**, including how clearly the activity is described and whether required information is provided up front.
- **Environmental review needs**, such as whether additional analysis is required to evaluate potential impacts to resources, cultural sites, or sensitive areas.
- **Coordination needs**, such as involvement of multiple BLM offices or other federal agencies.

Submitting a complete application and coordinating early with the local BLM office such as through a pre-consultation request can help identify potential issues early and reduce delays in processing. Again, RAPTOR includes a request for a pre-consultation to improve your application experience.

5) Permit Categories, Fees, and Payments

Are there different types of SRPs under Title III?

Yes. Title III establishes updated permit categories and types to better reflect different kinds of recreation uses and improve consistency. (See p. 2 under "What is a Special Recreation Permit?")

Does Title III change fees?

Title III does not create new recreation fees, but it updates how certain SRP fees are structured and applied to improve consistency and transparency across federal lands. Depending on the permit type and nature of the activity, SRP fees may be assessed using:

- Predetermined fees, such as per person or minimum annual fees;

- Adjusted Gross Receipts (AGR) based fees for certain commercial or service-based activities; or
- Other fee methods authorized under applicable law and policy.

Not all permit types are subject to the same fee structure, and not all activities are charged in the same way. The BLM will determine which fee approach applies based on the permit category as shown below. In some cases, the permittee can select the predetermined fees and AGR. When permit holders report post-use data in RAPTOR, the system automatically calculates applicable fees and, when appropriate to the permit category, displays the options for selection.

Category	Permit Type	BLM Predetermined Fee
1	Type 1 – Organizational Camp	\$130 minimum annual fee or \$7 per person/per day, whichever is greater.
	Type 2a – Single Event (non-fee, >75 people)	
	Type 2b – Recurring Event (non-fee, <75 people)	
	Type 3 – Public Participation in a recreation activity where public use is allocated (ISRP)	ISRP application, eligibility, and fee requirements are handled differently and are managed through site-specific systems where use is allocated or limited.
2	Type 4 – Large Group Activity or Event (75 or more participants)	\$130 minimum annual fee or \$7 per person/per day, or 3% of adjusted gross receipts, whichever is greater.
3	Type 5 - Single Organized Group (Limited-use)	The Recreation Service Provider (RSP) must elect either*: (1) \$130 minimum annual fee, or \$7 per person/per day, whichever is greater; or (2) 3% of adjusted gross receipts.
	Type 6 – Single Competitive Event (Limited-use)	
	Type 7 – Recurring Organized Group Activity or Event (Limited-use)	
4	Type 8 – Long-term Permit	The RSP must elect either*: (1) \$130 minimum annual fee, or \$7 per person/per day, whichever is greater; or (2) 3% of adjusted gross receipts.
	Type 9 – Temporary Permit	Regardless of the method selected, the \$130 minimum annual fee applies. If both elected calculations exceed the \$130 minimum, the BLM will collect the amount chosen by the RSP.

* The Recreation Service Provider must make this election. The BLM may not make this election on the RSP’s behalf.

How are fees calculated?

BLM will explain applicable fees during permit processing. Fees vary based on permit category.

When are fees due?

Fee timing and payment methods will be communicated during the application and permitting process.

Do America the Beautiful passes cover SRP fees?

No. America the Beautiful passes apply only to Standard Amenity Recreation Fees for individual passholders. They do not cover SRP fees, Individual SRP fees, or fees owed by others. Permit holders and participants must still pay any applicable standard or expanded amenity, and Individual Special Recreation Permit fees.

6) Visitor Use Days (VUDs) and Allocations

Does Title III affect VUD tracking or allocations?

Title III includes provisions related to visitor-use management and tracking where use is allocated or monitored and when use isn't allocated, BLM will use VUDs as a standard and consistent tracking tool. Not all BLM recreation sites, locations or SRPs will include visitor use day allocations.

What happens if allocated use is already full?

The answer depends on the type of permit, the location, and whether capacity is available for the proposed dates and times.

In areas where use is allocated for Category 4 permits (such as long-term or temporary outfitting and guiding permits), Category 3 permits (Types 5 and 7) may still be issued when:

- The proposed location is not subject to an Individual Special Recreation Permit (ISRP) or other public limited entry system;
- Capacity is available for the proposed dates and times; and
- Issuance would not conflict with resource protection, visitor-use management, administrative capacity, or public health and safety considerations.

Category 3 permits are not constrained by Category 4 allocations and do not count against allocated outfitter or guide use. However, they remain subject to the BLM's discretion if conflicts with resource protection, visitor-use management, administrative capacity, or public health and safety exist.

In areas with allocated use, **coordination with the local BLM office is especially important**, as capacity availability may vary by location and time and may change based on surrendered or unused use.

What happens if I don't use all my authorized VUDs?

Unused VUDs are evaluated during allocation reviews and reviewed over time. Non-use is not a penalty by itself, but repeated or unexplained non-use may affect future allocation decisions.

Can unused or surrendered VUDs be carried forward?

No. Title III does not authorize automatic rollover or banking of unused allocations. Permittees may voluntarily surrender allocated VUDs they are unable to use during the current season or year. This action is optional, and surrendered days are not automatically deducted from the permittee's overall allocation unless adjusted under a future allocation review.

7) Existing Permits and Changes

What happens if I already have an SRP?

You may continue to operate under a valid, current authorization and you may also seek annual reauthorization for remaining years on an existing multi-year permit. Existing Special Recreation Permits remain valid and enforceable under their current terms and conditions. The EXPLORE Act does not require immediate conversion of existing permits to Title III permit types.

Transition to Title III will generally occur at natural transition points, such as:

- Permit renewal or reissuance;
- Requests for significant amendments (e.g., changes in scope, services, or use levels); or
- Other circumstances identified by the administering BLM office.

Local BLM offices are developing prioritization and transition plans to manage conversion requests in a phased and orderly manner based on workload, operational considerations, and program needs. While permit holders may request transition of existing permits to an EXPLORE Act Title III permit, conversion timing will be coordinated by the local BLM office and will be processed in RAPTOR according to local workload volume.

Permit holders should continue to operate under their existing permit until they receive written confirmation from the BLM regarding any transition or modification.

What if I need to amend my permit?

Contact the administering BLM office. Amendments may require additional review or analysis depending on the scope of the change.

Will existing permits automatically convert to an EXPLORE Act Title III Permit?

No. Conversion work for the permittee and the BLM would begin at natural points such as upon permit holder request (application) renewal and amendment stages.

Should I request to convert my existing permit to an EXPLORE Act Title III Permit?

This is a case specific business decision. There are a number of factors for you to consider:

- 1) How soon is my operating season coming up?
- 2) Do I have an existing permit that will allow me to continue operating?
- 3) How many other permits is my BLM office processing and where do I stand in the local queue?

8) Multi-Office, Vendors, and Sales

What if my activity involves multiple BLM offices or agencies?

Identify this issue early with your local office. BLM will coordinate multijurisdictional permits internally or with other agencies as needed. Some agencies may be at different stages of implementing EXPLORE Act Title III permitting. As the agencies fully align, multijurisdictional permitting is expected to be more easily accommodated vs. past practices.

What is a multijurisdictional trip?

A multijurisdictional trip involves two or more federal land management agencies. Trips crossing multiple BLM offices are handled through internal coordination.

Will every recreation vendor need an SRP?

In some cases, **a vendor may be covered under an existing SRP when:**

- The vendor is formally included in the primary permit holder's application and operating plan;
- The vendor's role is integral to the permitted activity or event (e.g., providing food, equipment, or services specifically for registered participants); and
- The vendor is not operating as an independent business open to the general public.

In other cases, **a vendor may be required to obtain a separate SRP when:**

- The vendor operates independently of the primary permit holder;
- The vendor's services are open to the general public or attract independent visitation;
- The vendor was not identified or evaluated as part of the original permit application; or
- The vendor's activities resemble a standalone commercial operation (such as food trucks, merchandise sales, or equipment rentals not limited to event participants).

In general, vendors that are co-located but not part of the permitted activity are not automatically covered by another permit and may require separate authorization.

Applicants are encouraged to identify any proposed vendors early in the application process so the BLM can determine whether they may be included under a single permit or require separate authorization.

Can vendors be included under one permit?

Vendors may be included only when their role is integral to the permitted activity and not a separate commercial operation.

9) Liability, Insurance, and Waivers

Does Title III change insurance requirements?

Insurance requirements remain risk-based. Title III clarifies requirements for low-risk activities (as determined by the BLM Authorized Office) and these activities do not require insurance.

Are exculpatory agreements (waivers) allowed?

Yes. In some cases, recreation service providers or event organizers may use participant waivers or exculpatory agreements, consistent with applicable law.

When waivers are used in connection with an SRP-authorized activity, they must include language that releases the United States from liability, consistent with BLM insurance and liability requirements. The specific content and enforceability of a waiver are generally between the provider and participants and are subject to applicable federal and state law.

The BLM requires a copy of the waiver be submitted as part of the permit file. Use of a waiver does not replace or reduce BLM SRP insurance requirements for moderate to high-risk activities and events.

Will insurance be the same for all activities?

No. Insurance requirements vary based on risk and activity type.

10) Incidental Sales

What are incidental sales?

Incidental sales are limited, secondary sales that are subordinate to the primary permitted activity.

What sales are not incidental?

Standalone vending, food trucks, or independent commercial sales are generally not incidental and usually require separate authorization.

11) Compliance and Help

What happens if I operate without a required permit?

Operating without a required permit is illegal and subject to enforcement action.

Who should I contact if I'm unsure?

Contact the local BLM office where the activity would occur.

Where can I learn more?

- Apply/manage permits (RAPTOR): <https://permits.blm.gov>
- EXPLORE Act resources: [Special Recreation Permits | Bureau of Land Management](#)
- Contact a BLM office: [All State Offices | Bureau of Land Management](#)