

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

**House Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Federal Lands**

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**May 21, 2026**

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide a statement for the record on the bills on the hearing agenda related to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

The BLM manages approximately 245 million surface acres, located primarily in 12 western states, and approximately 700 million acres of subsurface mineral estate. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) sets forth the BLM’s multiple-use mission, directing that public lands be managed for a broad range of uses, such as energy development, livestock grazing, timber production, hunting and fishing, and recreation, unless otherwise specified by law. FLPMA also generally requires the BLM to manage public land resources on a sustained-yield basis for the benefit of current and future generations.

**H.R. 184, Action Versus No Action Act**

H.R.184 requires the Department of the Interior (DOI or Department) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to consider only the “action” and “no action” alternatives for certain forest management activities when preparing Environmental Assessments (EAs) and Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) under Section 102 of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA, 42 U.S.C. 4332). Under the leadership of President Trump, the Department has implemented final sweeping reforms to its NEPA procedures, cutting red tape, accelerating project approvals, and restoring NEPA to its intended role as a focused, efficient decision-making tool. These efforts bolster reforms to modernize the federal environmental review process and prevent unnecessary regulations from blocking American Progress. The Department supports H.R. 184 as it aligns with the Administration’s efforts to make environmental reviews faster and more efficient.

***Analysis***

H.R. 184 would direct DOI and USDA to consider only the action and no action alternatives when the proposed forest management activity would occur on public lands or Forest Service (FS) lands that the Secretary concerned deems suitable for timber production *and* the lands are designated under Section 602(b) of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (applicable only to the FS) or the project is developed collaboratively, proposed by a Resource Advisory Committee, or part of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). With regard to the no action alternative, the Secretary concerned would be obliged to consider whether to evaluate the result of not taking the proposed action with respect to forest health, wildlife habitat, timber production, other economic and social factors, and the potential for wildfire, loss of life or property, and insect and disease.

A no action alternative can set a useful reference to measure the effects of a proposed action. For an EA, NEPA requires agencies to “study, develop, and describe appropriate alternatives to recommended courses of action in any proposal which involves unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources,” which may include a no action alternative (NEPA Sec 102(2)(H)). For an EIS, NEPA requires consideration of “a reasonable range of alternatives to the proposed agency action, including an analysis of any negative environmental impacts of not implementing the proposed agency action in the case of a no action alternative, that are technically and economically feasible, and meet the purpose and need of the proposal,” which again may include a no action alternative (NEPA Sec 102(2)(C)(iii)). The Department supports the bill’s direction to streamline environmental review and ensure appropriate evaluation of the result of taking no action – especially given the dire need to reduce future catastrophic wildfires and reduce the risk fire poses to communities and landscapes through strategic forest management.

### **H.R. 2785, Land Grant-Mercedes Traditional Use Cooperation and Coordination Act**

H.R. 2785 would require the Department and USDA, in consultation with the New Mexico Land Grant Council, the governing bodies of qualified land grant-mercedes, and Indian Tribes, to develop within two years written guidance pertaining to the management of lands within certain land grant-mercedes in New Mexico. The guidance would describe the historical-traditional uses a community user or governing body of a qualified land grant-mercedes may conduct for noncommercial use on Federal land, as well as the activities that would require a Federal permit.

H.R. 2785 also provides for additional consideration for historical-traditional uses by qualified land grant-mercedes when developing land use plans. Under the bill, the Departments would be required to provide for and evaluate impacts to historical-traditional uses in developing, maintaining, and revising land management plans under the FLPMA.

The Department understands the importance of working closely with New Mexico’s land grant-mercedes and appreciates the cultural and historical role they have played and continue to play throughout New Mexico. The BLM engages in outreach and coordination efforts with land grant-mercedes, which includes inviting those that are political subdivisions of the State of New Mexico to participate as cooperating agencies on planning efforts, and interfacing with the New Mexico Land Grant Council. The Department supports the goal of H.R. 2785 to enhance the BLM’s coordination with land grant-mercedes in New Mexico and has no objection to the bill.

The Department defers to the USDA regarding any changes to the management of lands under its jurisdiction.

### **H.R. 8682, Accelerating Forest Management Act**

H.R. 8682 would codify the BLM proposed categorical exclusion to accelerate reviews for timber salvage on public lands. The bill categorically excludes certain timber salvage activities from any requirement to prepare an EA or EIS, which significantly reduces documentation of the environmental consequences of such activities under the NEPA. Further, the bill extends the Forest Ecosystem Health and Recovery Fund (FEHRF) – which funds forest management activities to improve forest health, salvage dead and dying timber, and reforest salvaged areas – through 2033. The Department supports the bill as it furthers the Trump Administration’s commitment to increase efficiency and reduce unnecessary regulatory burdens while supporting active forest management. The Administration further supports expanding the categorical exclusion to include National Forest System lands managed by the USDA Forest Service.

The BLM manages roughly 245 million surface acres of public land predominantly in the West, of which an estimated 58 million acres are forested/woodlands. The BLM estimates that roughly 2 million acres of dead or dying timber is on BLM-managed lands. Historically, the BLM has used the practice of harvesting dead or dying trees, commonly referred to as “salvage harvest,” to improve forest conditions by accelerating reestablishment of native resilient forest tree species and reducing wildfire fuel loads, as well as to help recover economic value from the timber. Specifically, the bill establishes a categorical exclusion for salvage harvesting of dead and dying trees resulting from fire, insects, disease, drought, or other disturbances, not to exceed 1,000 acres where the disturbance affects 3,000 acres or less of bureau-managed lands, and not to exceed the lesser of 5,000 acres or one third of the disturbance area where the disturbance exceeds 3,000 acres of bureau-managed lands. By codifying the BLM’s April 6, 2026, proposed categorical exclusion for timber salvage, the bill protects the agency’s ability to streamline efforts to remove excess timber, recover dead or dying trees, reduce future wildfire risks, and bolster rural communities and local economies.

Further, the Department supports the extension of the FEHRF. The FEHRF receives revenue from salvage timber sales and forest health timber sales and is used to implement critical treatments such as thinning for resilience to fire, insect, disease, and drought. The BLM also uses the FEHRF to fund reforestation after severe tree mortality. This fund has been integrated into BLM’s annual forestry program funding and has become a critical component for the management of BLM forests.

### **H.R. 8688, Forest Health and Wildfire Risk Reduction Act**

H.R. 8688 would codify the BLM proposed categorical exclusion streamlining efforts to implement forest thinning on certain public lands. The bill categorically excludes certain forest management activities modifying tree density from any requirement to prepare an EA or EIS, which significantly reduces documentation of the environmental consequences of such activities under the NEPA. The Department supports the bill as it furthers the Trump Administration’s direction to increase efficiency, reduce wildfire risk, and improve forest health and timber production – efforts that help protect the communities that depend on healthy, resilient forests. The Administration further supports expanding the categorical exclusion to include National Forest System lands managed by the USDA Forest Service.

President Trump’s Executive Order 14225, *Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production*, directed the Department and USDA to pursue categorical exclusions to reduce unnecessarily lengthy processes and associated costs related to administrative approvals for forest management, wildfire risk reduction and timber production. The BLM’s April 6, 2026, proposed categorical exclusion advances the President’s directive by streamlining reviews, addressing the wildfire crisis, applying proven treatment methods more efficiently, supporting local mills, and sustaining timber jobs.

Over the past several decades, forest structure and species composition on BLM-managed lands has significantly changed because of fire suppression, insect outbreaks, disease, and drought. As a result, BLM-managed public lands face increased fuel loading that has contributed to an increase in complex fires on public lands which threaten human life and property. Prompt, active management is often necessary for long-term sustainability. To address this critical need for active management, the bill specifies that the categorical exclusion covers thinning treatment areas of up to 5,000 acres. Thinning projects may include maintenance and renovation of existing roads, include construction of temporary roads not to exceed 2.5 miles of road per 1,000 acres of treatment area, and may not exceed five miles of new permanent road construction. The categorical exclusion is necessary to increase BLM’s flexibility to respond to forest health and wildfire concerns across larger areas. H.R. 8688 provides needed long-term stability – the bill’s codification of the Department’s proposed categorical exclusion into law, ensures that the categorical exclusion is a durable tool for NEPA compliance as our public lands endure increasingly catastrophic wildfire seasons.

**H.R. 8686, To amend the Military Land Withdrawals Act of 2013 to withdraw and reserve certain public lands in the vicinity of Yuma Proving Ground, Arizona**

H.R. 8686 would amend the Military Lands Withdrawals Act of 2013 (P.L. 113-66) to withdraw and reserve for the Department of the Army approximately 22,000 acres of federal land in the vicinity of Yuma, Arizona. The federal lands would be withdrawn from all forms of appropriation under the general land laws, including the mining laws and mineral and geothermal leasing laws, subject to valid and existing rights.

The bill also would establish a framework for continued coordination between the Department of the Interior and the Department of the Army regarding management of certain compatible non-defense uses, including recreation, wildlife habitat management, cultural resource protection, and utility rights-of-way. In addition, the bill would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to assign certain management responsibilities for the withdrawn lands to the Secretary of the Army under specified conditions.

The BLM has coordinated with the Department of the Army on their withdrawal application of these lands, which aligns with H.R. 8686. The Department supports the bill, as the withdrawal would support the Army’s mission and operation while preserving a framework for continued coordination on public land management and recreational access. The Department defers to the Department of War and the Army regarding the military interests under their jurisdiction.

***Analysis***

The BLM manages approximately 245 million acres of public lands under the FLPMA, including lands subject to military withdrawals authorized by Congress under the Engle Act of 1958 (P.L. 85-337). Under the Engle Act, withdrawals exceeding 5,000 acres in the aggregate for any one defense project or facility require congressional authorization absent a national emergency. The Army has requested the withdrawal to ensure they can safely conduct modern, high-altitude airdrops and aviation testing while establishing an enhanced safety buffer. The bill withdraws and reserves the necessary acreage for Army use, including the long-used Howard Cantonment Area indefinitely, with this indefinite use matching the Army's indefinite use of the existing Yuma Proving Ground under Public Land Order No. 848 (July 8, 1952), ending only when the Army determines the land is no longer needed for military purposes. This provides long term stability for national defense operations at Yuma Proving Ground and prevents the need for future renewal actions.

H.R. 8686 provides a balanced and responsible framework that supports national defense needs while upholding key public land values. Specifically, the Department notes that the bill appropriately preserves the Secretary of the Army's exclusive authority over defense related uses of the withdrawn lands, while assigning the Secretary of the Interior responsibility for nondefense land use authorizations and associated stewardship functions. For actions spanning both withdrawn and adjacent non-withdrawn lands, the bill provides for BLM to issue land use authorizations with the Army's consent and subject to any conditions that the Army may require, except as to uses for utility infrastructure within the utility corridor. The Department appreciates this role for the Secretary of the Interior and the BLM in administering certain land use and stewardship responsibilities consistent with the BLM's multiple use mandate.

The Department is proud to work with the Department of the Army to further national security and we look forward to working with the Sponsor and the Subcommittee to ensure the protection of the American people and our nation. Finally, the Department would like to work with the sponsor on one minor technical clarifying amendment.