Statement for the Record
U.S. Department of the Interior
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Legislative Hearing on

S. 456, Streamlining Thermal Energy through Advanced Mechanisms Act (STEAM) Act
S. 2644, Camden National Battlefield Park Study Act
S. 4103/H.R. 2709, Save Our Sequoias Act
S. 4489, Dry-Redwater Regional Water System Authorization Act
S. 4955, Gateway Arch National Park Boundary Revision Act of 2026
S. 5169, Shenandoah Valley Battlefields National Historic District Boundary Expansion and Partnership Act of 2026
S. 5293, Pilot for Regional Emergency Prepositioning of Aerial Resources and Equipment (PREPARE) Act
S. 5352, Desalination Reauthorization Act
S. 5374, to facilitate the conveyance of certain land in Bonners Ferry, Idaho
S. ___, Western Water Reinvestment Act

September 16, 2026

S. 456, Streamlining Thermal Energy through Advanced Mechanisms Act (STEAM) Act

S. 456 proposes to amend Section 390 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 (EPAct 2005) to apply the existing Section 390 Categorical Exclusions (CEs), currently limited to oil or gas exploration or development, to geothermal energy.

CEs are categories of actions that federal agencies have determined normally do not significantly affect the quality of the human environment and for which neither an environmental assessment nor an environmental impact statement is required to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Currently, Section 390 CEs apply only to oil and gas exploration and development activities that are carried out under the Mineral Leasing Act.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) oversees geothermal development on federal lands by leasing sites, conducting environmental reviews, and issuing permits for exploration and production. This bill aligns with the goals of Executive Order 14156, Declaring a National Energy Emergency, and Secretary's Order 3417, Addressing the National Energy Emergency.

The Trump Administration has made it clear that energy security is national security and it is imperative to fast track the development of energy projects by removing unnecessary burdens and red tape. Extending Section 390 CEs to geothermal development would offer significant benefits in ensuring the expeditious review for energy projects that are critical for U.S. national security and Energy Dominance while maintaining environmental stewardship. As such, the Department of the Interior (Department) supports S. 456.

S. 2644, Camden National Battlefield Park Study Act

S. 2644 would direct the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study of the Camden Battlefield area in South Carolina, including the site of the Battle of Camden, fought on August 16, 1780, and other associated Revolutionary War resources, to determine the suitability and feasibility of designating the area as a unit of the National Park System.

A Congressionally authorized special resource study of the Camden Battlefield area and Historic Camden was conducted by the National Park Service (NPS) in 2015. At that time, the NPS found that including these areas as a unit of the National Park System was infeasible due to cost. Historic Camden is already designated as an affiliated area of the National Park System, and since the special resource study was completed, both areas have become part of the Southern Campaign of the Revolution National Heritage Corridor, designated as a national heritage area in 2023. As such, the NPS maintains a valuable working partnership with the Historic Camden Foundation and the American Battlefield Trust in support of these historic resources.

The Department continues to recognize the historical importance of the Camden Revolutionary War Site. However, we do not support S. 2644, as a special resource study has already been conducted for this site and the NPS is focusing its resources on addressing current critical needs, including reducing the deferred maintenance backlog.

S. 4103/H.R. 2709, Save Our Sequoias Act

S. 4103/H.R. 2709 would provide statutory authorities for the duties of the Giant Sequoia Lands Coalition, of which the National Park Service is a part. While the Coalition already exists under its 2022 charter, the legislation would codify the Coalition in federal law and would assign specific responsibilities. Under the bills, the Coalition would be required to produce the Giant Sequoia Health and Resiliency Assessment, facilitate collaboration and coordination among Coalition members on Protection Projects, and create and maintain a searchable website database tracking protection projects and other sequoia-resiliency activities. The legislation would direct the Department to make personnel available to the Coalition to provide administrative support, technical services, and staff assistance. In addition, the bills would establish or expand a collaborative grant program to award grants to eligible entities to advance, facilitate, or improve giant sequoia health and resiliency.

The Department supports the goals of S. 4103 and H.R. 2709 and welcomes the opportunity to work with the Committee to improve implementation, including but not limited to, ways to provide greater flexibility in how funds would be permitted to be used to carry out the requirements of Sections 4(c) and 9. For example, it may be beneficial for the legislation to allow such funds to help defer the cost of staff within Coalition-member nonprofit organizations who assist in fulfilling statutory responsibilities such as reporting. Similarly, allowing grant funds under Section 9(d) to support any of the functions described in Sections 5 through 8, including fuel-treatment implementation, reforestation, drought and insect mitigation, research, monitoring, and the development and submission of assessments and required reports, would provide beneficial flexibility.

S. 4489, Dry-Redwater Regional Water System Authorization Act

S. 4489 would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to carry out the Dry-Redwater Regional Water Authority System in eastern Montana and northwestern North Dakota substantially in accordance with the Bureau of Reclamation's (Reclamation) October 2025 feasibility study on the system, and would allow the system to serve commercial livestock operations. The bill would authorize a cooperative agreement with the Dry-Redwater Regional Water Authority (Authority) or its successor for the planning, design, and construction of the system; establish a Federal cost share of up to 75 percent; and direct the Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) to make Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program power available at the firm power rate for project operations, subject to specified eligibility and transmission requirements. S. 4489 also authorizes $602 million for fiscal years 2027 through 2037 for the planning, design, and construction of the system, subject to specified cost adjustments.

The Department recognizes that communities within the Authority's service area face significant water-supply and water-quality challenges, and the potential for the project to provide non-monetary public-health, safety, and water-supply-reliability benefits. Reclamation's October 2025 feasibility study found the locally preferred alternative for the project technically and environmentally feasible, and potentially financially feasible, but not economically justified under the applicable feasibility standards. However, the commercial livestock benefits permitted by S. 4489 were not included in Reclamation's analysis; consequently, Reclamation has not determined whether those benefits would change the project's economic feasibility. The Department also remains concerned about the proposed 75 percent Federal cost share. The Department looks forward to working with the Sponsor and the Committee on the legislation.

S. 4955, Gateway Arch National Park Boundary Revision Act of 2026

S. 4955 would revise the existing statutory boundary of Gateway Arch National Park (park), adjusting the acreage authorized for acquisition for the expansion of the park across the Mississippi River into East St. Louis, Illinois—primarily Malcolm Martin Park and the former American Car Foundry (ACF) site – by 2.18 acres. The bill would also update the park's original enabling legislation to reflect the current name, Gateway Arch National Park.

Under laws enacted in 1984 and 1992, Gateway Arch National Park has authority to acquire approximately 100 acres in East St. Louis. Malcolm Martin Park has been managed for passive recreation for many years, while the City of East St. Louis is conducting an environmental assessment and pursuing remediation funding for the former ACF parcel. Community partners and stakeholders have expressed interest in supporting the cleanup and potential donation of these properties, in keeping with the historic bi-state vision for the park originally articulated in the 1947 winning design by Eero Saarinen.

We appreciate this history and do not object to S. 4955.

S. 5169, Shenandoah Valley Battlefields National Historic District Boundary Expansion and Partnership Act of 2026

S. 5169 would expand the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields National Historic District to include Rockbridge County in Virginia and Berkeley, Jefferson, and Morgan Counties in West Virginia. It would provide continued funding and eligibility for assistance beginning in fiscal year 2027, authorize new appropriations for the district through 2033, and direct the Secretary to report to Congress on how the district's partnership model could be applied at other national park sites.

The Department recognizes the historical significance of the Shenandoah Valley and the pivotal role its battlefields played in shaping our nation's history. However, we do not support S. 5169, as it would divert NPS resources from higher priority operational responsibilities, including efforts to reduce the deferred maintenance backlog. Additionally, authorizing the District to seek technical assistance normally reserved for National Heritage Area System participants could place further strain on NPS resources and support capacity.

S. 5293, PREPARE Act

S. 5293 would direct the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a pilot program for seasonal prepositioning protocols for aerial wildfire suppression resources for early-season fine fuel wildland fires in Nebraska, Colorado, Kansas, South Dakota, and Wyoming. The bill requires the pilot program to be established in accordance with the state's Master Cooperative Wildland Fire Management and Stafford Act Response Agreement and in consultation with the Rocky Mountain Area Coordination Center, and carried out using funding otherwise available for wildland fire management.

The Department provides wildland fire management through the United States Wildland Fire Service (USWFS). USWFS coordinates with federal, state, and local partners through the National Interagency Fire Center and National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group to strategically place fire suppression resources based on an evaluation of current and predicted fire activity and available firefighting resources, a process known as prepositioning. Successful prepositioning requires carefully balancing risks, response times, and resources across a national landscape. Further, the 2027 Budget proposes to unify federal wildland fire programs, including those currently at the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service, into the Department of Interior's USWFS to continue to improve Federal responsiveness thorough increased operations efficiency and effectiveness year-round.

The Department supports the intent of S. 5293 and would welcome the opportunity to work with the Sponsor and Committee to continue supporting and improving prepositioning strategies for aerial wildfire suppression resources.

S. 5352, Desalination Reauthorization Act

S. 5352 would extend the Federal desalination authorities established under the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act (P.L. 114-322) and the Water Desalination Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-298) for a period of 15 years after the date of enactment. The bill would establish a Federal cost share of not more than 25 percent with no per-project funding cap, make both ocean- and brackish-water projects eligible, and authorize pilot grants to test new desalination technologies and estimate the cost of producing water at full scale.

The Department supports desalination as one tool for addressing drought and strengthening water supplies across the American West. The authorities would help the Department continue expanding the use of technologies to address drought and improve water supply resilience.

S. 5374, to facilitate the conveyance of certain land in Bonners Ferry, Idaho

S. 5374, to facilitate the conveyance of certain land in Bonners Ferry, Idaho, directs the Department to issue a recordable disclaimer of interest in approximately 15 acres of land in Bonners Ferry, Idaho, to facilitate conveyance of the land. The bill requires the Department to issue the disclaimer of interest within 90 days of enactment. As a matter of policy, the Department supports working with local governments to resolve land tenure issues that advance the public good. However, the Department's preliminary review finds that the United States does not hold fee title to the covered lands. The Department welcomes the opportunity to work with the Sponsor and conduct a full property title search to facilitate the conveyance.

Discussion Draft of S. ____, Western Water Reinvestment Act

The discussion draft of the Western Water Reinvestment Act would increase authorizations of appropriations for the Cooperative Watershed Management, Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration, and Basin Study programs and expand eligible activities for some WaterSMART programs to include projects that reduce consumptive water use at a regional or watershed scale or increase ecological resilience. The discussion draft would also establish a new financial assistance program for agricultural producers to create waterbird and shorebird habitat; direct the development of a plan to support critically important fisheries during extended drought; extend the authorization of appropriations for the Fisheries Restoration and Irrigation Mitigation Act of 2000; establish a categorical exclusion under the National Environmental Policy Act for certain aquatic restoration activities; and reauthorize the Deschutes River Conservancy Working Group and related administrative-cost authority.

The Department notes that the discussion draft would authorize substantial additional Federal spending and Reclamation is focused on its core responsibilities for water delivery and hydropower production. The Department looks forward to providing additional views after the discussion draft is introduced.