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Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining
Legislative Hearing

S. 1791, Gunnison Outdoor Resources Protection Act of 2025
S. 4200, Douglas County Economic Development and Conservation Act
S. 4383, Geothermal Ombudsman for National Deployment and Optimal Reviews Act
S. 4410, To amend the Mineral Leasing Act to provide for the payment of bonus payments of certain coal leases issued under that Act
S. 4458, Caja del Rio Protection Act
S. 4561, CLOSE THE GAP Act
S. 4605, Geothermal Cost-Recovery Authority Act of 2026
H.R. 1687, CLEAN Act
H.R. 4090, Critical Mineral Dominance Act
H.R. 5587, HEATS Act
H.R. 5631, Geothermal Energy Advancement Act
H.R. 7831, License to Drill Act

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Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Cortez Masto, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony 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 generally be managed for a broad range of uses, such as energy development, livestock grazing, timber production, hunting and fishing, and recreation. FLPMA also requires BLM to manage public land resources on a sustained-yield basis for the benefit of current and future generations.

<u>S. 1791, Gunnison Outdoor Resources Protection Act</u>

S. 1791 would establish six land management designations on over 700,000 acres of federal lands in Colorado, including approximately 200,000 acres of BLM-managed lands and 500,000 acres of lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). In addition to designating over 122,000 acres of federal lands as Wilderness, the management areas created by the bill would include approximately 20,500 acres in Protection Areas, 18,200 acres in Recreation Management Areas, 12,250 acres in Rocky Mountain Scientific Research and Education Areas, over 214,000 acres in Special Management Areas, and over 220,000 acres of new Wildlife Conservation Areas.

S. 1791 would also withdraw nearly 75,000 acres from oil and gas leasing on federal mineral estate in Delta County's North Fork Valley in western Colorado. The bill would further establish a "no surface occupancy" management restriction for nearly 50,000 acres of oil and gas development on certain USFS lands in Delta County. Other notable provisions in S. 1791 include the transfer the approximately 18,500 acre Pinecrest Ranch owned by the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe from fee ownership to trust ownership. The Department defers to the USDA on provisions of the bill governing USFS managed lands.

Analysis

The Department opposes S.1791 as it is duplicative of existing conservation measures, runs counter to the Administration's energy dominance goals, would complicate hazardous fuels management, and limits potential development of our natural resources. The Department is particularly concerned that the no surface occupancy and withdrawal imposed by the bill would impede the Administration's goal of American Energy Dominance with a renewed focus on the removal of barriers to oil and gas exploration and development. In addition, Department does not find that wilderness designations are the best mechanism for managing the resources on the lands designated by the bill, and the new designations created by S. 1791 for the management of BLM lands and resources are also unnecessary given existing authorities.

Regarding the transfer of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe's Pinecrest Ranch from fee ownership to trust ownership, the Department has no objection to these provisions, as they align with the Department's commitment to fulfilling trust responsibilities and supporting tribal self-determination.

S. 4200, Douglas County Economic Development and Conservation Act

S. 4200 provides direction for the future management of Federal lands in Douglas County, Nevada. Specifically, S. 4200 provides for the conveyance of at least 8,928 acres of Federal lands for a variety of public purposes, and directs the sale at fair market value of an unspecified number of acres of Federal lands. It also designates approximately 12,392 acres of public lands managed by the BLM as the Burbank Canyons Wilderness; releases approximately 1,065 acres of existing BLM wilderness study areas (WSA); and takes nearly 2,470 acres of Federal lands into trust for the benefit of the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California.

As a matter of policy, the Department supports working with local governments to resolve land tenure issues that advance the public good. The Department supports the goals of the proposed land conveyances in S. 4200, as these actions align with the Trump Administration's priorities to further economic growth and ensure land management strategies are effective and in the public interest. In addition, the Department is committed to fulfilling its trust responsibilities to tribal nations and supporting tribal self-determination and has no objection to the provisions taking land into trust for the benefit of the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California.

Regarding the proposed Burbank Canyons Wilderness, the Department opposes the designation, noting that the Burbank Canyons WSA was not recommended for wilderness designation in either 1991, when the BLM made recommendations to the President, or in 2000 as part of the Nevada Wilderness Action Plan. We believe a wilderness designation is not the most appropriate mechanism to adequately protect the natural resources of this area and recommend that Congress release the entirety of the WSA from management under Section 603 of the FLPMA. Through the land use planning process directed by FLPMA, the BLM allocates resources and determines appropriate multiple uses for the public lands, provides a strategy to manage and protect resources; and establishes systems to monitor and evaluate the health of resources and effectiveness of management practices over time. The proposed wilderness designation would limit the ability of the BLM to adequately manage and protect the lands in response to changing conditions, including the growing risk of wildfire and changing public needs.

The Department defers to the Department of Agriculture on provisions pertaining to the USFS.

S. 4383, Geothermal Ombudsman for National Deployment and Optimal Reviews Act

S. 4383 proposes to establish a Geothermal Permitting Task Force that is headed by a Geothermal Ombudsman. The Geothermal Ombudsman would have the ability to assign BLM personnel with relevant expertise to assist with completion of geothermal authorizations in a field office other than their own. Additionally, the bill allows the Geothermal Ombudsman to utilize retention incentives for the Task Force.

Analysis
The BLM supports streamlining geothermal leasing and permitting on public lands and supports the creation of a Geothermal Permitting Task Force proposed in S. 4383 as it could encourage more development by streamlining geothermal leasing and permitting on public lands. The BLM recommends including other surface-managing agencies, such as the Forest Service, on the Task Force since a consent determination is required from those agencies before geothermal leases can be issued on lands they manage. The BLM would like to work with the sponsor to incorporate the roles and responsibilities of the proposed Geothermal Ombudsman into BLM's existing operations.

S. 4410, To amend the Mineral Leasing Act to provide for the payment of bonus payments of certain coal leases issued under that Act

S. 4410 would amend the Mineral Leasing Act to allow that bonus payments for coal leases issued under the deferred bonus payment system be payable in ten equal annual installments, rather than five, as required by current regulation. Under the bill, the first payment would still be submitted with the bid for the lease. President Trump issued E.O. 14261, Reinvigorating America's Beautiful Clean Coal Industry and Amending Executive Order 14241, establishing support for the domestic coal industry as a national priority by removing regulatory barriers to coal production and encouraging the use of coal to meet America's energy needs. S. 4410 incentivizes coal production by deferring a portion of the start-up costs of coal operations on federal lands and the Department supports the bill.

Analysis
The BLM manages coal leasing and development on approximately 570 million acres of federal land, under the Mineral Leasing Act, the Mineral Leasing Act for Acquired Lands, and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, with the goal of providing a fair return for the American taxpayer while allowing responsible energy development. The BLM's coal program conducts lease sales, administers leases, inspects Federal and Indian operations to ensure compliance, and provides pre-lease evaluations of mineral tracts when requested by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Tribes, or Indian mineral owners.

Under the Mineral Leasing Act, the BLM is required to receive fair market value for all acreage that is leased for coal development, which includes a bonus bid, or value that is a cash payment in addition to the required annual rental payments and production royalties. Additionally, at least half of the acreage offered for competitive coal leases in any one year must be offered on a deferred bonus payment basis. By regulation (43 CFR 3422.4(c)), the bonus is paid in five equal annual installments, with the first payment being submitted with the bid. If a lease is relinquished or otherwise cancelled or terminated, the unpaid remainder of the bid must be paid immediately.

Since the beginning of the Trump Administration, the Department has reaffirmed its commitment to supporting American Energy Dominance with a renewed focus on coal. Coal is a critical component of a secure, stable and diversified American energy portfolio. By expanding access to coal reserves and streamlining permitting processes, the administration is removing long-standing regulatory barriers that have undermined American coal production. These efforts support high-paying mining jobs and rural economies, strengthen U.S. energy independence, and reduce reliance on foreign energy sources. Due to the nature of coal development, the changes being proposed in the bill would be beneficial to both the coal industry and the American taxpayer. The Department supports the bill and looks forward to continuing to work with Congress to position coal as a cornerstone of the nation's energy strategy.

S. 4458, Caja del Rio Protection Act

S. 4458 would establish the Caja del Rio National Conservation Area (NCA) on 17,837 acres of public lands managed by the BLM and the 67,163-acre Caja del Rio Special Management Area (SMA) on 67,163 acres of federal lands managed by the USFS in northern New Mexico. The bill would withdraw the lands within the NCA and SMA from entry and appropriation under the public land laws, from location and entry under the mining laws, and from operation of the mineral leasing, mineral materials, and geothermal leasing laws, subject to valid existing rights. S. 4458 would also direct the withdrawal of an additional 20,623 acres of federal lands in the area from energy and mineral development. The Department defers to the USDA on provisions of the bill governing USFS managed lands.

The Department opposes S. 4458, as broad withdrawals of public lands from energy and mineral development are contrary to the Administration's priorities of unleashing American energy and minerals and reducing our dependence on foreign adversaries. In addition, the proposed Caja del Rio NCA and the restrictive travel management provisions would remove or significantly reduce access to over 17,000 acres of public lands, including for outdoor recreation activities such as climbing, off-highway vehicle use, and target shooting. The Department opposes the proposed

NCA designation as contrary to its commitment to increasing access to public lands and supporting affordable outdoor recreation opportunities for American families.

S. 4561, Closing Long Overdue Streamlining Encumbrances To Help Expeditiously Generate Approved Permits (CLOSE THE GAP) Act

S. 4561 would direct the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture to issue new regulations to expedite the process for reviewing and approving broadband applications on Federal lands managed by the Department through its bureaus, including the BLM, National Park Service, Bureau of Reclamation, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Indian Affairs, as well as Federal lands managed by USFS. Additionally, the bill exempts new communications use authorizations (including for broadband deployment) from reviews under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) if the new communications use would be installed on existing infrastructure or Federal land already authorized for another communications use, if that previous authorization was supported by sufficient NEPA and NHPA review. The bill also requires the Secretaries to establish a new or adopt existing categorical exclusion to exclude from NEPA review certain projects to improve facilities associated with previously approved communications uses.

The BLM facilitates development of broadband infrastructure on public lands by issuing right-of-way (ROW) authorizations. Currently, the BLM administers more than 4,000 communications facilities on more than 1,500 communications sites on public lands. Consistent with Executive Order (EO) 13821, Streamlining and Expediting Requests To Locate Broadband Facilities in Rural America, the BLM continually works to streamline and facilitate broadband expansion through the collocation of telecommunication equipment on sites with prior authorizations, and strives to respond to all applications for broadband ROWs within 270 days of receipt.

The Trump Administration is committed to ensuring that communities have access to affordable and reliable highspeed internet, which is an essential service in today’s increasingly digital environment. The Department supports S. 4561, as it aligns with the Trump Administration’s priorities to cut bureaucratic red tape and accelerate approvals for infrastructure projects in order to advance national and economic security.

The Department defers to the United States Department of Agriculture regarding interests under their jurisdiction.

S. 4605, Geothermal Cost-Recovery Authority Act

S. 4605 would authorize the Secretary to require an applicant for, or holder of, a geothermal lease to reimburse the United States for certain administrative costs. These costs may be associated with the BLM’s processing of the lease application; processing other applications associated with a geothermal lease; inspections and monitoring for geophysical exploration activities; the drilling, plugging, and abandonment of geothermal wells; and the construction, operation, termination, and reclamation of any well site or facility for the use of geothermal resources. The bill further states that the Secretary must consider whether there is a cooperative cost share agreement between the United States and the geothermal lessee when determining whether to require reimbursement of these costs.

Analysis

The BLM recognizes the importance of geothermal development and believes that any fees imposed on an applicant should be structured in a way that further encourages this development. The BLM supports the goals of the bill, which would help support a sustainable and responsive permitting process. Sec. 304(b) of FLPMA provides the BLM with the authority to establish fees with respect to transactions involving public lands to recover the reasonable processing cost of services that provide a special benefit not shared by the general public to an identifiable recipient. The BLM has used this authority to establish fees for certain activities associated with geothermal leasing, including site license applications; the BLM, however, currently has neither a geothermal drilling permit fee nor a mechanism to charge a fee for inspections.

H.R. 1687, Committing Leases for Energy Access Now Act (CLEAN) Act

H.R. 1687 would amend the Geothermal Steam Act to require the BLM to hold competitive geothermal lease sales annually in any state with pending nominations. If a scheduled lease sale is canceled or delayed, the BLM must conduct a replacement sale within the same year. The bill directs the BLM to offer at least 75 percent of nominated parcels that are eligible under the applicable resource management plan and to provide a written justification identifying the statutory, environmental, or administrative basis for not offering any remaining eligible parcels. The bill also requires the BLM to notify applicants within 30 days of receiving an application for a geothermal drilling permit whether their application is complete. Then the Secretary must either issue the permit or defer the decision and must issue a final decision within 10 days after those steps are completed.

Analysis

The BLM supports the bill’s goal of promoting geothermal development on public lands and the BLM held a lease sale in every state office with geothermal resource development interest in FY 2025. The BLM notes it often requires additional time to prepare for lease sales when the agency is leasing geothermal resources underlying lands managed by other federal agencies.

The BLM also supports the goal of promoting efficient and timely processing of geothermal development permits, including notifying applicants as to the completeness of their application and issuing decisions on complete applications. Additionally, operators may need permits from other federal, state or tribal agencies which may require additional time to issue a final decision beyond that provided in the bill.

H.R. 4090, Critical Mineral Dominance Act

H.R. 4090 would require the Secretary to submit to Congress the dollar value and the overall economic impact of the United States’ reliance on imported mineral commodities, and to include this information in the 2026 United States Geological Survey’s (USGS) Mineral Commodity Summaries.

The bill would mirror provisions of Executive Order 14154, Unleashing American Energy, by requiring the Secretary to submit to Congress a list of each mining project on federal land for which a plan of operations, permit application, or other application for approval has been submitted to the Department, identify each priority mining project that can be immediately approved, and take all necessary steps to expedite and approve each such project.

The bill also codifies portions of Executive Order 14154 by requiring review of all existing agency actions that impose an undue burden on the exploration, identification, development, or operation of domestic mining projects, and to begin implementing an action plan to suspend, revise, or rescind each agency action identified as unduly burdensome. It also directs the Secretary to solicit industry feedback on regulatory bottlenecks and recommended strategies to expedite approval of mining projects on federal lands, and to begin implementing an action plan to implement industry feedback received. Further, H.R. 4090 requires the Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary of Agriculture, to submit a report to Congress that includes recommendations for changes in law necessary to review and rescind or revise unduly burdensome agency actions, and a nationwide review of state and local statutes, regulations, and ordinances the Secretary determines impede the development of domestic mining and mineral exploration projects.

The bill would additionally support Executive Order 14241, Immediate Measures to Increase American Mineral Production, by requiring the Secretary to submit to Congress a list of each mining project on federal land that has the potential to increase production of hardrock minerals or byproducts, expand operations to include hardrock mineral byproducts, or produce hardrock minerals from mine tailings. In addition, the Secretary would be directed to identify all land managed by the Department, or by the Department of Agriculture, which may be leased for the exploration, development, or production of hardrock minerals, or is open to location under the Mining Law of 1872, and where: 1) exploration is being conducted, 2) the Secretary determines hardrock minerals may be present, or 3) known economically recoverable hardrock minerals are present.

Finally, the bill directs the Secretary to prioritize efforts to accelerate the ongoing, detailed geologic mapping of the United States, with a focus on mapping previously unknown deposits of hardrock minerals. Within a year of enactment, the Secretary is required to submit a Report to Congress regarding the progress and estimated completion date of the comprehensive mapping and data integration effort directed by section 40201 of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (43 U.S.C. 311).

The Department defers to the USDA on provisions of the bill governing interests under its jurisdiction.

Analysis
On January 20, 2025, President Trump issued Executive Order 14154, Unleashing American Energy, to establish our position as the leading producer and processor of non-fuel minerals, including rare earth minerals, with the goal to create jobs and prosperity at home, strengthen supply chains for the United States and its allies, and reduce the global influence of malign and adversarial states. The Executive Order directed an immediate review of all agency actions that

potentially burden the development of domestic energy resources and critical minerals, and to undertake efforts to expedite and simplify the permitting process.

On March 20, 2025, President Trump issued Executive Order 14241, Immediate Measures to Increase American Mineral Production, directing relevant agency heads to identify priority projects to Secretary Burgum, Chair of the National Energy Dominance Council, for expedited approval and, with feedback from industry, to identify regulatory bottlenecks and other recommended strategies for expediting domestic mineral production. The Executive Order also directed the Secretary to prioritize mineral production and mining related purposes as the primary land uses on Federal lands known to hold mineral deposits and reserves.

The efforts codified by H.R. 4090 support the responsible development of our natural resources, the creation of high paying jobs that support rural economies, and the strengthening American energy independence by reducing reliance on foreign energy sources and minerals. The Department appreciates the bill's recognition of the role the USGS has in supporting domestic minerals initiatives. The USGS is making progress on these activities through development of the annual Mineral Commodity Summaries (MCS), the whole-of-government List of Critical Minerals, and the acceleration of mapping through the Earth Mapping Resources Initiative. The USGS is currently compiling and analyzing the data that will be used in the 2027 MCS. Depending on timing of this bill's passage, some components of this legislation may not be fully implemented until the next MCS edition.

The Department supports H.R. 4090 and looks forward to working with the Subcommittee on further implementation of these Executive Orders to ensure the United States' position as a global leader in energy development, while ushering in an era of prosperity and security.

H.R. 5587, Harnessing Energy At Thermal Sources (HEATS) Act

H.R. 5587 eliminates the requirement that a geothermal operator submit a federal geothermal drilling permit to the BLM in instances where there is non-federal surface estate and where the subsurface geothermal estate is less than 50 percent federal. Under the bill, an operator would be required to provide the Secretary a copy of a state-approved drilling permit and may commence activities 30 days after submission. H.R. 5587 also states that nothing in the bill alters the amount of royalties due to the United States from production of federal geothermal resources and allows the Secretary to conduct onsite reviews and inspections to ensure payment of royalties. The bill would not apply to lands held in Trust by the United States for the benefit of various Tribes.

Analysis
The BLM appreciates the efforts to streamline geothermal permitting by reducing redundancies with state regulatory agencies and supports H.R. 5587. This bill will help expedite permitting of this important domestic energy resource.

H.R. 5631, Geothermal Energy Advancement Act

H.R. 5631 includes several provisions aimed at promoting geothermal development on public lands by streamlining permitting and compliance requirements, authorizing cost recovery, establishing a Geothermal Ombudsman, and improving interagency coordination.

The BLM notes that the agency worked with the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources on technical edits to the previously introduced text of individual House bills covering Sections 5, 6, 7, and 8 in H.R. 5631 and supports the bill (as amended and passed by the House of Representatives on June 2, 2026).

Sec. 2, Effect of Pending Civil Actions On Processing Applications Related To Geothermal Leasing, would require the BLM to complete the processing of a geothermal drilling permit, sundry notice, notice to proceed, right-of-way, or other authorization or approval within 60 days of complying with all applicable laws and regulations, including the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), unless a federal court vacates the underlying lease as a result of litigation.

While the Department is currently implementing emergency permitting procedures to expedite the review of geothermal projects in response to the National Energy Emergency, it is also working to ensure that the country doesn't face an energy emergency in the future. The Department is actively reviewing actions that potentially burden the development of domestic energy resources and working to expedite and simplify the permitting process. The BLM recognizes the need for permanent permitting solutions that ensure efficient and timely processing of authorizations associated with geothermal leasing, exploration, and development activities and supports Sec. 2.

Sec. 3, Cost Recovery from Geothermal Leasing, Permitting, And Inspections and 4, Report. would authorize the Secretary to require an applicant for, or holder of, a geothermal lease to reimburse the United States for certain administrative costs. These costs may be associated with the BLM's processing of the lease application; processing other applications associated with a geothermal lease; inspections and monitoring for geophysical exploration activities; the drilling, plugging, and abandonment of geothermal wells; and the construction, operation, termination, and reclamation of any well site or facility for the use of geothermal resources. The bill further states that the Secretary must consider whether there is a cooperative cost share agreement between the United States and the geothermal lessee when determining whether to require reimbursement of these costs.

The BLM recognizes the importance of geothermal development and believes that any fees imposed on an applicant should be structured in a way that further encourages this development. The BLM supports the goals of the Sec. 3 and 4, which would help support a sustainable and responsive permitting process. Sec. 304(b) of FLPMA provides the BLM with the authority to establish fees with respect to transactions involving public lands to recover the reasonable processing cost of services that provide a special benefit not shared by the general public to an identifiable recipient. The BLM has used this authority to establish fees for certain activities associated with geothermal leasing, including site license applications; the BLM, however, currently has neither a geothermal drilling permit fee nor a mechanism to charge a fee for inspections.

Sec. 5, Publication of "Gold Book" For Geothermal Operations on Federal Lands, would require the BLM to draft and publish an updated "Gold Book" that would include geothermal development on federal lands, currently known as the BLM's Surface Operating Standards and Guidelines for Oil and Gas Exploration and Development (Oil & Gas Gold Book). Within one year of enactment of the bill, the Department would be required to consult with other federal agencies to identify standard procedures and guidelines for efficient and environmentally responsible geothermal leasing and permitting. The Department would then be required to publish the new "Geothermal Gold Book" 270-days after identifying those standards. The bill would require review and revision of the Geothermal Gold Book, if necessary, every five years.

The Oil & Gas Gold Book was developed to assist operators by providing information on the requirements for obtaining permit approval and conducting environmentally responsible oil and gas operations on federal lands and on private surface over federal minerals. It remains an important tool for guiding operators, particularly as to technical aspects of BLM's surface management of oil and gas exploration operations and resource utilization. The Department supports Sec. 5 of the bill to improve efficiency in geothermal permitting and development.

Sec. 6, Geothermal Ombudsman and Permitting Task Force, proposes to establish a Geothermal Permitting Task Force that is headed by a Geothermal Ombudsman. The Geothermal Ombudsman would have the ability to coordinate with any Departmental bureaus or offices to assign personnel with relevant expertise to assist with completion of geothermal authorizations in a field office other than their own. Additionally, the bill allows the Geothermal Ombudsman to utilize retention incentives for the Task Force.

The BLM supports streamlining geothermal leasing and permitting on public lands and supports the creation of a Geothermal Permitting Task Force proposed in Sec. 6 as it could encourage more development by streamlining geothermal leasing and permitting on public lands.

Sec. 7, Geothermal Royalties, would amend the Steam Act to require royalties on production from leased geothermal resources from each electric generating facility (as defined), instead of by lease. The Steam Act requires companies that generate electricity from geothermal resources on federal lands to pay royalties, which help support tribes, states, and local communities. Under the Steam Act, a lower royalty rate is paid on energy generated in the first ten years of production than on energy produced after the initial ten-year period. By specifying that royalties be calculated per energy generation facility or power plant (not per lease) based on the actual electricity a facility produces, the bill would affect the initial ten-year period of reduced royalty by making it applicable to each power plant utilizing resources under a lease.

Under current law, the initial ten-year reduced royalty applies to the lease, not to each power plant. Therefore, the first power plant utilizing the resource under the lease is the only power plant that gets the full benefit of the ten-year reduced royalty. Subsequent power plants constructed and utilizing resources under the lease, depending on their date of initial production, may get some or none of the initial ten-year period of reduced royalty. Sec. 7 would ensure that each power plant would receive the full benefit of the lower royalty during the initial ten-year period.

The Department appreciates the sponsor's goal of tying royalty payments to the production output of the facility rather than the lease as a means of encouraging efficiency and productivity. The Department supports Sec.7.

Sec. 8, NEPA Review, 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 to not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment (individually or cumulatively) and for which neither an environmental assessment nor an environmental impact statement is required to comply with 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 BLM oversees geothermal development on federal lands by leasing sites, conducting environmental reviews, and issuing permits for exploration and production. This section 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 supports Sec. 8.

H.R. 7831, License to Drill Act

H.R. 7831 would extend for 10 years the BLM's authorization to collect oil and gas permit processing fees, which are set to expire at the end of FY 2026. The BLM strongly supports H.R. 7831. The bill would enable the agency to continue fulfilling the objectives of the President's Executive Order, Unleashing American Energy, (E.O. 14154) and the Secretary's Order of the same name (S.O. 3418).

Background

The Energy Policy Act of 2005, as amended by the National Defense Authorization Act of 2015 (NDAA, Section 3021(b)), authorizes the BLM to collect an oil and gas processing fee for new Applications for Permit to Drill (APDs). The BLM's authority to collect such fees is set to expire at the end of FY 2026. The fee amount is established by law – currently $12,850 per APD – and is adjusted annually to account for inflation according to the Consumer Price Index. After collection, these fees are transferred to the BLM Permit Processing Improvement Fund (PPIF), which supports the processing of APDs and related use authorizations.

In FY 2025, the BLM collected approximately $49 million in APD fees from the submission of nearly 4,000 applications. During the same fiscal year, more than $40 million from the PPIF was used to process over 6,000 APDs, a 55% increase compared to the same period in 2024-2025, including associated sundry notices and ROWs. APD fees are essential in supporting the growing demand for permitting services and maintaining timely and defensible permit reviews. The majority of funds collected from APD fees are allocated to the BLM offices responsible for processing oil and gas permits. A portion of these fees also support improvements in database and processing software.

Analysis

H.R. 7831 supports oil and gas exploration and production on federal lands to meet the energy needs of our nation and solidify the United States as a global energy leader. If the authority providing for APD fees expires, the BLM would need to rely on an increase in appropriated funds to make up for any loss of revenue to support APD processing.