

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

***“Examining the President’s FY 2025 Budget Request for the
Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service”***

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Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Budget priorities and mission of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The BLM’s 2025 Budget proposal supports the critical role the Bureau plays in achieving the environmental, conservation, and economic goals of the Biden-Harris Administration, while working in partnership with thousands of communities nationwide, mostly across the American West and in Alaska.

Introduction

Managing the BLM’s portfolio of approximately 245 million acres of surface land and 700 million acres of subsurface mineral estate on behalf of the American people is a tremendous honor. As directed by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), the BLM sustains the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation’s public lands for multiple uses, such as conventional and renewable energy development; livestock grazing; conservation; mining; watershed protection; and hunting, fishing, and other forms of recreation. This multiple-use, sustained yield mission demands a thoughtful, science-based approach to management of our public lands and waters, as it enables the BLM to sustain the economy, create jobs, and produce domestic energy, while generating revenues for Federal and state treasuries. The BLM is also charged with conserving, protecting, and restoring public land resources and nationally significant landscapes for the benefit of current and future generations. To advance this broad mission as pressures increase on our public lands, the BLM recently announced new rules to help protect critical wildlife habitat, cultural resources, and recreational values, and ensure a fair return for American taxpayers. Combined, these rules will guide balanced management of America’s public for decades to come.

America’s public lands are strong economic drivers, and the BLM’s work contributes significantly to the national economy as well as the financial health of the States where BLM lands and resources are located. According to the BLM’s estimates, activities associated with BLM-managed public lands and minerals contributed an estimated \$262 billion to the nation’s economic output, supporting approximately one million jobs in FY 2022.¹ In terms of receipts, in FY 2023, productive uses of BLM-managed public lands generated more than \$9.6 billion,

¹ The BLM: Valuing America’s Public Lands 2023, <https://www.blm.gov/about/data/socioeconomic-impact-report-2023>.

including a significant share for the States where the revenues were generated. The country's economic return on its annual discretionary appropriations investment in public lands is remarkable: more than six dollars are generated for each dollar provided to the BLM.

Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Overview

The Bureau's FY 2025 Budget requests \$1.6 billion, including \$1.4 billion for the Management of Lands and Resources (MLR) appropriation and \$120.8 million for the Oregon and California Grant Lands (O&C) appropriation – the BLM's two main operating accounts.

The BLM's FY 2025 Budget request advances the Administration's priorities in the following areas:

- Strengthening climate resilience by investing in landscape health;
- Facilitating the transition to a clean energy economy;
- Enhancing and expanding outdoor recreation;
- Improving the management of wild horses and burros;
- Conserving and protecting nationally significant landscapes;
- Strengthening Tribal sovereignty and self-determination; and
- Supporting underserved and disproportionately affected communities.

Strengthening Climate Resilience by Investing in Landscape Health

The FY 2025 Budget request demonstrates the BLM's enduring commitment to addressing the impacts of climate change by continuing to prioritize investments that promote the health and resilience of public lands and waters that are increasingly facing those impacts, including prolonged drought, increased spread of invasive species, and more frequent and intense wildland fires. For example, the Budget requests \$317.4 million under the BLM's Land Resources activity to improve the health of public lands through restoration efforts, including eradicating and controlling invasive species and re-establishing native plant communities. Efforts to improve landscape health supported by this request will complement the Bureau's ongoing ecosystem restoration and resilience work, including activities funded through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act – more commonly referred to as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) – and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

In addition to \$11 million for the Public Domain Forest Management program, the Budget requests \$105.8 million in the BLM's Western Oregon Resources Management program. Combined, these funds will support timber sales, help restore forest structure and composition to improve wildfire and climate resilience, identify and manage carbon sinks, and implement projects for reforestation and to protect mature and old-growth forests.

The FY 2025 Budget requests \$153.4 million in the BLM's Wildlife Habitat Management program to identify, protect, conserve, and restore wildlife habitat; maintain and improve wildlife corridors and habitat connectivity; enhance ecosystem diversity; and improve drought preparedness and response. Together, these efforts will help respond to the effects of climate change on priority wildlife and plant species and habitats. This program supports the development of the native seed supply chain, the foundational underpinning of all of the BLM's land restoration efforts, and provides significant support to conserve greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat. This work is bolstered by one-time funding provided by the BIL and IRA and

coordination with many Federal, State, Tribal and other partners. The Budget request also includes \$59.9 million for BLM's Aquatic Resources program to enable the Bureau to continue to work to conserve remaining high-quality lands and waters, restore degraded land and water resources, and ensure the connectivity of these systems.

Each of the landscape health activities supported by the FY 2025 Budget request will be complemented by the *Conservation and Landscape Health Rule*, which the BLM finalized on May 9, 2024. Informed by more than 200,000 comments from individual Americans, State and local governments, Tribes, industry groups, and advocacy organizations, the final rule will support multiple use and sustained yield of the public lands into the future, helping to improve the health and resilience of public lands in the face of a changing climate, conserve important wildlife habitat and intact landscapes, facilitate responsible development, and better recognize unique cultural and natural resources on public lands. The FY 2025 Budget also supports the Administration's *America the Beautiful* initiative, a ten-year, locally-led effort to protect, conserve, connect, and restore the lands, waters, and wildlife upon which we all depend.

Facilitating the Transition to a Clean Energy Economy

As conventional energy sources continue to play an important role in our economy, the BLM is advancing the development of renewable energy by providing sites on public lands for environmentally sound renewable energy production and transmission projects. BLM-managed public lands provide excellent solar, wind, and geothermal energy potential and are an important component of the Administration's broader strategy to rapidly reduce U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50 percent by 2030 and achieve a carbon pollution-free electricity sector by 2035.

Consistent with the Energy Act of 2020, the BLM continues to accelerate responsible permitting of renewable energy projects on public lands. Since January 21, 2021, the BLM has permitted projects that are expected to produce over 7.3 gigawatts of clean energy – enough to power over 2.8 million homes. In addition to specific project approvals, the BLM has also leased eight new areas in Solar Energy Zones with the capacity to generate nearly 2.5 gigawatts of additional clean energy. These efforts contributed to the Administration recently surpassing its goal of permitting 25 gigawatts of clean energy projects on BLM-administered public lands by 2025. As of April 2024, the BLM is currently processing 65 utility-scale onshore clean energy projects – including solar, wind, geothermal, and transmission interconnect projects – with a combined potential to add approximately 32,500 megawatts of renewable energy. The BLM is also undertaking the preliminary review of almost 200 applications for solar and wind development, as well as almost 100 applications for solar and wind energy testing.

In addition, on May 1, 2024, the BLM finalized its *Rights-of-Way, Leasing and Operations for Renewable Energy Rule*, which will lower the cost of developing solar and wind projects, improve renewable energy project application processes, and incentivize developers to continue to responsibly develop solar and wind projects on public lands. Consistent with the Administration's commitment to create high-quality jobs in the clean energy economy and support American manufacturing, the final rule includes incentives for projects to use project labor agreements and American-made materials.

The complexities involved with authorizing bulk energy generation and the associated transmission lines necessitate extensive stakeholder engagement and coordination and thorough environmental reviews of project proposals. To that end, the FY 2025 Budget proposes \$53.1 million in the Renewable Energy Management program to support siting, leasing, processing rights-of-way applications, and oversight of renewable energy projects and transmission lines on BLM-managed public lands. The BLM expects renewable energy demand and workload to continue to increase significantly as more utility companies and States seek to diversify their energy sources or require increased amounts of renewable energy in their electric power portfolios. Helping to drive the expected demand is the nearly \$400 billion in Department of Energy loans for clean energy and transmission infrastructure enacted in the IRA. This investment is anticipated to further increase permitting workloads on Federal lands through at least 2030.

While the BLM has made great progress facilitating renewable energy development, a substantial part of the BLM's energy portfolio consists of oil and gas production from public lands. Since January 21, 2021, the BLM has approved more than 11,000 new drilling permits – including over 3,800 in 2023 alone – and onshore oil production from Federal lands is at an all-time high. At the same time, the BLM has focused on efforts to ensure that conventional energy development is environmentally responsible and provides a fair return to the American taxpayer.

On April 23, 2024, the BLM finalized its *Fluid Mineral Leases and Leasing Process Rule*, which codifies fiscal provisions that were enacted in the IRA. These changes revise outdated fiscal terms for the onshore Federal oil and gas leasing program, including royalty rates and minimum bids, and will increase returns to the public and disincentivize speculation. The rule also strengthens bonding standards to help ensure that taxpayers are not saddled with paying industry cleanup costs. The rule is the BLM's first comprehensive update to the federal onshore oil and gas leasing framework since 1988, the first update to minimum bonding levels since 1960, and the first increase in royalty rates in more than a century. The rule also implements recommendations from the Department of the Interior's *Report on the Federal Oil and Gas Leasing Program* and will guide BLM efforts to focus oil and gas leasing in areas that are the most likely to be developed – areas with existing infrastructure and high oil and gas potential – providing transparency and clarity for industry, while better managing public lands for other important uses.

Additionally, on April 10, 2024, the BLM finalized its *Waste Prevention, Production Subject to Royalties, and Resource Conservation Rule* to curb the waste of natural gas during the production of oil and gas on Federal and Tribal lands. The final rule modernizes regulations that are more than 40 years old. The updates will help hold oil and gas companies accountable by requiring operators to avoid wasteful practices and find and fix leaks, while ensuring that American taxpayers and Tribal mineral owners are fairly compensated through royalty payments. By building on technological advances and best management practices to help reduce waste, the rule is expected to generate more than \$50 million in additional natural gas royalty payments each year to taxpayers and Tribal mineral owners, while conserving billions of cubic feet of gas that might otherwise have been vented, flared, or leaked from oil and gas operations.

Finally, given the importance of critical minerals to the clean energy transition, the BLM is

working across the Federal government to update mining policies, strengthen permitting efficiency, and promote a robust, environmentally and socially responsible domestic mining industry. Some of these efforts, including much needed reforms to the General Mining Law of 1872, will require the assistance of Congress. The BLM looks forward to continuing to work with the Subcommittee on this issue.

Enhancing & Expanding Recreation

The BLM is a key part of connecting Americans to the outdoors, as more than 120 urban centers and thousands of rural towns are located within 25 miles of BLM-managed public lands and waters. Public lands and waters are widely recognized as a “backyard to backcountry” treasure, affording a variety of accessible recreation opportunities – from neighborhood trails to world-class destinations and a diverse mix of camping, boating, off-highway vehicle riding, recreational shooting, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, and many others.

As a result of the unique opportunities, resources, and experiences our public lands offer, recreational use has skyrocketed. In FY 2023, the BLM recorded more than 82 million visits, representing a 41 percent increase in use since 2012, with almost a third of that increase occurring since 2020. In response to this significant growth in recreation, the BLM last year released its *Blueprint for 21st Century Outdoor Recreation* (Blueprint), which is intended to guide investments, partnerships, outreach, and program development, so the Bureau can more effectively respond to current demand and chart a course to meet future needs. The FY 2025 Budget request for the Recreation Resources Management program is \$61.5 million to implement the Blueprint; enhance and increase access to recreational opportunities, including access by disadvantaged or underserved communities; and maintain, repair, and construct recreational trails, facilities (including campgrounds, day-use areas, and trailheads), kiosks, and directional signs. The request will also support recreation site and trail design improvements to mitigate recreation conflicts with sensitive natural resources, such as by altering traffic and concentrated use patterns.

Improving the Management of Wild Horses & Burros

The overpopulation of wild horses and burros across the West continues to present unique challenges to the BLM’s ability to improve and maintain landscape health. As of March 2024, there were approximately 73,500 wild horses and burros across the 177 herd management areas that the BLM administers – exceeding the nationwide appropriate management level (AML) of 27,000 animals by over 46,500. Of the 177 herd management areas, almost 80 percent are above AML. The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 requires that the BLM manage wild horses and burros in a manner “designed to achieve and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance on public lands,” and the AML is the population range the BLM sets to best maintain that thriving natural ecological balance. The BLM has worked diligently in the last few years to address this problem, reducing the on-range population from a peak of 95,000 wild horses and burros in 2020 to approximately 73,500 today, but we have more work to do. Climate change-induced lack of forage and water, as well as competition among wild horses and burros, big game species, and livestock over these limited resources, have made it even more difficult for the BLM to maintain this necessary ecological balance, resulting in further degradation of the range and undermining other BLM land health investments.

The BLM is focused on addressing the management challenges with this program, particularly through use of fertility control treatments and permanent sterilization efforts and through private placements of animals. However, the substantial growth in the cost of off-range holding has impacted the BLM's ability to deliver fertility treatments or remove wild horses and burros from the range while balancing the obligations to ensure the wellbeing of the approximately 63,000 horses off-range in our care (as of May 2024). The FY 2025 Budget requests \$170.9 million in the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Management program, which will help to offset rising program costs and conduct on-range and off-range management activities. This includes a \$15 million increase to support permanent sterilizations. Given the substantial challenges associated with the management of wild horses and burros in the face of a changing climate, and the fact that about two-thirds of the program's budget is now allocated to the care and feeding of horses off range, the BLM would welcome the opportunity to work with the Subcommittee to address the many challenges with this issue.

Conserving & Protecting Nationally Significant Landscapes

As specified in the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, the BLM's National Conservation Lands "conserve, protect, and restore nationally significant landscapes that have outstanding cultural, ecological, and scientific values for the benefit of current and future generations." The National Conservation Lands currently encompass 905 units covering over 37 million acres, including national monuments, wilderness, wilderness study areas, wild and scenic rivers, national conservation areas, and national scenic and historic trails. Designated by Congress or the President, the National Conservation Lands represent some of the nation's most spectacular landscapes and are also the current and ancestral homelands of Tribal Nations and Indigenous peoples, many of whom have deep cultural, historic, and spiritual connections to these places.

An estimated 12.5 million people visit units of the National Conservation Lands each year, providing significant economic benefits to surrounding communities and sustaining long-term jobs within them. To support the conservation and management of these special places, the FY 2025 Budget requests \$65.8 million in the BLM's National Conservation Lands program, \$19.6 million in the Wilderness Management program, and \$7.1 million in cross-cutting funds for wild and scenic rivers.

Strengthening Tribal Sovereignty & Self-Determination

The BLM's management of heritage resources informs the public about climate change and human interactions with the natural environment; offers educational, interpretative, and recreational opportunities to the public; and affirms public, Native American, and other descendent community connections to the landscape. Under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990, the BLM has a responsibility to identify Native American human remains, funerary items, and objects of cultural significance in its museum collections and consult with Tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations to repatriate these remains and objects. The FY 2025 Budget includes an increase of \$250,000 in the Cultural Resources Management program to support and expedite this critically important work.

Supporting Underserved & Disproportionately Affected Communities

The impacts of climate change and environmental degradation in the United States are not evenly distributed across our society. Communities of color, low-income families, and rural and Indigenous communities have long suffered disproportionate and cumulative harm from air pollution, water pollution, and toxic sites. The BLM, as part of its work, dedicates time and resources to engage a wide range of stakeholders and communities in all its land management decisions, as well as to conduct formal consultation with Tribes in recognition of the Federal government's trust responsibilities.

The FY 2025 BLM Budget will advance the Administration's efforts to create good-paying jobs through its program to remediate and reclaim orphaned wells and abandoned mines. These jobs will support communities that may have been disproportionately affected by energy and mining activities and ease the transition for oil and gas field workers, coal miners, and conventional energy and mining communities as the market transitions toward cleaner energy sources. The FY 2025 request in the BLM's Oil and Gas Management program includes over \$23 million to enable the agency to continue remediating wells on Alaska's North Slope. The BLM expects to address orphaned oil and gas wells in the Lower 48 states with funds provided by the BIL (through the Department's Energy Community Revitalization Program), in addition to annual appropriations. Plugging these wells will mitigate risks to groundwater and air pollution. The request also includes \$58.4 million in the Abandoned Mine Lands and Hazardous Materials Management program for the remediation of both physical and environmental impacts of legacy abandoned mine lands and the prevention, mitigation, and remediation of the effects of hazardous substance releases.

Conclusion

The BLM's FY 2025 proposed Budget reflects the Administration's continued commitment to managing America's public lands in a balanced, science-based manner. It is incumbent on us as stewards of our public lands to ensure their use is sustainable and beneficial to current and future generations of Americans, regardless of who they are or where they live, and we take that responsibility seriously. I look forward to working with the Subcommittee to ensure that the BLM has the tools and resources necessary to achieve these important objectives. Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today.