

September 10, 2025

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jared Huffman
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

Re: September 10, 2025 Legislative Hearing on H.R. 4776 (Rep. Westerman), “Standardizing Permitting and Expediting Economic Development Act” (The “SPEED Act”); H.R. 4503 (Rep. Johnson), “ePermit Act;” H.R. 573 (Rep. Yakim), “Studying NEPA’s Impact on Projects Act.”

Dear Chairman Westerman, Ranking Member Huffman, and Members of the House Committee on Natural Resources:

On behalf of the 26 undersigned organizations and our members across the country, we write in strong opposition to H.R. 4776 (SPEED Act) currently before your committee.

This bill, deceptively titled as standardizing permitting, is in fact solely crafted to hamstring the nation’s bedrock environmental law, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The bill sharply limits NEPA’s application and scope by redefining the actions subject to review, authorizing agencies to ignore critical impacts and applicable science, and expanding exemptions to the review requirement. It also restricts the ability of frontline communities and the general public to provide input on projects that will impact them and to seek judicial recourse for wrongful government action. In the guise of permit reform, it cripples NEPA’s central purpose that the federal government fully disclose and consider the environmental and health impacts of its decisions and include the public in decision making so public lands and resources are managed to serve the public interest and future generations.

Not surprisingly, the SPEED Act is strongly supported by the fossil fuel industry which stands to be its primary beneficiary. If enacted, the bill would ensure industry interests, along with those of other extractive industries, have a clear path to drill, mine, pollute and otherwise harm public lands, water, air, and wildlife without mitigating or even considering harmful effects. Any hope that this bill might speed approvals and construction of clean energy infrastructure is entirely misplaced. Given the breadth of recent administrative and executive actions to prioritize fossil fuel and other extractive industry without regard for environmental and climate consequences, further erosions to environmental reviews as proposed in the SPEED Act will simply entrench fossil fuels, limit future decarbonization action, prioritize ill-advised logging and mining extraction over conservation, and otherwise undermine action to forcefully address the climate and ecological crises. The SPEED Act will not lead to an abundance of clean energy as some

permit reform advocates hope but will stifle its development for years to come by subordinating the interests of people, communities, and the environment to developers, investors, and resource extraction companies who hold undue power with decisionmakers.

We recognize that recent calls for permitting reform are driven by legitimate concerns over the slow pace of permit approvals for building out the electric grid, renewable energy, and affordable housing. However, environmental review is not the root cause of those delays. Other actions have a better chance of speeding up the permitting process. Agencies lack funding, staff and training to effectively and efficiently permit projects. New technology and improvements in how communities are heard could lead to more meaningful engagement and reduce conflict. Moreover, this bill is unnecessary to address any alleged project delays due to environmental reviews. Just two years ago, Congress amended NEPA in the 2023 FRA adding time and page limits to environmental reviews, expanding the categories of projects exempt from review, and streamlining coordination. Those changes are already having an effect.

Effective permit reform must begin with public engagement to develop a clear, values-driven vision for what the nation needs to support resilient communities and include protections for abundant clean water, air, wild lands, and wildlife, and prioritize climate action. Gutting existing environmental laws and cutting the public out of decision making is a quick-fix gimmick that will only lead to worse decisions and outcomes for communities and the environment.

The SPEED Act is not the equitable and meaningful permitting reform necessary to meet the clean energy and housing goals driving much of the permit reform discussion. It is nothing more than a bald attack on the environment and our future. It will fast-track and entrench fossil fuel and other extractive resource projects at the expense of clean energy buildout, communities, and the environment. And it will give extractive industries free rein to destroy public lands and resources, pollute communities, and accelerate the climate crisis without answering to the public or the courts. This type of “abundance” will lead us into economic stagnation and environmental degradation. Our organizations and members urge this committee to take a different path and support policies that will lead to a future with affordable clean energy, strong communities, and healthy ecosystems.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Erik Schlenker-Goodrich', written over a horizontal line.

Erik Schlenker-Goodrich Executive Director
Western Environmental Law Center

ON BEHALF OF:

Shannon Straight, Executive Director
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