

**Chairman Alan S. Lowenthal**  
**Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee Legislative Hearing:**  
**Geospatial, Geothermal, & Mineral Withdrawl Bills**  
**September 19, 2019**

The Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources will come to order.

The Subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony on five bills that cover a range of issues – the collection, use, and preservation of geospatial data, geothermal energy development, and a mineral withdrawl in central New Mexico.

Under Committee Rule 4(f), any oral opening statements at hearings are limited to the Chairman and the Ranking Minority Member or their designees.

I ask unanimous consent that all other Members' opening statements be made part of the hearing record if they are submitted to the Subcommittee Clerk by 5:00 pm today. [*pause*] Hearing no objection, so ordered.

I also ask unanimous consent for Congressman Fulcher to sit on the dais and participate in this morning's hearing. [*pause*] Hearing no objection, so ordered.

To begin, I'd like to welcome all the witnesses – thank you for being here today.

I want to emphasize the bipartisan, practical nature of the legislation we're considering today, and thank my colleagues across the aisle for working with us on this hearing and these bills.

Three of the bills in today's hearing address the collection, preservation, and use of geospatial data.

Geospatial data is essential to a variety of industries, services, and activities that hold immense scientific, social, and economic value.

Although most people are probably unfamiliar with the term “geospatial data”, federal, state, and local government management of that data is critically important to the lives of every American.

Whether transporting goods more efficiently, mapping outbreaks of the flu, or getting driving directions on your smartphone, accurate and easily accessible geospatial data is fundamental in our modern world.

Geospatial data also informs our land management decisions – it helps us determine the quantity and quality of water, mineral, and energy resources, and it helps us conserve our natural and cultural heritage.

The Federal Land Asset Inventory Reform Act, or the FLAIR Act, introduced by Mr. Kind and Mr. Westerman, directs the Department of the Interior to develop and maintain an up-to-date, centralized inventory of federal property to assist in better managing our public lands.

In 2007, a National Academies of Sciences report detailed how the Department of Interior used over 100 different land management systems across multiple agencies.

The FLAIR Act is one potential remedy for this problem.

Geospatial data also helps government officials, emergency responders, and landowners assess how vulnerable an area is to deadly and destructive natural hazards.

The prevention of natural hazards is especially relevant to two of the bills on our agenda today: H.R. 496, Mr. Soto’s Sinkhole Mapping Act and H.R. 4299, Ms. Velazquez’ Data Preservation Act.

The Data Preservation Act, which reauthorizes the National Geological and Geophysical Data Preservation Program, is long overdue.

The authorization for this valuable program expired in 2010. While the U.S. Geological Survey has kept it operational, state geological surveys rely on grants from this program to preserve and digitize our country's geological and geophysical data.

This data is invaluable, representing literally millions of cores, maps, photographs, and more that have been collected over the last century and a half.

These collections aren't simply museum pieces. They are used every day by the private sector, teachers, and government officials.

In 2017, the state geological survey in my home state of California used a grant from the National Geological and Geophysical Data Preservation Program to inventory and digitize decades-old aerial photographs.

These photographs helped local governments in Riverside County determine which areas were prone to landslides after a wildfire, and effectively prevented local communities from being subjected to a second natural disaster.

The importance of geospatial data cannot be understated.

We have two other bills on our agenda today.

H.R. 4026, Mr. Fulcher's Enhancing Geothermal Production on Federal Lands Act, addresses one of my favorite topics: expanding clean energy on public lands.

Geothermal is a promising renewable resource, but development of this resource has stalled.

We must be doing more to increase development and level the playing field for geothermal energy on public lands, and this bill offers some ideas.

Last, but certainly not least, H.R. 2640, Ms. Haaland's Buffalo Tract Protection Act, addresses the concerns of communities and tribes impacted by gravel mining on public lands near Placitas, New Mexico.

The Bureau of Land Management has proposed to allow additional gravel mining in this area, which could worsen air and water pollution already harming local communities and impact important cultural heritage and wildlife migration corridors in this area.

This bill would withdraw a few small parcels of land from mineral development, and would permanently protect the health of local tribes and communities, as well as the resources they depend on.

I look forward to the discussion of these bills, and I now recognize Ranking Member Gosar for his opening statement.