



December 15, 2025

Chairman Pete Stauber
House Natural Resources, Subcommittee on
Energy and Mineral Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ranking Member Yassamin Ansari
House Natural Resources, Subcommittee on
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Dear Chairman Stauber, Ranking Member Ansari, and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of The Wilderness Society's (TWS) over one million members and supporters, I write to offer our views on eight bills pending before the Subcommittee: H.R. 301, H.R. 398, H.R. 1077, H.R. 1687, H.R. 5576, H.R. 5587, H.R. 5617, and H.R. 5631.

TWS recognizes that geothermal energy is a critical component of a reliable, low-carbon grid. We support scaling geothermal development on public lands when it is guided by strong environmental review, Tribal consultation, modern planning tools, and adequate agency capacity. The following comments reflect our commitment to responsible geothermal growth that is efficient, durable, and respectful of communities, Tribes, and our shared natural resources.

H.R. 301, the Geothermal Energy Opportunity (GEO) Act (Rep. Maloy, UT)

The GEO Act would amend Section 4 of the Geothermal Steam Act to require the Secretary to process all applications submitted under a valid existing geothermal lease within 60 days after completing the required National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) reviews, notwithstanding any pending civil action in federal court related to the application and so long as a federal court has not vacated or has provided injunctive relief for the applicable geothermal authorization. The bill would also clarify that it is not modifying any existing authority for a federal court to vacate or provide injunctive relief for a geothermal authorization.

We do not support arbitrary and insufficient deadlines for processing permits for any technology – clean, renewable, or otherwise. Doing so has the practical effect of rushing public input opportunities, Tribal consultation, and other critical elements of the review process. Cutting corners can jeopardize the durability of the very authorizations the legislation seeks to expedite. We also do not support attempts to insulate actions from judicial review or to minimize the judicial review process.

We recognize that a prior version of this bill was amended last year in response to stakeholder concerns, including an extension of the deadline from 30 to 60 days and further clarifications regarding judicial review – which H.R. 301 reflects.

We appreciate the inclusion of this feedback and urge the Subcommittee to remove the legislated deadline.

H.R. 398, the Geothermal Cost-Recovery Authority Act of 2025 (Rep. Ocasio Cortez, NY)

H.R. 398 would add a subsection to Section 6 of the Geothermal Steam Act of 1970 that would allow the Department of the Interior (DOI) to recover the costs of processing permits, conducting reviews, and inspecting geothermal operations.

Cost-recovery authority exists in law for many types of projects, including oil and gas, coal, recreation, and renewable energy projects – including wind and solar. Section 504(g) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1764(g)) requires wind and solar energy right-of-way applicants to “pay in advance the fair market value thereof, as determined by the Secretary granting, issuing, or renewing such right-of-way.” Additionally, the statute goes on to read that: “The Secretary concerned may, by regulation or prior to promulgation of such regulations, as a condition of a right-of-way, require an applicant for or holder of a right-of-way to reimburse the United States for all reasonable administrative and other costs incurred in processing an application for such right-of-way and in inspection and monitoring of construction, operation, and termination of the facility pursuant to such right-of-way.”

For wind and solar, cost-recovery authority has empowered the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to build capacity, engage in project- and landscape-level reviews of wind and solar projects, and conduct inspections with some independence from annual congressional appropriations. At the landscape level, cost recovery helped enable the BLM to undertake the Solar Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement to enhance its solar energy program across 11 Western states, which concluded last year.

This authority does not exist for the BLM’s geothermal program. According to the agency’s [FY 2021 report to Congress](#) regarding renewable energy on public lands, BLM identified the lack of a cost recovery authority as a barrier “in its ability to undertake programmatic efforts to enhance the program.”

By enabling BLM to enter into cost recovery agreements with geothermal developers, this legislation will help ensure that the geothermal leasing, permitting, and inspection apparatus at BLM receives dedicated funding – in addition to some annual congressional appropriations – to keep core functions operating with certainty while also enabling the agency to conduct efficient reviews and inspections, engage in longer-term programmatic planning, and hire staff.

TWS supports H.R. 398 and urges members of the Subcommittee to advance it.

H.R. 1077, the Streamlining Thermal Energy through Advanced Mechanisms (STEAM) Act (Rep. Lee, NV)

The STEAM Act would amend the Energy Policy Act of 2005 to add certain geothermal exploration and development activities to an existing categorical exclusion for oil and gas activities, putting geothermal on par with oil and gas in certain narrow circumstances. This would mean that the DOI could expedite NEPA analysis for the following limited geothermal activities:

- Individual surface disturbances less than 5 acres where the total surface disturbance under the lease is 150 acres or less;
- Drilling a geothermal well at a site where drilling for oil, gas, or geothermal occurred within the last 5 years;
- Drilling a geothermal well within a developed field where either a resource management plan or NEPA document that was approved within the last 5 years previously analyzed such drilling as a reasonably foreseeable activity;



- Placing a pipeline within a right-of-way that was approved within the last 5 years; or
- Maintaining a minor activity, but not the construction or major renovation of a building or facility.

Public input and NEPA analyses are critical to effective decision-making. They identify potential resource conflicts early and evaluate alternatives to avoid, minimize, or mitigate them. This upfront work makes project approvals more durable and can ultimately speed up permitting.

That said, TWS supports the renewable energy build-out, including expanding geothermal energy – and we do not believe that renewable energy activities should be held to a higher standard than analogous oil and gas activities with the same level of surface disturbance. Enlarging the scope of an existing categorical exclusion that currently only applies to a limited set of oil and gas activities on previously studied and/or previously developed land to also apply to the same activities related to geothermal is in service of the goal of responsibly permitting additional clean, renewable energy on federal public lands.

This legislation could be strengthened by requiring all Sec. 390 activities – including oil and gas development – be subject to an extraordinary circumstances review, so BLM can determine if a more rigorous environmental review is appropriate.

While we oppose the underlying categorical exclusion as written, we believe that as long as it exists in law for oil and gas, it should also apply to geothermal activities. [TWS supports H.R. 1077 and urges members of the Subcommittee to advance it.](#)

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

TWS supports the aims of the CLEAN Act, but the bill as written contains unacceptable language and must be amended.

Section 2(a) requires the BLM to conduct one lease sale per year in each state with pending nominations, rather than biennially as current law dictates. Additionally, this subsection requires the agency to conduct a replacement sale in the event an annual lease sale is canceled. Recognizing that H.R. 1 mandates quarterly lease sales for oil and gas, annual lease sales for geothermal would be a step toward leveling the playing field for this clean, firm energy resource.

Section 2(a)(4) would require the BLM to offer for lease all parcels nominated for geothermal energy production that are eligible for such use under a resource management plan (RMP). We oppose this provision because it forecloses BLM's ability to scope nominations in response to public comment and NEPA analysis. First, many RMPs are decades old and fail to consider today's on-the-ground realities, including natural and cultural resource conflicts. "Eligibility" pursuant to an outdated plan must not be the final word. Second, this provision could allow nominations in areas local stakeholders view as unacceptable, with little recourse for them – or for BLM – to prevent those nominations from resulting in leases. This could undermine public confidence in geothermal energy writ large.

Section 2(b) requires BLM to, within 30 days of a drilling permit application submission, notify applicants both about the completion status of their documents and about any further

documentation needed. The subsection then requires BLM to issue a permitting decision no later than 30 days after notifying an applicant that their application is complete.

TWS opposes implementing arbitrary and insufficient timelines for environmental reviews. During consideration of H.R. 1449 in the 118th Congress, which is identical to this bill, Ranking Member Grijalva offered [an amendment](#) on the House Floor to extend the completeness deadline in the proposed Subsection “(h)(1)” to 90 days. His amendment also provided flexibility in proposed Subsection “(h)(2)” for DOI to defer a decision with proper justification and provide steps a project proponent could take to facilitate a timely decision. We supported this amendment then, and we urge the Committee to follow suit during markup.

We welcome the opportunity to work with the bill’s sponsor to incorporate this feedback, but we oppose H.R. 1687 as written and urge the Subcommittee not to advance it.

H.R. 5576, Enhancing Geothermal Production on Federal Lands Act (Rep. Fulcher, ID)

TWS supports the aims of H.R. 5576, the Enhancing Geothermal Production on Federal Lands Act, but the bill as written includes unacceptable language that must be amended.

Section 2 attempts to expedite permitting for geothermal exploration test projects and related covered activities – like off-road travel and access road maintenance and construction – by declaring them non-major federal actions, thereby waiving them from NEPA requirements entirely. Unlike prior iterations of the bill, H.R. 5576 does not prescribe adequate definitions for geothermal exploration test projects, such as disturbance limits and well sizes.

TWS holds that legislated NEPA waivers – where federal actions are deemed not subject to environmental review carte blanche – are unacceptable. We believe that existing NEPA mechanisms, including but not limited to effective programmatic planning (per Sec. 3, below) and the analysis and tiering that comes with it, provide ample authority and flexibility for efficient geothermal leasing and permitting. In fact, after a public input and environmental review process, the BLM finalized an administrative categorical exclusion for many categories of geothermal exploration test projects earlier this year. Should the Secretary, in consultation with lands management agencies, determine that additional categories of geothermal exploration test projects will not result in individually or cumulatively significant impacts, then another administrative categorical exclusion may be appropriate.

Section 3 requires the Secretary to identify areas prioritized for geothermal leasing. TWS supports the identification of priority areas for geothermal, and we have long supported the same for wind and solar energy development on public lands. Landscape level analysis with proper consideration and incorporation of public input – paired with meaningful process incentives in priority areas – helps reduce conflict, accelerate deployment, and makes projects more durable. It would also help address outdated RMPs by updating lands eligible for geothermal development across the West and across RMPs. Considering this exercise was last completed for geothermal in 2008 and recognizing the technological advancements that have occurred – and continue to occur – since then, TWS supports this language.

We recommend additional authorities to complement the programmatic study requirement, including cost-recovery authority (per H.R. 398) and consistent congressional appropriations for the BLM.



We welcome the opportunity to work with the bill's sponsor to incorporate this feedback, but TWS opposes H.R. 5576 as written and urges members of the Subcommittee not to advance it.

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

The HEATS Act would amend the Geothermal Steam Act by adding a new Section 30 that eliminates the requirement that a geothermal operator apply for a federal drilling permit in instances where a state-level permit has already been issued and where the subsurface geothermal estate is less than 50% federal. If enacted, this bill would exempt operations on millions of acres of split-estate lands from the federal permitting process, circumventing NEPA, Endangered Species Act, and National Historic Preservation Act requirements.

Such a measure would invalidate the public's right – as well as the right of impacted landowners with holdings over subsurface federal geothermal estate – to participate in the management of these lands and resources. Additionally, it would deny federal land management agencies the valuable contributions that the public and Tribes often provide in furthering the efficient and equitable management of federal resources. If enacted, the public and impacted split-estate landowners would also be denied the right to seek redress when resource management decisions occur that may violate the law.

Instead, operators would need only to seek state permits. State agencies often lack the capacity or authority to conduct holistic environmental reviews, engage federal, state, Tribal and local stakeholders, and identify any public health or safety concerns or other potential resource conflicts. We strongly believe that DOI should remain involved in all decisions pertaining to the federal subsurface estate to maintain an appropriate level of environmental review, public engagement, and adherence to the BLM's multiple-use and sustained yield mandate. While the bill does require states to provide a 30-day notification period to DOI of any approved permits, it does not empower the Department to decide whether permits should move forward.

TWS opposes H.R. 5587 and urges members of the Subcommittee not to advance it.

H.R. 5617, Geothermal Gold Book Development Act (Rep. Ansari, AZ)

This legislation directs DOI to, within one year, create standard procedures and guidelines for efficient and responsible geothermal leasing and permitting. It then requires DOI to publish a "Geothermal Gold Book" within 180 days, for use by both BLM field offices, geothermal developers, and the public. The legislation also includes stipulations for consultation, what to include, and when to revise the Geothermal Gold Book.

The BLM's Gold Book for oil and gas leasing and permitting is a set of best practices for BLM staff and oil and gas operators to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to surface resources. It has become a critical tool not only for oil and gas developers, but also for BLM field staff responsible for leasing, permitting, and enforcement decisions. Having a corollary for geothermal developers and BLM field staff will help improve consistency and certainty across geographies.

Additionally, we offer the following considerations:

- In Sec. 2(c)(1), consider adding other federal surface management agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Consider also adding the Department of Energy, whose Geothermal Technologies Program developed the [“Protocol for Addressing Induced Seismicity with Enhanced Geothermal Systems.”](#)
- In Sec. 2(c)(2), consider adding Tribal Governments, Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, State agency officials (including wildlife management officials, engineers, permitting officers).
- In Sec. 2(d)(2), consider adding a subparagraph to cover “decommissioning and reclamation.”

TWS supports H.R. 5617, and we urge members of the Subcommittee to advance it.

H.R. 5631, Geothermal Ombudsman for National Deployment and Optimal Reviews Act (Rep. Hurd, CO)

This legislation would create an ombudsman role at the BLM to help facilitate geothermal energy permitting, including knowledge sharing between field offices, best practices, and liaising with the geothermal industry. TWS supports these functions.

Notably, however, the legislation does not provide new funding to carry out its requirements. TWS remains concerned about congressional appropriations for the BLM, and for the Renewable Energy Management Program and Renewable Energy Coordination Offices – and adding this bill’s requirements to the agency’s long list of duties could deprive resources from other important clean energy permitting activities.

Moreover, the legislation directs the ombudsman to develop geothermal best practices for permitting and leasing. This would be best accomplished by the more holistic process set forth by H.R. 5617. For this reason, TWS supports passage of H.R. 5631, H.R. 5617 and H.R. 398; the whole of this suite of bills is greater than the sum of the parts. The funding from H.R. 398 and the development of consolidated best practices directed by H.R. 5617 are both essential to the success of H.R. 5631.

Conclusion:

As Congress evaluates reforms to support geothermal development, we encourage a balanced approach that pairs permitting efficiency with modern planning, robust environmental review, and the resources necessary for the BLM to administer a growing program. With these elements in place, geothermal energy can scale rapidly, responsibly, and with broad public confidence. TWS looks forward to working with the Subcommittee to advance thoughtful solutions that help realize the full potential of geothermal energy on public lands while protecting the landscapes and communities that depend on them. Thank you for the opportunity to submit our views on these bills.

Sincerely,



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Justin Meuse".

Justin Meuse
Government Relations Director