



February 23, 2026

Dear Chairman Stauber, Ranking Member Ansari, and the members of the Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee:

Since 1919, the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System. On behalf of our 1.6 million members and supporters nationwide, I write to share our thoughts on legislation ahead of a hearing in the Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources scheduled for February 24, 2026.

NPCA understands the importance of developing robust, responsible and resilient domestic supply chains for minerals. Clean energy, national security and infrastructure all rely on various minerals. However, the existing framework for managing mining exploration and development on our public lands is not up to the modern standards needed to reduce conflict with the continued protection of the natural, cultural and historic resources of the National Park System. Under the mining law of 1872 and the overlying regulatory landscape, multi-national mining corporations and speculators have near unlimited access to public land. This system, designed for the pick and shovel miner of the California gold rush, hands the responsibility of managing public lands over to companies looking to profit from them without providing for any fair return to Americans.

On top of the antiquated regulatory framework, the current administration has reduced environmental and historical resource review timelines, reduced opportunity for public input, directed agencies to prioritize large swathes of public lands for mineral development, cut vital staffing at agencies, directed agencies to expedite approval for mineral projects and even promoted speculative mineral exploration development inside of a national park.

**H.R.7458 - To codify notice requirements for mineral exploration activities on certain public lands, and for other purposes:** NPCA **opposes** this legislation, which would legislatively apply the Bureau of Land Management's notice-level requirements for mining exploration projects on public lands to the U.S. Forest Service. Right now, mining companies can carry out exploration activities on Bureau of Land Management lands with fewer than 5 acres of disturbance by simply filing a notice with the agency. This notice allows road construction, drilling, blasting, sampling and the use of mining equipment. Even a 5-acre disturbance can have serious impacts depending on what resources are affected. These activities can significantly disrupt wildlife, nearby communities and even vital water sources.

The bill also expands the maximum area of surface disturbance for exploration activities from the current 5 acres to 25 acres of disturbance at any given time. This five-fold increase in the allowable area of disturbance would allow speculative mining companies to set up drilling rigs and mining roads across an area equal in size to almost 19 football fields. Because these notice-level activities are exempt from public review under NEPA and the National Historic Preservation Act, the public has no opportunity to raise concerns or support. Increasing the disturbance limit far beyond 5 acres would open larger areas of public land to exploratory development without any analysis of potential impacts, consultation with adjacent land managers or public involvement.

Each of these exploratory projects may pose various threats to ecological and cultural resources. In Nevada, local community opposition has pushed back against proposed lithium exploration drilling around the Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge. The proposed notice-level activities would threaten the subsurface water that flows across the state border into Death Valley National Park.

**H.R.7126 - the Securing Essential and Critical U.S. Resources and Elements (SECURE) Minerals Act:** NPCA has concerns with this legislation, which would establish a Critical Minerals Reserve to carry out market-related activities and investments in critical minerals and materials in the U.S. and partner countries. The bill establishes the Reserve as a government corporation with authorities to shape and control mineral markets. Moreover, the Reserve has additional powers that are currently held by federal agencies and departments, including the authority to issue rules, regulations and orders; to purchase land or interests in land for related facilities; and to enter into contracts. Relevant federal agencies are relegated to advisory and consultatory roles to the Reserve. The Reserve would be financed with an initial \$2.5 billion of U.S. taxpayer dollars and managed by a President-appointed Board. It lacks measures for adequate enforcement of strong labor and environmental standards, public transparency or meaningful congressional oversight. Additionally, this legislation would be another investment in domestic mining while the mining industry still does not pay back the taxpayer for the resources extracted from public lands. We hope to work with the bill sponsors to improve investments in domestic mineral supply chains while establishing clear guardrails and a fair return to the American public.

**H.R.4781- the Rare Earth Solutions and Carbon Utilization Enhancement Act of 2025:** NPCA supports the intent of this legislation, which aims to support the efficient permitting of projects to extract critical minerals from historic and existing mining waste piles. However, we have concerns about the way the bill is currently written and the potential for the bill to legislatively add new coal mining projects to FAST-41 under the banner of “critical mineral extraction.” We believe that there is significant opportunity for the United States to better analyze potential critical mineral deposits in existing mine waste, including in historic coal mining waste. We hope

to work with the bill sponsors and the committee to improve the bill by providing clarity about the types of projects eligible. Additionally, we hope to work with the bill sponsors to identify opportunities to prioritize more mining from waste piles instead of opening new mines on sensitive public lands.

### *Additional Background on Mining and National Parks*

According to NPCA's analysis, about 33 percent of active mining claims are located within 30 miles of a national park or monument. While these claims are not all destined to become large mining operations, exploration activities, like drilling and road building, on these lands still pose a huge risk to resources protected by the National Park System.

NPCA is particularly concerned about a growing boom of exploration and mining activities in Southeastern Utah, around the California Desert, Southwestern Nevada, the Gates of the Arctic and the greater Grand Canyon area. Recent exploration for lithium, uranium, cobalt, rare earth elements and more all raise serious concerns for the potential impacts to water, air, wildlife, visitor experience and sensitive cultural resources at our national parks in these landscapes.

On April 8, just two weeks after signing EO 14241, the Trump administration ignored the requirements of the Mining in the Parks Act and approved further mineral exploration work at the Colosseum Mine in Mojave National Preserve. The approval, published in a BLM press release, cites a plan of operations from 1985 that pre-dates the creation of the park and ignores the congressionally designated status of the lands in which the mine is located. Without conducting a modern environmental review, the approval of the Colosseum project threatens the natural resources that the park was established to protect. The administration touts this "approval" as a win for the "American Energy Dominance" agenda. Since then, the number of mining claims staked on public lands adjacent to Mojave NP has increased.

With recent efforts to expand investment in domestic mining, cut permitting requirements and open more public land to the mining industry, we are still concerned about the lack of proposals from this committee to ensure that our most special places are not permanently harmed in the process. To be clear, NPCA does not oppose responsibly sited mining projects so long as they are paired with adequate environmental and social safeguards and modernization of the laws that govern mining on public lands to ensure our national parks and special places are protected.

NPCA suggests that mining and mineral policy conversations include:

- Protecting special places like national parks from adjacent harmful mining activities
- Increasing the annual claim maintenance fee to better reflect the value of the public land being used for mining and returning value to the taxpayer

- Increasing investment in abandoned mine land (AML) reclamation with a clear commitment for additional funding to address the approximately 38,000 AML features across our national parks
- Increased investment in mining schools and mining engineering with commitments to improve federal expertise in mining.
- A mining royalty that would return fair value back to the American taxpayer for use of public lands and provide vital funding for future conservation
- More discretion for land managers to determine landscapes more suitable for mining development and steer developers away from areas of high conflict (those directly outside of a national park)
- Increased investment in recycling
- Increased investment in end-of-life planning for mine sites to be either re-mined or converted for other uses such as renewable energy development.
- Robust scientific review and environmental safeguards for all extractive industries, including coal and deep-sea mining, to ensure protection of ecosystems and cultural resources.

We appreciate the work of this committee to advance the protection of our national parks and special places. As you look to invest in domestic mining and address concerns with the permitting process, we hope you will also address the systemic deficiencies with our mining systems. NPCA stands ready to work with the committee to develop real, science-based solutions that meet our mineral needs without sacrificing public health, our climate or America's most treasured landscapes and seascapes. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me at [colsen@npca.org](mailto:colsen@npca.org).

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

Charlie Olsen

Energy and Public Lands Policy Manager