

March 25, 2026

The Honorable Pete Stauber
Chairman
Energy and Mineral Resources
Subcommittee
U.S. House Natural Resources
Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Yassamin Ansari
Ranking Member
Energy and Mineral Resources
Subcommittee
U.S. House Natural Resources
Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Stauber, Ranking Member Ansari, and members of the House Natural Resources Committee's Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources,

On behalf of our millions of members, we urge you to vote against Representative Bice's (R-OK-05) legislation H.R.1555, the Bureau of Land Management Mineral Spacing Act, which would exempt certain BLM subsurface minerals from the federal oil and gas permitting process.

H.R. 1555 eliminates the requirement that an oil and gas operator submit a Federal Application for Permit to Drill (APD) to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in instances where there is non-federal surface estate and where the subsurface mineral estate is less than 50 percent federal in drilling and spacing units. If enacted, this bill would exempt millions of acres of split-estate lands from the federal permitting process, remove agency authority to evaluate and approve the plan of operations and drill plan, circumvent bedrock conservation statutes and public input requirements - eliminating vital transparency, public comment, and environmental review safeguards, and eliminate the point at which BLM enforces requirements for reclamation bonds.

Representative Bice's legislation would allow oil and gas operators to drill on certain split-estate leases without federal permits, exempting the exploration, development, or production of oil and gas from National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and Endangered Species Act (ESA) requirements. Such a measure would invalidate the public's right, as well as the right of impacted landowners with holdings over subsurface federal minerals, to participate in the management of these lands and resources. Elimination of ESA consultations would reduce opportunities to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to listed species and their habitats. Additionally, it would deny federal land management agencies the invaluable 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 that may violate the law occur.

Instead, operators would need only to seek state permits. Some states approve permits within 14 days. This is not enough time to conduct a holistic environmental review, engage federal, state, Tribal and local stakeholders, and identify any public health or

safety concerns or other potential resource conflicts. We strongly believe that the Secretary of the Interior should remain involved in all decisions pertaining to the federal mineral estate to maintain an appropriate level of environmental review, public engagement, and adherence to the Bureau of Land Management's multiple-use and sustained yield mandate. While the bill does require states to provide a 45-day notification period to the Interior Department of any approved permits, it does not empower the Secretary to decide whether permits should move forward. Additionally, monitoring and enforcement of oil and gas production would be difficult, and any shortcomings resulting from a state's permitting process could leave federal taxpayers responsible for clean-up obligations created by the state, including orphaned and abandoned wells.

H.R. 1555 is also a solution in search of a problem. According to the Bureau of Land Management's oil and gas leasing statistics for Fiscal Year 2025, BLM approved 5,740 drilling permits ("APDs") on federal oil and gas leases that year. As of March 2, 2026, the industry's inventory of approved permits ready to drill is 8,887. According to BLM's annual oil and gas leasing statistics, the number of wells drilled annually on federal oil and gas leases was 2,383 in FY 2024, 2,106 in FY 2023, 2,063 in FY 2022, 1,630 in FY 2021, and 1,486 in FY 2020, the final year of the first Trump Administration. This data does not point to a permitting bottleneck and does not justify changing the law in the way H.R. 1555 proposes.

We acknowledge that language resembling this bill was included in S. 4753, the Energy Permitting Reform Act, in 2024. Since that time, H.R. 1 has been enacted into law, grossly tipping the scales in favor of the oil and gas industry by reducing royalties, mandating lease sales across the West and in the Arctic, and harshly restricting the BLM's ability to defer nominated parcels. This language was unacceptable then and it is unconscionable now.

In closing, our organizations strongly urge you to vote against H.R. 1555 during the scheduled House Energy and Mineral Resources Committee business meeting on Wednesday, March 25, 2026.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Alaska Wilderness League
Center for Biological Diversity
Climate Justice Alliance
Defenders of Wildlife
Earthjustice Action
GreenLatinos
League of Conservation Voters
Los Padres ForestWatch

Montana Wildlife Federation
Natural Resources Defense Council
Next 100 Coalition
Rocky Mountain Wild
Sierra Club
Wild Montana
The Wilderness Society
Wyoming Wildlife Advocates