

Douglas A. Ducey
Governor



Lisa A. Atkins
Commissioner

Arizona State Land Department

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September 13, 2022

Honorable Joe Neguse, Chairman and Honorable Russ Fulcher, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Neguse and Ranking Member Fulcher:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on behalf of the Arizona State Land Department (ASLD) regarding H.R. 8719, the *Great Bend of the Gila Conservation Act*, scheduled to be heard by the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands on September 14, 2022.

The *Great Bend of the Gila Conservation Act* creates two distinct conservation areas located in western Arizona which include not only federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands, but also sections of State Trust Land. The purpose of my letter is to provide for the record my concern about the effect that trapping State Trust Land within a restrictive federal designation has on fulfilling ASLD's responsibilities and mission to the Beneficiaries of State Trust Land.

Federal land management agencies have very different missions from ASLD. Federal agencies, generally, have a mission to preserve and protect land under their management for posterity and public use. State Trust Land, granted to Arizona at Statehood, is to be managed for the purpose of providing a revenue stream for thirteen designated Beneficiaries, the largest of which is Arizona's K-12 education system. When land is trapped within a federal designation such as a wilderness or national conservation area, it adversely impacts the management and value of the land, effectively ensuring that the Beneficiaries will never see the value of their land asset realized, nor be compensated for that value.

A reasonable and well-vetted measure to address the problem of trapped land is found in the *Advancing Conservation and Education Act (ACE)*, which was acted upon by your Subcommittee and the full Committee in May 2021. Enactment of ACE would allow Arizona to relinquish State Trust Land trapped in designations like those proposed in H.R. 8719 to the federal government

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for conservation and other purposes, in return for making an in-lieu selection of federal lands to replace the value of the relinquished acreage. This would ensure that the Beneficiaries are properly compensated, while also creating more contiguous land management areas aligned with the respective state and federal missions.

In the event ACE is not enacted, I respectfully request that the Committee include language and authorization in H.R. 8719 allowing BLM to purchase the State Trust Land at fair market value and provide resources for BLM to do so.

Thank you for your favorable consideration.

Sincerely,



Lisa A. Atkins
Commissioner