

**DISCUSSION DRAFT OF H.R. _____, MILITARY
AND VETERANS IN PARKS ACT; H.R. 1786;
H.R. 1829; AND H.R. 2468**

LEGISLATIVE HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

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**LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON DISCUSSION DRAFT OF H.R. _____,
TO PROMOTE AND ENHANCE OUTDOOR RECREATION
OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES
AND VETERANS ON FEDERAL RECREATIONAL LANDS,
“MILITARY AND VETERANS IN PARKS (MVP) ACT”; H.R. 1786,
TO DIRECT THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO
SUBMIT TO CONGRESS A REPORT ON THE WARRIOR TRAIN-
ING ADVANCEMENT COURSE, TO DIRECT THE SECRETARY
OF THE INTERIOR TO ADMINISTER A PILOT PROGRAM TO
EMPLOY VETERANS IN POSITIONS THAT RELATE TO CON-
SERVATION AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, AND FOR OTHER PUR-
POSES, “GET REWARDING OUTDOOR WORK FOR OUR
VETERANS ACT, OR (GROW) ACT; H.R. 1829, TO REQUIRE THE
SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE TO CONVEY THE PLEASANT
VALLEY RANGER DISTRICT ADMINISTRATIVE SITE TO GILA
COUNTY, ARIZONA; AND H.R. 2468, TO REQUIRE THE
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TRATIVE JURISDICTION OF THE BUREAU OF LAND MANAGE-
MENT WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF CAMP WILLIAMS, UTAH,
AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES, “MOUNTAIN VIEW CORRIDOR
COMPLETION ACT”**

**Thursday, July 20, 2023
U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC**

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 9 a.m. in Room 1324, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Tom Tiffany [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Tiffany, Fulcher, Stauber, Bentz, Kiggans, Westerman; Porter, and Leger Fernández.

Also present: Representatives Crane and Owens.

Mr. TIFFANY. The Subcommittee on Federal Lands will come to order.

Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess of the Subcommittee at any time.

The Subcommittee is meeting today to consider four bills: Representative Kiggans’ Military and Veterans in Parks Act; H.R. 1786, Representative Levin’s Get Rewarding Outdoor Work for our Veterans Act, the GROW Act; H.R. 1829, from Representative Crane; and H.R. 2468 from Representative Owens, Mountain View Corridor Completion Act.

I ask unanimous consent that the following Members be allowed to participate in today’s hearing from the dais: the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Hunt; the gentleman from Utah, Mr. Owens; and the gentleman from Arizona, Mr. Crane.

Without objection, so ordered.

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

I therefore ask unanimous consent that all other Members' opening statements be made part of the hearing record if they are submitted in accordance with Committee Rule 3(o).

Without objection, so ordered.

I will now recognize myself for an opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. TOM TIFFANY, A REPRESENTATIVE
IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF WISCONSIN**

Mr. TIFFANY. Today, the Subcommittee on Federal Lands continues our celebration of America by considering legislation that recognizes the brave men and women whose heroism and sacrificial service to this country protect our safety and the liberties that we cherish. The legislation we will consider today offers thoughtful solutions that will improve outdoor recreation opportunities for our nation's heroes, provide spaces for relaxation and healing for military families.

The perils of military service, unfortunately, leave many members of our Armed Forces with long-lasting wounds: some visible, some invisible. An estimated 50 percent of veterans experience some combination of combat-related psychological or physical injuries, and as many as 66 percent have diagnosable mental health issues.

Research has consistently shown that time spent in nature and recreating outdoors can be beneficial and therapeutic to soldiers returning from the battlefield, particularly for those dealing with PTSD. With the proper stewardship, our national parks and public lands can play a critical role, offering convenient, affordable, and accessible recreation opportunities to our country's armed services and veterans. I would say all of us can benefit from being outdoors, which I am looking forward to this weekend.

The unfortunate reality is that veterans, and wounded warriors in particular, often find much of our public lands to be off limits. Trails can be inaccessible or not maintained. Outdated regulations can limit the use of new, adaptive recreation equipment. And even if adaptive recreation opportunities are offered, finding information about those opportunities from Federal land managers can be next to impossible.

Our veterans deserve to access the very lands they fought so hard to protect and defend. Every American owes our nation's veterans an unpayable debt, and it is incumbent upon each one of us sitting around the dais today to fight to ensure our public lands are stewarded in a way that makes them accessible for our nation's military veterans and Gold Star families. That is why I am a strong supporter of Representative Kiggans' legislation, Military and Veterans in Parks Act, or the MVP Act.

I am thankful for Representative Kiggans' leadership on this issue. As a freshman member of our Committee and a former Navy helicopter pilot, there is nobody more well-suited to lead this effort than her. She is a tireless advocate for our nation's service

members and veterans, especially for those in her district in Virginia.

I would also like to take a moment to recognize the other important legislative efforts on today's agenda.

H.R. 1829, offered by Congressman Crane, would create a retreat facility in Gila County, Arizona for veterans and their families to relax and enjoy the outdoors with their families.

H.R. 2468, the Mountain View Corridor Completion Act, offered by Representative Owens of Utah, conveys land within the boundary of Camp Williams, an important National Guard training facility, to the state of Utah to complete the Mountain View Corridor.

Finally, Representative Levin's GROW Act is a bipartisan bill that helps veterans find employment at the Department of the Interior through a new pilot project. Only one in four veterans have jobs lined up after leaving the Armed Forces. Representative Levin's legislation will enable veterans to find stable, well-paying jobs that enable them to be outdoors.

In closing, I believe our agenda today honors our military members and veterans, and will hopefully make tangible and meaningful improvements in their lives. I want to thank all the bill sponsors for their leadership on these important bills before us.

I also want to recognize and thank the witnesses for being here, and for your advocacy on behalf of our nation's brave heroes.

With that, I will now recognize Ranking Member Levin, sitting in place of Representative Neguse today.

Welcome, and we would love to hear your opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. MIKE LEVIN, A REPRESENTATIVE
IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

Mr. LEVIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate that. Ranking Member Neguse had a scheduling conflict, so I am filling in.

Today's hearing includes key bills designed to uplift and support the veterans community, continuing important work to promote access to public lands among service members and veterans.

Last Congress, I was proud to support bipartisan legislation to ensure free access to public lands for all veterans and Gold Star families. Passing the Alexander Lofgren Veterans and Parks Act was a valuable milestone. However, there is always more we can do to deepen the connections between veterans and their public lands. That is why I am particularly excited to talk about my bill, H.R. 1786.

The GROW Act establishes a pilot program aimed at employing veterans in conservation and resource management activities directly on our public lands. By engaging our veterans in the preservation of our public lands, we honor their dedication to our nation and provide them with meaningful career development opportunities. The participation of veterans and conservation and resource management activities through the pilot program established by the GROW Act not only offers them valuable employment opportunities, but also enlists their expertise and passion in safeguarding these lands for all Americans to enjoy.

We will also be reviewing the Military and Veterans in Parks Act, a discussion draft from Representative Kiggans geared toward

increasing recreation opportunities for veterans. The MVP Act is an excellent companion to the GROW Act, and two great acronyms for these two bills, by the way.

Our public lands, which encompass breathtaking landscapes, diverse ecosystems, and a rich cultural heritage are national treasures. Enhancing opportunities for veterans to connect with them, whether through work or recreation, should be a priority for this Subcommittee. By combining efforts to support our veterans and preserve our public lands, we foster a profound sense of patriotism and stewardship, ensuring that the beauty of our nation's natural heritage endures for years to come.

It is encouraging to see us come together in a bipartisan manner to ensure that our heroes are rewarded for their sacrifices, given every opportunity to succeed, and celebrated for their continued service to our great nation.

I look forward to the conversation today and yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Mr. Levin. I would now like to recognize the Chairman of the Natural Resources Full Committee for an opening statement.

Mr. Westerman.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. BRUCE WESTERMAN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ARKANSAS

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you, Chairman Tiffany, and thank you to everyone that is here today.

Ronald Reagan once said that veterans know better than anyone else the price of freedom, for they have suffered the scars of war. We can offer them no better tribute than to protect what they have won for us. I think that is very fitting as we begin this hearing today. What our veterans have won and defended for us includes the full splendor and abundance of national parks and public lands that we, as Americans, have been blessed with. And there is no better tribute to them than ensuring their full access to these lands so that they can begin often the long process of healing the scars that remain from war.

From the National Mall here in Washington, DC to the backcountry wilderness areas in my district in Arkansas, our national parks and public lands can and should be places of healing and comfort for our veterans.

Last year, I was proud to co-lead the bipartisan Alexander Lofgren Veterans in Parks Act, or the VIP Act, alongside Representative Miller-Meeke, to provide free lifetime passes to our public lands to our veterans and Gold Star families. The Military and Veterans in Parks Act, or the MVP Act, is a continuation of our bipartisan efforts to truly unleash the full outdoor recreation potential of the public lands our military service members and veterans fought so hard to defend.

When I became Chairman of the Natural Resources Committee earlier this year, I laid out a vision for our public lands with my Republican colleagues that was focused on increasing access. And while I know that increasing access for our veterans, military service members, and individuals with disabilities are goals that

have been talked about and idealized for a long time, it is now time to turn that talk into action, and that is exactly what Representative Kiggans is doing here today by leading the MVP Act.

As a former Navy helicopter pilot, I know that she understands how difficult it can be for our country's veterans to return to civilian life, and the importance that time outdoors can have towards easing that transition. The MVP Act sets a new bar for what it means to truly have access to our national parks and public lands, creating tangible and meaningful improvements in the lives of veterans.

It would create new, adaptive trails and recreation opportunities such as hiking, camping, skiing, and kayaking in each region managed by the BLM, the Forest Service, and the Park Service. With minor improvements to existing infrastructure, we can turn inaccessible recreation into accessible opportunities for wounded warriors and individuals with disabilities broadly.

The bill would also streamline the permitting and fee process for veterans groups to host activities and events on Federal lands, and provide assistance to organize and host more of these events.

As you can see in the pictures behind me, these events reach thousands of veterans annually. This legislation would help more groups organize events so that veterans can become more connected to nature and to each other. This is critical, as research has proven time and time again that nature can be one of the most effective treatments for veterans suffering from physical or psychological injuries from the battlefield.

The MVP Act, like the GROW Act, would also promote career and volunteer opportunities for our veterans. I would like to acknowledge Representative Levin and Representative Wittman's work on the GROW Act, which is a win-win for both our veterans and Federal land managers.

I would like to also recognize the efforts of my colleague from Arizona, Representative Crane, to help veterans in his community. A veteran himself, the legislation he has before us today would help turn under-utilized Forest Service land and buildings into a veterans' retreat in Young, Arizona.

Our nation's service members, veterans, and Gold Star families, they really are our MVPs, and they should be entitled to fully experience the public lands they or their fallen family members put their lives on the line to defend. The brave men and women in our nation's Armed Forces are the best that our nation has to offer, and they deserve access to the best recreation opportunities our nation's Federal lands have to offer.

Again, I would like to thank the witnesses for joining us today, particularly those who are veterans themselves. I look forward to hearing your testimony, although I will have to leave before I get to hear all your testimony. But we do have written copies, and I thank you.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We will now move on to our first panel, which consists of Members who are sponsoring bills today.

First of all, I would like to recognize Representative Kiggans in regards to the MVP Act.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. JEN KIGGANS, A REPRESENTATIVE
IN CONGRESS FROM THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA**

Mrs. KIGGANS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak in support of the Military and Veterans in Parks Act, nicknamed the MVP Act after the invaluable role our service members play in protecting our great nation.

As the wife of a veteran, the mother of future veterans, and a Navy veteran myself, I have a unique understanding of the issues plaguing this important population. As a geriatric nurse practitioner who spent years caring for our greatest generation, I have also seen the effects of not just physical injuries sustained on the battlefield, but combat-related emotional trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, and countless other psychological wounds. These lasting scars make the already difficult transition back to civilian life that much harder for our veterans.

Almost two-thirds of all post-9/11 veterans are experiencing mental health issues, and 25 percent of all veterans have a service-related disability. We should be going above and beyond to give these heroes every opportunity to reintegrate into civil society.

Between the beach and the bay, southeast Virginia is home to some of the most beautiful natural resources in the country. Residents and visitors alike enjoy hunting, fishing, hiking, kayaking, camping, and countless other forms of outdoor recreation, often on one of the many national wildlife refuges we have. The MVP Act ensures that these recreation opportunities are available to our military service members, veterans, and Gold Star families.

As a primary care provider, I know the connection between outdoor recreation, exercise, and positive mental health outcomes cannot be denied. This important bill seeks to capitalize on these proven benefits to help our most vulnerable veterans. Research consistently demonstrates that spending time in nature can reduce stress, alleviate symptoms of anxiety and depression, and enhance overall psychological and well-being.

For our veterans who suffer from both physical and invisible wounds of war, these benefits are particularly critical. That is why it is incredibly frustrating to me that accessibility remains a significant obstacle for disabled veterans in our national parks and recreation sites. Steep trails, inaccessible facilities, and inadequate accommodations limit the ability of veterans with disabilities to fully enjoy all the fantastic recreation opportunities our Federal lands have to offer.

The MVP Act directs the Forest Service, BLM, and the National Park Service to each develop adaptive trails and campgrounds in the regions they manage, as well as accessible hunting, fishing, and kayaking opportunities.

I cannot stress enough how important it is that we invest in infrastructure and initiatives that make our parks more accessible to those with disabilities, especially our veterans. This includes the construction of wheelchair-accessible trails, ramps, and facilities, as well as transportation options within parks, ensuring that disabled individuals have convenient access to all areas.

Though my time in Congress has been short, I have made it my mission since Day 1 to advocate for the mental health of our

service members and veterans. This goal impacts everything I do here in Washington, admittedly, most of all in the Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committees. But Virginia's 2nd District is home to more veterans than almost any other in the country, as well as some of the nation's most beautiful natural resources. Therefore, it is a great honor to be advocating for the MVP Act before this Committee today.

These brave men and women have dedicated their lives to the service of our nation, defending our freedoms, and protecting our way of life. They have displayed extraordinary courage, resilience, and unwavering commitment to our country. It is our duty to ensure they receive the support and opportunities they deserve, even after their service has concluded. I hope my colleagues recognize the great need for the MVP Act, and I urge your support.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Representative Kiggans. I now recognize Representative Owens for 5 minutes on H.R. 2468.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. BURGESS OWENS, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF UTAH**

Mr. OWENS. Thank you, Chairman Tiffany and Ranking Member Levin, for the opportunity to testify on behalf of my bill, H.R. 2468, the Mountain View Corridor Completion Act.

I was pleased to introduce this legislation earlier this year with the support of Congressman John Curtis, a member of this Committee. Both Congressman Curtis and I represent some of the fastest-growing counties in the fastest-growing state in the nation. The transportation infrastructure needed to support this growing population is under immense stress. Fortunately, Utah is up for the challenge.

To add to our challenging, tremendous growth is the added factor of over two-thirds of the state of Utah being owned or controlled by different Federal Government agencies. Connecting communities over and across some of these federally owned parcels creates a unique difficulty, which often requires intervention and approval of the U.S. Congress. This bill addresses one of those situations.

The Department of Transportation, UDOT, has been anticipating our population growth for decades, and began work over 15 years ago on a project called the Mountain View Corridor. The corridor connects eastern Utah County and southwestern Salt Lake County, transecting the military training installation of Camp Williams. Camp Williams is a 24,000-acre training area managed by the U.S. Army National Guard.

This existing road, the Mountain View Corridor, serves as the only public access to the headquarters area of the Utah National Guard complex, as well as access to the National Security Agency, NSA, Data Center. Two-thirds of the Mountain View Corridor project has already been completed, and the final third would require an acquisition by UDOT of three separate irregular parcels of land totaling 36 acres. This is Federal land technically owned by the Bureau of Land Management.

Because these parcels are located inside the existing boundaries of an active military reservation created in 1914 by President Woodrow Wilson's executive order, the BLM does not actively

manage these parcels. They are instead managed by the U.S. Army National Guard, which does not use this land, nor has any plans to do so in the future. This bill is needed because BLM lacks authority to transfer the land presently under the control of the U.S. military.

The Utah National Guard is in full support of the Mountain View Corridor project, and has worked extensively with UDOT, as well as BLM, on the project's proper alignment.

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, I urge this Committee to move quickly to approve this legislation.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you very much, Representative Owens. Next, I recognize Representative Crane for 5 minutes on H.R. 1829.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. ELIJAH CRANE, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ARIZONA

Mr. CRANE. Thank you, Chairman Tiffany, for the opportunity to be here today. Thank you for inviting me to participate in today's hearing and speak in support of my bill.

I also want to thank Congressman Paul Gosar for his leadership in this effort, and I also want to thank Senators Kelly and Sinema from Arizona for co-sponsoring this legislation.

This piece of legislation was the first bill I introduced, and is a testament to veterans in Arizona. Specifically, my bill would enable Gila County, Arizona to build a veterans center on 232 acres in Young, Arizona. As a former Navy Seal, I know the importance of providing this resource cannot be understated.

This legislation will serve our state and its heroes well. The Veterans Center would protect and maintain the rich history of the property, while providing family housing, meeting and activity spaces, resource rooms, veteran ceremonial grounds, and outdoor recreation. It would be the first of its kind in northern Arizona, providing resources and support to primarily rural veterans and their families.

Veterans in northern Arizona deserve a space to heal and reconnect with their families after putting their lives on the line for the peace and freedom of all Americans. I am happy that I can be a part of this hearing today, and will get a chance later to hear from my friend, Woody Cline, who has been very instrumental in raising awareness and support of this project.

I encourage you all to support this legislation. Thank you.

I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Representative Crane. I would like to recognize our Ranking Member today, Representative Levin, for 5 minutes on H.R. 1786.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. MIKE LEVIN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Mr. LEVIN. Thank you very much, Chairman Tiffany, for holding this legislative hearing, and particularly for hearing my legislation, the Get Rewarding Outdoor Work for our Veterans, or GROW Act. I was proud to introduce this bipartisan bill with my colleague, Rob Wittman of Virginia, to employ more veterans in outdoor jobs at the Department of the Interior.

The Federal Government has a duty to ensure veterans returning to civilian life can obtain jobs that advance their skill sets and support their families. The Department of the Interior, in particular, is well positioned to provide rewarding career opportunities that allow veterans to get outside and reap the benefits of being in nature for their mental and physical health.

Under my bill, the Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Service and Department of Veterans Affairs will establish guidelines containing best practices for Federal agencies to employ transitioning veterans. These guidelines will incorporate lessons learned from VA's Warrior Training Advancement Course, or WARTAC, an established program with a proven track record in training and employing service members transitioning from the military. DOI will use those best practices to establish a 2-year pilot program to employ veterans in positions relating to conservation and resource management, and will report back to Congress.

I place a great importance on conserving our Federal lands and waters, and I can think of no better group of individuals to continue their service by protecting our natural treasures than our veterans. Not only will the GROW Act employ veterans at DOI and give them the tools to succeed, I believe it will also create a veteran hiring model for all Federal agencies in the future. It is a win for the Federal workforce, it is a win for the environment, a win for veterans, and a win for our country.

The bill has also been referred to my other committee, the House Veterans Affairs Committee, where it has received a hearing and a markup in the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee. I look forward to receiving feedback from our witnesses today on how we can strengthen the portions of this proposal under the Natural Resources Committee's jurisdiction so that we can move it forward.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Representative Levin. We will now move on to our second panel.

Let me remind the witnesses that under Committee Rules, you must limit your oral statements to 5 minutes, but your entire statement will appear in the hearing record.

To begin your testimony, press the "on" button on the microphone.

We use timing lights. When you begin, the light will turn green. At the end of 5 minutes, the light will turn red, and I will ask you to please complete your statement.

I would now like to introduce Mr. Frank Lands, the Deputy Director for Operations at the National Park Service, to testify for 5 minutes.

Mr. Lands, you are recognized.

STATEMENT OF FRANK LANDS, DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR OPERATIONS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. LANDS. Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Levin, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on two items on today's agenda. I would like to submit our full statement for the record and summarize the Department's views.

In addition, the Bureau of Land Management has submitted a statement for the record on a third bill, H.R. 2468, the Mountain View Corridor Completion Act. The Bureau would be happy to respond in writing to any questions on that bill.

The National Park Service strongly supports the goals of H.R. 1786, the Get Rewarding Outdoor Work for our Veterans Act, or the GROW Act, facilitating greater opportunities for employing veterans in conservation and resource management work.

The Department recognizes the immense pool of talent represented in our nation's veterans, and we have a strong record of employing veterans and their spouses. Currently, more than 12,000 of the Department's workforce is made up of veterans. A wide range of opportunities in natural and cultural resource conservation, law enforcement, maintenance, information technology, and administration align particularly well with the experiences and interests of many of our military's veterans.

As a former veteran myself, with over 20 years of experience working for the military prior to joining the National Park Service in 2021, I can personally attest to the excellent fit and opportunity the National Park Service offers the military, and the military offers the National Park Service.

We also participate in innovative programs such as the Traditional Trades Advancement and the Skill Bridge programs, which offer opportunities to gain experience working in the resource management and conservation field.

The pilot program envisioned in H.R. 1786 has the potential to add to the range of job opportunities that veterans have currently within the Department. However, we are concerned about the timelines contained in the bill. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the sponsors and the Committee on amendments to address our concerns.

On the discussion draft titled the Military and Veterans in Parks Act, or MVP Act, the Department strongly supports the goals of the discussion draft to promote and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities for our active service members and veterans, and our full statement provides preliminary views on the draft.

Of note, the discussion draft addresses adaptive trails and opportunities for military service members and veterans. The Department is committed to meeting standards for accessible trails. However, the discussion uses the term "adaptive trails," which is not defined in the current authorities.

It also identifies a number of requirements that would entail significant time, effort, and resources to meet if not brought into alignment with our other accessibility authorities.

The Department works closely with the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs as directed in the discussion draft, and is committed to providing public information regarding its remarkable variety of recreation programs and resources.

We note that the Director of the National Park Service currently co-chairs, with the VA, the Task Force on Outdoor Recreation for Veterans.

The Department notes that exempting active duty members and their dependent veterans and Gold Star families from Federal

recreation fees, as proposed, could impact our ability to maintain and operate local recreation facilities.

Additionally, the allocated use exemption may have significant impacts to the recreational experiences of other public land users.

The discussion draft contains several other provisions that appear to be similar to programs already in place. For example, the National Park Service has numerous partnerships with entities with experience in outdoor-related volunteer and wellness programs for Armed Forces and veterans.

We also look forward to giving further consideration to how the discussion draft's requirements would fit into our existing programs.

The Department would like to have the opportunity to work with the sponsor and Committee to better understand the intent of some of the provisions, and to provide comments and recommended amendments as the draft is introduced.

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Levin, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Lands follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF FRANK LANDS, DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR OPERATIONS,
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
ON H.R. 1786 AND DISCUSSION DRAFT, H.R. _____, "MILITARY AND VETERANS IN
PARKS (MVP) ACT"

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee thank you for the opportunity to provide the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 1786, the Get Rewarding Outdoor Work for our Veterans Act (GROW Act), and a discussion draft of H.R. _____, the Military and Veterans in Parks Act (MVP Act).

The Department strongly supports promoting and enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities for active service members and veterans on recreational lands under the Department's jurisdiction, and facilitating opportunities for the hiring and promoting of veterans within the Department's workforce, goals of both H.R. 1786 and the discussion draft of the MVP Act.

The Department employs almost 12,000 veterans Department-wide. Within the NPS, over fifteen percent of the National Park Service's (NPS) workforce are veterans. These 3,300 veterans work in a wide range of natural and cultural resource roles, including law enforcement, maintenance, information technology, and administration, and, importantly, include both the NPS Director and the NPS Deputy Director for Operations.

H.R. 1786, Get Rewarding Outdoor Work for our Veterans Act (GROW Act)

The Department strongly supports the goal of H.R. 1786 of facilitating greater opportunities for employing veterans in conservation and resource management work. We recognize the immense pool of talent represented in our nation's veterans and, along with other Federal agencies, we take seriously our commitment to hiring and promoting veterans. We would like to work with the sponsor and the Committee on amendments to address the concerns described in this statement.

Our comments are limited to section 3(b) of H.R. 1786. We defer to the Department of Veterans Affairs for views on section 2, which requires a report on the Warrior Training Advancement Course, and to the Department of Labor on section 3(a), which requires the establishment of guidelines containing best practices for Federal agencies that carry out programs to employ veterans transitioning from service in the Armed Forces.

Section 3(b) would require the Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with the Assistant Secretary of Labor for Veterans' Employment and Training and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, to establish a pilot program to hire veterans in conservation and resource management positions within the Department of the Interior. It would require an initial briefing to Congressional committees no later than 60 days after enactment on how the pilot program will be implemented and

legislative recommendations for improvement. It would further require a second briefing to Congressional committees within one year of the start of the pilot program on implementation progress, and the issuance of a final written report providing data on the pilot program to those same Congressional committees within 30 days of the pilot's completion.

The NPS has had a strong record of employing veterans and their spouses, including robust use of applicable special hiring authorities such as the Veterans Recruitment Appointment authority, the 30% or More Disabled Veteran authority, Spouse Preference, and the authorities under the Veterans Employment Opportunities Act of 1998. As noted above, more than 3,300 veterans are employed by the NPS, comprising over fifteen percent of the NPS workforce.

In addition to directly hiring veterans into federal positions, the NPS also participates in innovative programs, such as the Traditional Trades Advancement Program (TTAP) and SkillBridge, which provide job skills and experiences that prepare veterans for post-military careers in the Federal government or elsewhere in the public or private sectors. The TTAP is a national, pre-apprenticeship-style internship program administered by the NPS Historic Preservation Training Center. TTAP introduces youth and veterans to skills and careers in the historic trades, such as carpentry and masonry, at NPS sites nationwide through an earn-as-you-learn experience. With SkillBridge, the NPS partners with the Department of Defense to allow active service members to intern or apprentice in NPS sites as Volunteers-in-Parks, where they can receive training and gain valuable civilian work experience in a variety of career fields before they transition out of military service.

Like the NPS, both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) have robust programs to employ veterans and their spouses. The FWS employs over 1,500 veterans, comprising over sixteen percent of the agency's workforce. Through a new entry-level hiring initiative, the FWS is directly recruiting veterans and others eligible for special hiring authorities into positions in human resources, finance, information technology, law enforcement, biological fields, and other administrative areas. The FWS has also hosted and hired veterans participating in vocational training through the Veteran Readiness and Employment program. By advancing these initiatives and utilizing our existing special hiring authorities, the FWS is able to offer a broad range of career opportunities to our nation's veterans.

The BLM offers a number of hiring programs that benefit veterans, transitioning service members and their families. Veterans may be given preference during the hiring process when applying for positions, and depending on eligibility, may also qualify for special hiring authorities utilized through the Department. Over the past several years, for example, the BLM has developed Wildland Firefighting Crews specifically designed to employ military Veterans matching our veterans' skills with wildland firefighting. Many of the skills veterans learned in the military translate to wildland firefighting, such as teamwork; decisive leadership; risk mitigation and management; logistics and emergency medicine. BLM veteran crews provide job and career avenues for military veterans, allowing them to find post-military careers that provide a sense of serving and working within a team setting.

As noted above, the Department supports the bill's overall goal of facilitating greater opportunities for veteran employment. The pilot program envisioned by H.R. 1786 has the potential to add to the range of job opportunities that veterans have currently within the Department. However, we are concerned that the timelines contained in the bill for briefing Congressional committees, implementing the pilot program, and the issuing a written report would not be sufficient to consult with our interagency partners at the Departments of Labor and Veterans Affairs, design an effective and evidence-based pilot program, and implement the pilot for a sufficient length of time from which to gather data to inform our recommendations and reporting. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the sponsor and the Committee on amendments to address these concerns.

Discussion Draft of H.R. ____, Military and Veterans in Parks Act (MVP Act)

The Department strongly supports the goals of the discussion draft titled the "Military and Veterans in Parks Act" or "MVP Act" to promote and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities for active service members and veterans on recreational lands under the Department's jurisdiction, and we appreciate that the discussion draft is an effort to expand those opportunities. The Department is providing preliminary views on this discussion draft and looks forward to providing additional comments on this discussion draft and working with the Committee as this bill is introduced.

Section 2 of the discussion draft addresses adaptive trails and opportunities for military service members and veterans. Efforts to provide more accessible recreational and trail opportunities to the public not only help military service members and veterans but all people with accessibility issues. The Department is committed to meeting standards for accessible trails when constructing new or modifying existing trails. The discussion draft uses the term, “adaptive trails” which is not defined in current authorities, and also identifies a number of requirements that would require significant time, effort and resources to meet if not brought into alignment with the other authorities already in use.

Section 3 of the discussion draft provides direction for the Department to work with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense to develop education and public awareness materials to members of the Armed Forces and veterans. The Department currently works closely with these agencies, and the Director of the NPS currently co-chairs with the VA the Task Force on Outdoor Recreation for Veterans. The Department agrees with the importance of outdoor recreation and is committed to providing public information regarding its remarkable variety of recreational programs and resources across its bureaus.

Section 4 of the discussion draft would amend the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) by exempting all current and former military members from paying recreation fees. Currently, we offer no-cost annual passes to active-duty military members and their dependents, and no-cost lifetime passes to veterans and members of Gold Star Families. The annual and lifetime passes, however, do not cover the full cost of expanded amenity recreation fees or special recreation permit fees. This section would direct that in addition to no-cost entrance passes, active-duty members and their dependents, veterans, and Gold Star Families would also be exempt from standard amenity recreation fees, expanded amenity recreation fees, and special recreation permit fees. It also provides for streamlining special recreation permits to veterans organizations, and exempting these organizations from allocations of visitor use days. The Department notes that the exemption from fees has the potential to have a financial impact to federal agency fee collections, in turn impacting our ability to use those funds to maintain and operate local recreation facilities. Additionally, other portions of Section 4, such as the allocated use exemption, may have significant impacts to the recreational experiences of other public land users.

Section 5 of the discussion draft requires the Department to seek to enter into partnerships or agreements with State, Tribal, local or private entities with expertise in outdoor-related volunteer and wellness programs for members of the Armed Forces or veterans. Currently, the NPS Submerged Resources Centers (SRC) Wounded Veterans in Parks (WVIP) program engages wounded veterans in underwater scientific and resource management mission-based opportunities that provide therapeutic and rehabilitative benefits contributing to their physical and emotional health. Since 2017 the NPS SRC WVIP program has conducted 15 projects working with 5 different veteran service organizations in 6 different NPS units. Section 6 directs the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to develop and make public a strategy to increase visits to Federal recreational lands by members of the Armed Forces, veterans and Gold Star Families. We look forward to giving further consideration to how these requirements would fit with the existing programs we have for these groups.

Section 7 of the discussion draft revises FLREA to add veterans organizations to the membership of Recreation Resource Advisory Committees (RACs). The Department supports the concept of adding representation from military service members and veterans to Recreation RACs. The BLM notes, however, many RACs currently have difficulty getting and keeping enough members for a quorum. This could make it harder, especially if a location does not have a local or even regional veterans organization.

Section 8 of the discussion draft addresses providing career and volunteer opportunities for veterans in positions related to the management of Federal Recreational lands. As noted above, the Department appreciates that the experience and interests of many military veterans align well with the wide range of opportunities in natural and cultural resource lands management within the Department. We look forward to working with Congress to ensure that this section is not duplicative of current programs and authorities focused on the recruitment, training and hiring of veterans.

Finally, Section 9 of the discussion draft provides definitions that the Department is currently reviewing, and may have additional comments to ensure clarity in these definitions. The Department would like to have the opportunity to work with the sponsor and the Committee to better understand the intent of some of the provisions and to provide additional comments and recommended amendments.

Chairman Tiffany, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO MR. FRANK LANDS, DEPUTY DIRECTOR
FOR OPERATIONS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Mr. Lands did not submit responses to the Committee by the appropriate deadline for inclusion in the printed record.

Questions Submitted by Representative Owens

Question 1. As my staff worked with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to prepare the map for the conveyance in H.R. 2468, the Mountain View Corridor Completion Act, we received feedback from the BLM to expand the area conveyed to the State of Utah. Is the BLM interested in conveying more land in the area? How would a conveyance of this land ease the management burden on the agency?

Mr. TIFFANY. Yes, thank you, Mr. Lands. I now recognize Ms. Jacqueline Emanuel, the Associate Deputy Chief for the National Forest Service.

Ms. Emanuel, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF JACQUELINE EMANUEL, ASSOCIATE DEPUTY CHIEF, NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM, U.S. FOREST SERVICE, WASHINGTON, DC

Ms. EMANUEL. Good morning, Chairman Tiffany and Ranking Member Levin. My name is Jacqueline Emanuel, and I am Associate Deputy Chief of the National Forest System representing the U.S. Forest Service.

In my portfolio, I oversee recreation, heritage, and volunteer resources, engineering, the Great American Outdoors Act, and the wilderness and wild and scenic rivers, business services, and ecosystem management coordination. My background includes leading the National Partnership Office and in an earlier part of my career I stood up the fee demonstration program, which predates the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, which has evolved and grown since that time, and is an important part of our discussion today.

I am pleased to be here before you today to discuss the U.S. Department of Agriculture's view on two important pieces of legislation, both of which focus on serving veterans, active duty military, and Gold Star families.

The first piece of legislation is H.R. 1829, a bill to convey lands and facilities from the Forest Service to Gila County, Arizona so that the county can build a resort for veterans. The Department supports H.R. 1829 as a straightforward and common-sense solution to provide Gila County, Arizona with a facility that they can use for veterans to enjoy our public lands.

The Department would like to work with the Committee and the sponsor on some technical changes that address issues around implementing section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and related to a reversionary clause in the bill.

The second piece of legislation is titled the Military and Veterans in Parks Act, and that draft bill provides tangible benefits to

recognize our veterans, active duty military, and Gold Star families, building on the important work of the Alexander Lofgren Veterans and Parks Act.

Additionally, the proposal would make our Federal recreation lands more accessible to all. The Department strongly supports the intent of the Military and Veterans in Parks Act.

Our comments on this bill pertain only to the Forest Service's ability to efficiently and effectively implement the Act. The USDA defers to the U.S. Department of the Interior on the effects of this bill on DOI bureaus and Federal lands under its jurisdiction.

This draft bill dramatically reduces the fees that veterans, Gold Star families, and members of the armed services and their dependents would pay when visiting and enjoying National Forest System land. This includes most types of recreation and special recreation use fees.

Americans, and especially veterans, are finding connections to national forests and grasslands in greater numbers than ever before. This surge in visitation is helping us understand how to better serve and provide a variety of outdoor experiences to accommodate different abilities and needs across the recreation opportunity spectrum. Our national forests and grasslands belong to all Americans, and our mission is to provide for sustainable, high-quality opportunities to all visitors from any background or ability.

The goals of the Military and Veterans in Parks Act aligns with the agency's reimagined recreation effort, which engages a broad spectrum of stakeholders to advance the agency's outdoor recreation agenda. We want to work with the Committee to manage through the financial and programmatic impacts of the bill, and to ensure any unintended consequences are examined as we strive to apply our policies equally across the public.

We stand at the ready to work with the Committee on the development of this legislation.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement, and I would be happy to answer any questions you have.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Emanuel follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JACQUELINE EMANUEL, ASSOCIATE DEPUTY CHIEF,
NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOREST SERVICE
ON H.R. 1829 AND DISCUSSION DRAFT, H.R. _____, "MILITARY AND VETERANS IN
PARKS (MVP) ACT"

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service, regarding H.R. 1829, and H.R. _____, the "Military and Veterans in Parks Act" ("MVP Act").

H.R. 1829

H.R. 1829 would authorize a land conveyance between the USDA Forest Service, Tonto National Forest and Gila County, Arizona. The conveyance would be required if requested within 180 days after enactment of the bill. The bill would establish the terms for the conveyance as well as conditions for reversion of the conveyance.

The Tonto National Forest is currently using a portion of the administrative site that consists of a fire warehouse, helipads, and a fenced parking/storage area as depicted on the legislative map as "USFS Area." The remainder of the administrative site depicted as "Gila County Area" is currently under a special use permit as a term lease and the Tonto National Forest does not have existing plans to use it in the future. Transferring the site should not impact the Forest's administrative

or firefighting capacity, and executing the transfer is unlikely to impede the Forest and the Agency's ability to serve the public.

This bill would include several provisions related to the transfer. The action to initiate the transfer is clearly described, and the parcel for transfer is identified through a legislative map. All of the costs of conveyance are to be borne by the recipient of the transfer, and the agency is not required to provide a covenant or warranty with respect to environmental conditions under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980. Finally, the interest of the public and government are protected through the reversion clause; should the land cease to be used for the purpose identified in the legislation, the ownership reverts back to the USDA Forest Service.

The USDA supports H.R. 1829, as a straightforward and commonsense solution to provide Gila County Arizona with a facility that they can use to provide services to veterans, but would like to work with the committee to ensure historic resources are protected as the agency complies with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and to provide the Secretary with some oversight authority should the reversionary clause be utilized and the parcel to return to federal ownership.

H.R. ____, Military and Veterans in Parks (MVP) Act

USDA strongly supports the goals of the draft bill titled the Military and Veterans in Parks (MVP) Act to promote and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities for members of the Armed Forces and veterans on Federal recreational lands. The concepts contained in this discussion draft would provide tangible ways to recognize the service and sacrifice that this discussion draft is designed to honor. USDA would like to work with the discussion draft sponsor and Subcommittee on the MVP Act in addressing technical concerns noted in this testimony to ensure success in implementation of this discussion draft.

We are deeply committed to connecting all Americans to the outdoors, and we welcome this opportunity to make Federal lands even more accessible. The goals of this discussion draft are consistent with the Forest Service's engagement with stakeholders this summer in an endeavor called "Reimagine Recreation," which addresses equity and accessibility issues related to recreation opportunities on Forest Service-managed lands. Our comments on this discussion draft pertain to its effect on the Forest Service, including management of National Forest System lands. USDA defers to the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) on the effects of this discussion draft on DOI bureaus and the Federal lands under their jurisdiction.

Section 2(a) of the discussion draft would require the Secretary of Agriculture to select a location in each Forest Service region for at least one adaptive trail, defined as a continuous, land-based route with characteristics that allow access for individuals with physical disabilities. The discussion draft would place similar requirements on the Secretary of the Interior. Locations for adaptive trails would have to be identified no later than one year from the date of enactment and would have to be completed within five years of enactment, in consultation and coordination with stakeholders. Section 2(b) would require the Secretaries to identify and develop adaptive recreation opportunities, which could include improving access to existing recreational facilities such as campgrounds and target ranges or activities such as hunting, skiing, rock climbing, boating, and biking. Section 2(c) would authorize the Secretaries to enter into agreements, contracts, or partnerships to make adaptive rental equipment available on Federal recreational lands. Section 2 would also add inventory and reporting requirements.

Pursuant to national guidelines adopted through public notice and comment, the Forest Service provides accessible opportunities on some trails that are designed for hiker/pedestrian use. Other types of trails, such as equestrian or snowmobile trails, are designed for modes of travel that involve non-human-powered locomotion. These types of trails may accommodate people with disabilities. In addition, pursuant to national guidelines adopted through public notice and comment, the Forest Service integrates the concept of universal design into developed recreation areas on NFS lands. This approach ensures that developed recreation sites like campgrounds are accessible to all people, including people with disabilities. Some outdoor recreation opportunities, like outfitting and guiding and ski areas, are provided by concessioners, not the Forest Service. For these recreation opportunities, concessioners, rather than the Forest Service, are responsible for addressing accessibility. Concessioners are required to comply with applicable accessibility requirements. The Forest Service works with holders of ski area permits to promote accessibility at ski areas. The Forest Service would like to work with the discussion draft sponsor and Subcommittee to ensure that requirements to promote rental of adaptive recreation equipment do not conflict with concession operations on National Forest System lands. We would also suggest language regarding partnerships and other

opportunities for making adaptive equipment available for use at no cost, rather than for rent, to address equity issues.

Section 3 of the discussion draft would require each Secretary concerned to coordinate with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the Secretary of Defense to develop educational and public awareness materials to disseminate to members of the Armed Forces and veterans regarding recreation opportunities on Federal lands that are free of charge, volunteer opportunities, availability and location of trails for users of all abilities, adaptive equipment assistance, health benefits of outdoor recreation, and programs and jobs focused on continuing national service such as the Public Land Corps, AmeriCorps, and conservation corps programs.

The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA), enacted in 2004, authorizes the Forest Service, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Bureau of Reclamation to collect and retain recreation fees and requires most of the recreation fee revenues to be spent at the sites where they are collected to enhance the visitor experience and directly benefit visitors that use those sites. Section 4 of the discussion draft would exempt Veterans, Gold Star Families, and Members of the Armed Forces and their dependents from any type of recreation fees, including standard amenity recreation fees, expanded amenity recreation fees, and special recreation permit fees. This provision would apply to all noncommercial recreation fees at all Forest Service-operated sites, as well as to commercial special recreation permit fees for recreation events and outfitting and guiding. Fees at concessioner-operated federally owned recreation sites would remain unchanged by this discussion draft because FLREA does not apply to recreation use fees charged by concessioners under other authorities. Aspects of this section would further advance the Alexander Lofgren Veterans in Parks Act, which President Biden signed into law in 2021 (Pub. L. No. 117-81, Sec. 641), by giving members of the Armed Forces and veterans free passes that are honored at thousands of Federal recreation sites nation-wide.

Additionally, Section 4 of the discussion draft would require the Secretaries to issue a special recreation permit to veterans organizations in areas where there is no limited entry permit system and capacity is available; would require the Secretaries to waive the requirement for a special recreation permit for veterans organizations based on a finding of nominal effects; and would preclude the Secretaries from requiring a permit or reservation for a picnic area if the public is not required to obtain a permit or reservation for the area. Section 4 also would provide that service days allocated to outfitters and guides would not be applied to recreation events conducted by veterans' organizations in the area.

The goals of Section 4 generally align with USDA's Equity Action Plan, which promotes access to recreation and outdoor experiences by underserved communities. However, it is important to consider a balanced approach and the impact of recreation fee waivers for all recreation opportunities on Federal land management agencies' ability to offer the high-quality recreation services the public has come to expect. On the one hand, the Agency is proud to waive standard amenity recreation fees to veterans and members of Gold Star families pursuant to current law. On the other hand, commercial special recreation permits authorize business opportunities on Federal lands and are appropriately subject to a special recreation permit fee. The Forest Service relies on recreation fee revenues derived from FLREA for basic operations, to prevent its recreation sites from becoming part of its deferred maintenance backlog, to better manage Federal lands under its jurisdiction, and to respond quickly to changes in visitation levels. There would be financial impacts from the waiver on concessioners' business operations as well that should be considered. Special use permit fee waivers could result in inability to provide appropriate staffing to respond to visitor needs, particularly at units with large active duty or veteran populations, potentially resulting in unintended outcomes. USDA would like to work with the discussion draft sponsor and Subcommittee on technical improvements and clarifications to Section 4 of the discussion draft as there could be significant financial impacts on commercial recreation service providers. It would be important to minimize any real or perceived differences in treatment from other permitted user groups, including those aimed at supporting other populations with vocational or rehabilitative needs.

Section 5 of the MVP Act would seek to promote military and veteran outdoor recreation through partnerships, including authority to provide financial and technical assistance. Section 6 of the discussion draft would require the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior jointly to develop a strategy within one year of enactment to increase visits to Federal recreational lands by members of the Armed Forces, veterans, and Gold Star Families.

Section 7 of the discussion draft would require representation for veteran organizations on Recreation Resource Advisory Committees (RRACs). USDA questions the

need for Section 7 given that RRACs are focused on making recommendations about proposed recreation fees and Section 4 would exempt veterans from paying those fees.

Section 8 would encourage the hiring of veterans in all positions related to management of Federal lands and would require the Secretary concerned to establish a new program or expand an existing program to recruit, train, and accept members of the Armed Forces and veterans as volunteers on Federal recreational lands. USDA supports the intent of these provisions as they would provide an opportunity to create a new program, in collaboration with the Department of Defense, for targeting outreach to service members and veterans as well as forging new paths to hiring in Federal land management agencies. We would be interested in discussing changes to the Public Land Corp Act with the sponsor and Subcommittee to advance these pathways.

Conclusion

USDA strongly supports the goals of the discussion draft to benefit active-duty military personnel and their families as well as veterans. We do, however, have concerns about financial and programmatic impacts of the discussion draft. This discussion draft would not be revenue-neutral compared to existing statutory authority, and we would like to work with the bill sponsor and Subcommittee to minimize revenue impacts. Additionally, we would like to work with the discussion draft sponsor, the Subcommittee, and our partner land management agencies regarding improvements to the discussion draft that could aid the agencies in administering affected programs more efficiently and equitably. Finally, FLREA is not permanent, and if this discussion draft were enacted, elements of its implementation could be affected if FLREA expired. The Administration's FY 2024 budget proposes appropriations language to extend the authorization of FLREA through 2025.

That concludes my testimony, Mr. Chairman. I would be happy to answer any questions you or the other members have for me.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Ms. Emanuel. I am now going to recognize Members for 5 minutes for questions.

Representative Stauber, you have 5 minutes.

Mr. STAUBER. Mr. Chair, thank you for holding this meeting. I want to thank you for convening this hearing today, as well as for the bills' sponsors for putting forth these important pieces of legislation.

We owe a debt of gratitude to the men and women who wear the cloth of this country, along with the families that are forced to sacrifice in their everyday lives to enable their loved ones to serve. One very small step that we can take to thank these heroes is ensuring that they have access to our public and Federal lands, and are able to enjoy the wonderful benefits these lands have to offer. That is why I am happy to support a number of the bills before us today.

The district that I represent includes significant public lands such as the Superior National Forest, the Chippewa National Forest, Voyageurs National Park, and Grand Portage National Park. The public lands in Minnesota play such an important role in enabling us to live our way of life.

Unfortunately, the Federal Government and the bureaucracy that exert control over public lands often do not make it easy for my constituents to enjoy these resources. Often out-of-touch bureaucrats living in Washington push administrative policies that hinder our access.

Time and time again, I have urged our colleagues at the Forest Service, the National Park Service, and other Federal agencies to vigorously engage our local communities rather than simply dictate

to them from Washington. Our active duty service members, veterans, and their families, particularly, should not face hurdles or difficulties in accessing and enjoying our public lands. We should be keeping these interests in our minds.

It is important that our public lands actually serve the public and the communities where they are located. That is why I am happy to see several of these bills build collaboration with our local communities, allowing the American people closer control and access to our public lands.

I want to thank my colleague from Virginia, Representative Kiggans, for putting forth the Military and Veterans in Parks Act, which would better enable our military and veterans to access our public lands. In particular, I appreciate this legislation's focus on collaboration and partnerships with service member and veterans organizations, as well as state, local, tribal, and private-sector stakeholders.

It is through these partnerships that the National Park Service, the Forest Service, and the Bureau of Land Management can build off the incredible work already being conducted by our constituents in the communities we represent. That includes the work of organizations like Veterans on the Lake in Ely, Minnesota. Veterans on the Lake provides the opportunity for our veterans and their families to enjoy and recreate in the Superior National Forest in northeast Minnesota. Thanks to the work of this organization, hundreds of veterans and their families are able to boat, fish, swim, ski, and snowmobile. Veterans on the Lake ensures that all individuals, no matter their physical abilities, are able to participate in these activities.

I am hopeful that Representative Kiggans' legislation will help enable and replicate programs and initiatives like Veterans on the Lake on public lands across our great nation. Frankly, I believe the role of our Federal agencies is to get out of the way and, instead, partner with these local communities, enable them to provide these services and opportunities.

Our Federal agencies do not need to reinvent the wheel. They can build on the progress that great organizations like Veterans on the Lake in my district already are doing, and I believe Representative Kiggans' proposed legislation is a great opportunity to do just that.

Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields, and now I would like to recognize the Ranking Member, Mr. Levin, for 5 minutes.

Mr. LEVIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Lands, I will start with you. Thank you for your feedback on the GROW Act. I appreciate DOI's commitment to employing veterans and military spouses under current programs, and support for scaling up these efforts through the pilot that we are proposing in the GROW Act.

My office received technical assistance on this bill from your staff in May regarding the timing challenges referenced in your testimony. As we move this bill forward through the legislative process, I would be glad to accept DOI's recommendations to extend the initial briefing deadline to 180 days after enactment, and strike the

requirement for legislative recommendations as part of the initial briefing.

However, I believe it is important to keep the implementation briefing at 12 months after the pilot commences so that Congress receives an update at the pilot's midpoint. Does this sound fair, and do you have any outstanding concerns about that?

Mr. LANDS. Thank you for the question. At this point, I do not have the information to actually provide a yes or no answer on that. But I certainly will take it back to the staff, and we are committed to working with your staff to make sure that we are looking at the appropriate timelines.

Mr. LEVIN. Thank you. I appreciate that, and we will definitely follow up on that with you and continue the dialogue with you.

Ms. Emanuel, I will turn to you. The GROW Act was originally introduced last Congress by my friend, Conor Lamb, to establish a pilot program to employ veterans at both DOI and at USDA. Conor was kind enough to allow me to take up the mantle on this bill following his retirement—it seems like he is too young to have retired—but his retirement from Congress, and I decided to break it up into two separate proposals, starting with the Department of the Interior.

While the version of this bill that Conor had differs from ours, and the portion dealing with the USDA workforce hasn't been introduced yet, I would be remiss if I didn't take the opportunity to seek feedback from you, since you are here. Do you have any initial thoughts you can share on a potential USDA analogue of the GROW Act?

Ms. EMANUEL. Thank you for that question. While I was invited here to speak on MVP and H.R. 1829, I do know that we would welcome any opportunity we have to work with you on a pilot that employs veterans, so we would be happy to engage with staff and provide technical assistance or testimony on it in the future.

Mr. LEVIN. Fantastic. We will follow up with both of you. We really appreciate your expertise on this as we work to get this right.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Mr. Levin.

Mrs. Peltola, would you like to be recognized for 5 minutes for questioning?

Mrs. PELTOLA. Could you come back to me in just a minute?

Mr. TIFFANY. I certainly can, absolutely.

Mrs. PELTOLA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. TIFFANY. Ms. Emanuel, the Forest Service currently has a maintenance backlog of about \$7.7 billion. Will the conveyance such as the one directed by Representative Crane's legislation help the agency reduce its maintenance backlog?

Ms. EMANUEL. I suppose it is possible that it would help.

We want to ensure that we convey that property in the best condition possible, and take care of the archeological resources that we know exist, and bring those to resolution with it, and we are retaining some of that land for the use of firefighting and other emergency operations. But transferring that land in a good condition is in the best interest of the United States.

Mr. TIFFANY. Would it allow you to focus resources in other areas by doing that?

Ms. EMANUEL. It would.

Mr. TIFFANY. The Forest Service published a research paper that I would like to enter into the record.

Without objection, so ordered.

[The information follows:]

The full paper can be found on the Committee Repository at:

<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II10/20230720/116216/HHRG-118-II10-20230720-SD003.pdf>

Mr. TIFFANY. The paper found that public lands were ideal venues to increase outdoor recreation opportunities for veterans. Despite the importance of our public lands, this research found that efforts to promote veterans recreation among Federal land managers were ad hoc and lacked a cohesive strategy.

Do you believe the MVP Act will help the Forest Service elevate veterans' recreation as a priority nationwide, and enhance the agency's overall strategy for increasing recreational access?

Ms. EMANUEL. I appreciate that question. Absolutely. This promotion of partnerships that specifically can be in service to veterans and their families and active military, and having some structure, focus, and strategy around it will just help us replicate those types of activities that we already know are serving them well across the nation.

So, I really do believe that this is an important part of us reimagining our recreation and joining stakeholders to create those opportunities.

Mr. TIFFANY. Mr. Lands, Quinn Brett, a former National Park Service employee who specialized in outdoor recreation, recently stated in an article that the National Park Service's trails haven't been measured probably since the beginning of time to determine whether they meet accessibility criteria. What is the Park Service currently doing to measure trails to determine whether they are suitable for adaptive recreation, and how could the MVP Act help bolster those efforts?

Mr. LANDS. Sir, right now, across the nation, we have 21,000 miles of trails and a portion of that, obviously, is accessible to disabled and those that have difficulty.

I think, right now, although we do not have a national understanding of what our accessible trails are, we do have good numbers throughout the parks. And each park actually describes on their website what accessible trails are available, and what accessible utilities and facilities are available. I think this Act would help us as an agency to pull that information together, and I think there is benefit to that.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, and I yield and recognize Mrs. Peltola for 5 minutes.

Mrs. PELTOLA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I think you kind of asked this and kind of answered this, but you do have adaptive trails right now in all of our parks, is that correct?

Mr. LANDS. Most of the parks.

Mrs. PELTOLA. Most of the parks.

Mr. LANDS. Most of our parks have accessible trails. Many of the park units that we described before are historic in nature, and therefore would not have the acreage to potentially provide accessible trails. But many of the parks that are more of our natural resources and land base do have accessible trails.

I was just recently at a park in Golden Gate and had the ability to walk around and see how they are providing access not only to veterans and disabled veterans, but also our disabled population.

Mrs. PELTOLA. Just as a follow-up, Mr. Chairman, do you have anything online that helps park-goers see in advance if they have accessibility?

Mr. LANDS. We do. First of all, every park generally has information on accessible trails, and then we also have a website that specifically identifies those parks, and highlights which parks have accessibility trails and other features.

Mrs. PELTOLA. OK, and I just think it is wonderful that your last name is Lands and you are in this field.

[Laughter.]

Mr. LANDS. Thank you, ma'am.

Mrs. PELTOLA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. TIFFANY. Yes, that is a good note. Next, I would like to recognize Ms. Porter for 5 minutes.

Ms. PORTER. Thank you very much.

Mr. Lands, I had a hearing on public lands accessibility about 2 years ago when I was Chair of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations within the Natural Resources Committee. And one of the things that the witnesses said, and I would love if you could comment on this, is that a lot of the design choices and features that we might make to improve accessibility are also things that are consistent with good conservation choices and, generally, more flexible use of parks.

For example, the grade that trails need to be to permit people to use wheelchairs or assistive walking devices on is also the same grade that they recommend to prevent soil erosion, and that some of the things around picnic tables, for example, and making them wheelchair accessible also help people who have kids and bring high chairs to campgrounds.

Can you comment on the sometimes argument that we hear that we have to make a choice between making things accessible and delivering on the mission of conservation of the National Park Service?

Mr. LANDS. Yes, ma'am, I agree with you. Many of the accessibility features that we provided within our trails also meet some of our other requirements, and are designed specifically to do that. And I leave that to the very capable and smart engineers that we have working for the National Park Service, to look at those things that cross-cut against not only making sure that we have accessibility to disabled, but reducing impacts to the environment and also reducing costs and looking for sustainability options.

So, those opportunities do exist. They are out there, and we are working hard to make sure we incorporate those into our national parks.

Ms. PORTER. Ms. Emanuel, would you have anything to add?

Ms. EMANUEL. We also incorporate a universal design in our approach to providing outdoor experiences, and build in accessibility through our landscape architecture that we have professionally nationwide, just as a standard practice.

Ms. PORTER. Yes, because I think one of the things is that there is sort of this understanding of, and I think the poster here really illustrates kind of some of what people think of as disability, which may be people who have severe or very limited or need additional mobility capacity. But we are also talking about parks that are seeing a wider range. People are staying active later in life. We saw many more people with young children begin to use the parks.

So, I think, when we think about making the parks more accessible, we have to recognize that it is something that we actually do for all of us, because all of us at different stages and places in our lives will benefit from these accessibility features. When you lower things for people, for instance, who may use a wheelchair, you also make it possible for the 5-year-old to use that drinking fountain. And as a mom, I appreciated that. And when you have sensory things for people who maybe are visually impaired, those are also things that work well for kids and for learning.

So, I just want to emphasize that I think this bill and this approach is a win for all Americans, and I hope we can approach it from that matter. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentlelady yields. Mr. Crane, do you wish to ask any questions?

OK. Well, thank you for your testimony and answering these questions today. We appreciate it very much, and we will now move on to our third panel. I would like to thank both of the witnesses for their valuable testimony.

While the Clerk resets our witness table, I will remind the witnesses that under Committee Rules, they must limit their oral statements to 5 minutes, but their entire statement will appear in the hearing record.

I would also like to remind our witnesses of the timing lights, which will turn red at the end of your 5-minute statement, and to please remember to turn on your microphone.

As with the second panel, I will allow all witnesses to testify before Member questioning.

Just a note to those that are coming up. We are going to be going to votes soon, but we will get started here, and we will come back if those votes get called before all of you get a chance to give your testimony.

First of all, I am going to introduce the Honorable Woody Cline. He is the District 3 Supervisor for Gila County, Arizona.

Mr. Cline, I hope you are able to get settled in there.

I apologize, Mr. Cline, you have a much more esteemed person to introduce you than myself, and that would be your Representative, Mr. Eli Crane.

Mr. CRANE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Clearly, that is not true, but I appreciate you allowing me to introduce my guest today.

Thank you, Mr. Cline, for appearing today before this Committee, and also for your leadership on this bill.

Mr. Cline was elected as Gila County Supervisor in 2016, and is a fourth-generation Gila County resident who resides in Young, Arizona. He was born in Globe, Arizona, and raised in Young, Arizona, and is the first resident to be elected to the Board of Supervisors.

As a member of the Board of Supervisors, Supervisor Cline also serves on the National Association of Counties, Coalition of Arizona and New Mexico Counties, San Carlos Apache Tribe Partnership Steering Committee, Gila County Board of Health, and the Correctional Officers Retirement Plan Local Board for Gila County Sheriff Office Dispatchers.

Formerly, Woody was the 2016–2018 President of the Gila County Cattle Growers Association, and serves on the Board of Directors for the Arizona Cattle Growers Association. He has spent 19-plus years with the U.S. Forest Service working in fire and range management, and his understanding of public land usage and management is a valuable addition to the Board of Supervisors.

Woody, thank you for leaving your beautiful ranch, and wife Letha, and three daughters to come chat with us today. We really appreciate it, and admire your determination to get this legislation passed.

Mr. TIFFANY. Mr. Cline, you have 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. WOODY CLINE, SUPERVISOR, GILA COUNTY, ARIZONA

Mr. CLINE. Thank you, Mr. Chair and Committee members, and thank you, Representative Crane, for that. That was very nice.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify on H.R. 1829 to ask the Secretary of Agriculture to convey the Pleasant Valley Ranger District Administrative Site to Gila County.

I would like to commend the bill's sponsor, Representative Eli Crane, for championing this bill, it is a very good bill, and for introducing it to legislation, and recognizing the uniqueness of the area and its many outstanding resources that could benefit our veterans.

As Mr. Crane had said, I took office in 2017, at which time I started this project for Gila County. It has been in the works ever since then. We have come through many, many hurdles and obstacles to get to this point, and it is a very well-worth project.

The project consists of 232 acres on this administrative site there in Young. It is surrounded by three sides of private, and the back side by public lands. It is very pretty. It has been an admin site since the early 1900s, and then in most recent years it was combined with another ranger district, in which case all the staff members and people from that site were moved to Payson, Arizona, to the other district to work out of that.

The location is in Young, which is a remote, small town in Arizona in about the center of Gila County, a little more towards the north. There are about 800 to 1,000 full-time residents there. The closest towns to Young, Arizona are Payson, which is 65 miles, and Globe, which is about 70 miles from Young. Very quiet town. Not a lot of activities there, so it really fits for a project like this.

Through the years we have held many meetings on this site, not only with the delegation but also with local governments and town hall meetings, as well. Never once through the 6½ years we have been involved with this site have we ever found anyone opposed to the site. Everyone has been more than supportive of it. The only the only issues we ever had was just the process of getting to this point.

The site has a 6,000-square-foot administrative building, two brick residences, two sets of barracks, a historic ranger office, a historic ranger house, a historic barn, helipads, and a well and wastewater systems. The three historic sites are on the National Historic Register and SHPO out of Arizona has been consulted. All that has been gone through, and we are excited to take on the responsibility of keeping those sites up and pristine to what they were in the past.

As time went by, we went ahead and pursued a special use permit with the Forest Service to take occupancy of this site. And what that did was that allowed us to go in there and go ahead and start maintaining the site and working on it.

Today, the county has invested a little over \$2 million on the site. We have a partnership with the Forest Service to support and keep up all the infrastructure on it. Our first stage is complete. Our next stage is getting ready to start, and that is going to be about \$3 million project on our next stage for the site.

We had this go through the County Supervisors Association. All 15 counties in Arizona supported it.

With that, I would yield back and entertain any questions, and thank you, Mr. Chair, for having me.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Cline follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF WOODY CLINE, GILA COUNTY ARIZONA SUPERVISOR
ON H.R. 1829

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify on H.R. 1829, to require the Secretary of Agriculture to convey the Pleasant Valley Ranger District Administrative Site to Gila County, Arizona. I would like to commend the bill's sponsor, Rep. Eli Crane, R-AZ for introducing this legislation and for recognizing the uniqueness of the area and its many outstanding resources that could benefit our veterans.

Project Description

Gila County proposes to provide a peaceful respite for veterans and their families in a beautiful retreat-like facility in Young, Arizona. The subject property consists of 232 acres of pristine land along with a number of buildings for meetings and overnight accommodations.

Project Location

The project location is in Young, Arizona. The nearest cities to Young are Payson, 60 miles to the northwest, and Globe/Miami 65 miles to the south. From the Phoenix area, Young is about 150 miles away and typically takes 2.5 to 3 hours by vehicle. The site is a former Tonto National Forest (TNF) Administrative Site for the Payson/Pleasant Valley Ranger District. In 2016 the TNF began moving out of the facility and re-located to Payson where a new administrative site was built.

In 2017, Gila County began talks with TNF staff for the ownership of the property to be transferred to Gila County. During the many discussions with TNF staff, they admitted that eventually the buildings on the property would be "bull-dozed" due to a lack of maintenance funds. County staff along with myself determined that the best way to protect the site and buildings was to seek ownership. One of the

buildings that would have been bulldozed included a 6,000 square foot administrative office building built in 2001 and occupied in 2002.

Public Participation

Many discussions were held with county staff, community members and leaders regarding the re-use of the site. Early on, it was determined that it would be the ideal place to provide a retreat-like facility for veterans and their families that need a peaceful respite for healing and re-connection.

Background

Meetings were held with the Tonto National Forest Supervisor, Neil Bosworth as well as United States Forest Service Chief Vicki Christensen and Deputy Chris French in Washington, DC. I also held discussions and sought advice from Congressional staff to determine the best path for the county to obtain ownership and have the site along with buildings, transferred to Gila County. It was determined that a bill needed to be written and presented to both the House and the Senate in order to start the transfer of ownership. In 2020 Tonto National Forest Service Supervisor Neil Bosworth suggested a 20-year Special Use Permit in order for Gila County to begin the development of the site into a Veterans Camp/Retreat and provide the much-needed maintenance of buildings and land. The property contains a number of structures and an RV park that will be a part of the project:

- 6,000 square foot administrative building
- 2 brick residences
- 2 sets of barracks (can sleep 10 each with kitchens)
- Historic Ranger Office
- Historic Ranger House
- Historic barn
- Heli pads
- Well and wastewater system

The three historic structures are listed on the National Historic Register of Historic Places. That fact prompted a consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and that consultation was held in April 2020. The consultation included an assessment of the current condition of the buildings and advice from SHPO regarding the maintenance and restoration of the buildings. A plan was developed by County staff and submitted to the SHPO in May 2020 and approved in June 2020. The Special Use Permit could not be approved without the SHPO consultation.

Once SHPO approved the county's plan regarding the historic structures, the next step was to develop an Operating Plan that was submitted to the TNF for consultation and approval. The Operating Plan was approved in May 2021. Gila County wholeheartedly accepts the responsibility of the preservation of these historic structures.

The Special Use Permit was developed by TNF staff and presented to Gila County. The Special Use Permit and supporting documents was approved by the Gila County Board of Supervisors on July 27, 2021 and signed by the Tonto National Forest Supervisor on July 28, 2021.

On March 28, 2023, Rep. Eli Crane (R-AZ) introduced Bill H.R. 1829 and on March 28, 2023 Senator Mark Kelly (D-AZ) and Senator Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ) to convey the Pleasant Valley Ranger District Administrative Site to Gila County, Arizona.

On February 6, 2023, Arizona State Legislator, Rep. David Marshall (R) introduced HB 2725 (appropriation; Department of Veteran Services to appropriate \$1M of state general fund money to Gila County for the Pleasant Valley Veterans Retreat. During the course of the State budget process, the amount increased from \$1M to \$3M. The bill was included in Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs (D) final state budget.

Gila County Commitment to Project

The Gila County Board of Supervisors and county staff fully support this project. The County is committed to being good stewards of the beautiful land and buildings included on the site. Prior to the lease being in place, the historic buildings were cleaned and "rodent proofed" (with Tonto National Forest (TNF) approval) in order to protect them from further damage. Without the County's involvement the historic structures and other buildings would have fallen into disrepair and eventually would have been removed by the Forest Service due to a lack of maintenance funds.

Included in the Special Use Permit is the condition that the TNF may offset all or part of the permit fee by the amount paid by the holder for renovation, reconditioning, improvement, and maintenance deemed to be the government's responsibility, pursuant to Granger-Thye Fee Offset, 16 U.S.C. 580d. Gila County has accepted that responsibility.

The Gila County Board of Supervisors approved an allocation of \$2.5 million to the project and to date \$1.6 million has been contracted and \$200,000 has been invested in the water and wastewater treatment system. The water and wastewater system also supports the Tonto National Forest's outlying Fire Station (still located on the site but not included in the 232 acres) for fire suppression.

The transfer of ownership to the County will ensure that this beautiful property will be protected and maintained preserving its rich history in the community of Young and Gila County.

Gila County Vision:

We believe in the Family Unit and its ability to heal. We support military service members by reconnecting the family unit through a holistic approach within nature, while connecting the family unit with resources and programs.

Framework for Veterans Retreat:

As listed above, there are several buildings on the site that will be remodeled to provide the ultimate experience for veterans and their families.

The current administration building will become the "Main Lodge" that will provide a check in area, meeting space, game and resource rooms. A Veteran Ceremonial Grounds will be included at the Main Lodge as well. Also included, will be family housing, playground areas, walking trails sand volleyball court, horseshoe pits, gym & activity center.

Improvements Completed

The administration building has been completed and is ready to accept veteran events and to facilitate services.

The two existing barracks have been remodeled to include new kitchens and bathrooms and will house 10 veterans per night. A large common area in each of the barracks will provide a gathering place for group meetings or relaxing.

The two brick residences have been remodeled and will be available for families or individuals to occupy on a limited basis.

The RV Park has been upgraded and will provide 7 campsites for groups, families or individuals.

Future Planned Improvements

The Historic Ranger residence and the Historic District Office will be remodeled and will expand on the overnight options for families. Our vision includes a "Family Reconnect" program for families in crisis or families needing to reconnect after a parent has returned from a deployment.

Also in the planning stages is the construction of an event center that will provide a commercial kitchen and dining area as well as areas for recreational activities and meeting space. And in addition, a handicapped accessible house will be built to accommodate disabled individuals.

Statewide Support

As I previously mentioned, we have had bi-partisan support for this project. Rep. David Marshal (R) introduced H.R. 2725 and Governor Katie Hobbs (D) included the bill in the State's budget.

On January 19, 2023, the County Supervisors Association, an association that includes all 15 Arizona counties passed Resolution Number 1-23 in support of the Pleasant Valley Veterans Retreat.

The bills introduced in Congress include a bill co-sponsored by our Arizona Senators Kelly and Sinema, both Democrats and Rep. Eli Crane our Republican. Crane and Kelly are both veterans and recognize the importance of a retreat for veterans and the re-purposing of this federal land.

This concludes my testimony. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this important issue and I would be willing to answer any questions you may have.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you very much, Mr. Cline. Now, I would like to recognize Ms. Lisa Wilson, Deputy Director of Engineering and Operations, Utah Department of Transportation.

Ms. Wilson, you have 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF LISA WILSON, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF
ENGINEERING AND OPERATIONS, UTAH DEPARTMENT OF
TRANSPORTATION, SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH**

Ms. WILSON. Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Levin, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of H.R. 2468, the Mountain View Corridor Completion Act.

Speaking on behalf of the Utah Department of Transportation, we are very grateful to Representative Owens for sponsoring this bill.

The purpose of Representative Owens' bill is to authorize the Bureau of Land Management to transfer or sell three small parcels of Federal land to Utah. These parcels are within the boundaries of Camp Williams, Utah.

[Slide.]

Ms. WILSON. If I could draw your attention to Slide 1, this map shows the perimeter of Camp Williams. It is a large, active military training installation created by an Executive Order of President Woodrow Wilson in 1914, which withdrew over 18,000 acres of Federal public land for use by the military.

Today, the camp is used primarily by the Utah National Guard, and is also the location of a large National Security Agency data center. Camp Williams is located about 25 miles south of Salt Lake City, which straddles the border between Salt Lake County and Utah County, two of Utah's most populous counties. From time to time over the last 100 years, Congress has authorized transfers of land between the Federal Government and Utah related to Camp Williams. Camp Williams has grown to encompass approximately 20,000 acres of Federal land and 4,000 acres of land owned by the state of Utah.

This bill would authorize Utah to purchase 36 unused acres of the Federal 20,000 acres of Camp Williams. These small parcels are needed to complete a critical Utah highway project called the Mountain View Corridor.

To briefly give you a sense of importance, according to the 2020 U.S. Census Bureau report, Utah's population is growing at the fastest rate of any state in the nation. That growth continues, particularly along the heavily populated Wasatch Front in Salt Lake and Utah Counties, where well over half of Utah citizens reside.

One impact of that growth is Redwood Road, the only road that connects Western Salt Lake and Utah Counties, and which operates over a right-of-way through Camp Williams, has experienced dramatic increases in traffic volume from both the general public and the military. This road has historically provided the only public access to the Utah National Guard Headquarters, as well as the data center.

To address this growth, about 15 years ago the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) began the construction of what Utahns call the Mountain View Corridor, an important 35-mile highway between Salt Lake and Utah Counties.

[Slide.]

Ms. WILSON. Slide 2 shows the location of Mountain View Corridor.

From the beginning of this project, UDOT has worked closely with the Utah National Guard, as well as the Bureau of Land Management, on securing the necessary land rights to accommodate the project's alignment. Both entities have been very cooperative. However, we need congressional help to complete the last few miles of the Mountain View Corridor.

[Slide.]

Ms. WILSON. Slide 3 shows the completed portions of the Mountain View Corridor in blue and the uncompleted portion in orange.

While most of the yet-to-be-completed roadway will traverse state land, including some of the state-owned portion of Camp Williams, three triangular-shaped pieces of property that the highway would impact are irregular parcels of Federal land administered by the Bureau of Land Management.

[Slide.]

Ms. WILSON. While these parcels, as shown in Slide 4, are located entirely within the boundary of Camp Williams, neither the BLM nor the Utah National Guard actively use or manage these parcels.

Because of President Woodrow Wilson's Executive Order, the Bureau of Land Management considers these parcels to be under the indefinite active control and management of the military and will not transfer the parcels to Utah without congressional authorization. As I previously mentioned, the National Guard has been cooperative throughout the process and supports completing the Mountain View Corridor. We have included in the materials provided to this Committee, a copy of a letter of support from the Adjutant General of the Utah National Guard, Major General Taylor Michael Turley.

In closing, UDOT is confident that completion of the final phase of the Mountain View Corridor is in the best interest of the public safety in this fast-growing part of Utah, and urges the passage of H.R. 2468, the Mountain View Corridor Completion Act.

Thank you for your time today.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Wilson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF LISA J. WILSON, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF ENGINEERING AND OPERATIONS, UTAH DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

ON H.R. 2468

Dear Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, Vice Chair Curtis, and distinguished members of the Federal Lands Subcommittee: On behalf of the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT), thank you for providing the opportunity to testify in support of H.R. 2468, Mountain View Corridor Completion Act. We also express gratitude to Representative Burgess Owens for sponsoring this important legislation.

The purpose of the bill is to authorize the Bureau of Land Management to transfer or sell three small parcels of federal land to Utah. These parcels are located within the boundaries of Camp Williams, Utah. The land will be used by UDOT to complete an important highway project that will benefit not just Utah citizens, but also members of the military who utilize Camp Williams.

Camp Williams is a large active military training installation created by an Executive Order of President Woodrow Wilson in 1914. That order withdrew over 18,000 acres of federal public land for use by the military. Today, the camp is used

primarily by the Utah National Guard and is also the location of a large National Security Agency data center.

Camp Williams is located about 25 miles south of Salt Lake City, Utah and straddles the border between Salt Lake County and Utah County, which are Utah's two most populous counties.

From time to time over the last one-hundred years, Congress has authorized transfers of land between the federal government and Utah related to Camp Williams, and Camp Williams has grown to encompass approximately 20,000 acres of federal land and 4,000 acres of land owned by the State of Utah. [See Ex. 1.]

Representative Owens' bill would authorize Utah to purchase 36 acres of the federal 20,000 acres of Camp Williams land. These small parcels are needed to complete a critical Utah highway project, called the Mountain View Corridor.

According to the 2020 United States Census Bureau report, Utah's population is growing at the fastest rate of any state in the nation. That growth continues, particularly along the heavily populated Wasatch Front in Salt Lake County and Utah County where well over half of Utah citizens reside.

One impact of that growth is that Redwood Road, the only road that connects western Salt Lake County and western Utah County, and which operates over a right-of-way through Camp Williams, has experienced dramatic increases in traffic volume from both the general public and the military. This road has historically provided the only public access to the Utah National Guard Headquarters area as well as the NSA data center.

To address this growth, beginning fifteen years ago, UDOT began the planning and construction of what Utahns call the Mountain View Corridor—an important 35-mile highway between Salt Lake County and Utah County. [See Ex. 2.]

From the beginning of this project, UDOT has worked closely with the Utah National Guard as well as the Bureau of Land Management on securing the necessary land rights to accommodate the project's expansion alignment. Both entities have been very cooperative with UDOT, and the first two phases of the project have been completed. This needed project is already significantly increasing capacity and improving public safety for both the general public and the military.

However, Utah needs Congressional help to complete the last few southern miles of the Mountain View Corridor. [See Ex. 3] While most of the yet-to-be completed roadway will traverse state land, including some of the state-owned portion of Camp Williams, three triangular-shaped pieces of property that the highway would impact are irregular parcels of federal land administered by the Bureau of Land Management. While these parcels are located entirely within the boundaries of Camp Williams, neither the BLM nor the Utah National Guard actively use or manage these parcels. [See Ex. 4.]

Because of President Woodrow Wilson's Executive Order, the Bureau of Land Management considers these parcels to be under the indefinite active control and management of the military and will not transfer the parcels to Utah without Congressional authorization.

As mentioned, the Utah National Guard has been cooperative throughout this process and supports completing the Mountain View Corridor. We have included in the materials provided to this committee a copy of a letter of support from the Adjutant General of the Utah National Guard, Major General Taylor Michael Turley. We also understand that Major General Turley is sending the letter to all committee members. [See Ex. 5.]

UDOT is confident that completion of the final phase of the Mountain View Corridor is in the best interest of the public safety of both the military and the traveling public in this fast-growing part of Utah, and we respectfully urge timely passage of HR. 2468, the Mountain View Corridor Completion Act.

Thank you for your consideration. At any Member's request, UDOT is pleased to answer any questions or to provide any additional information to the subcommittee.

EXHIBITS

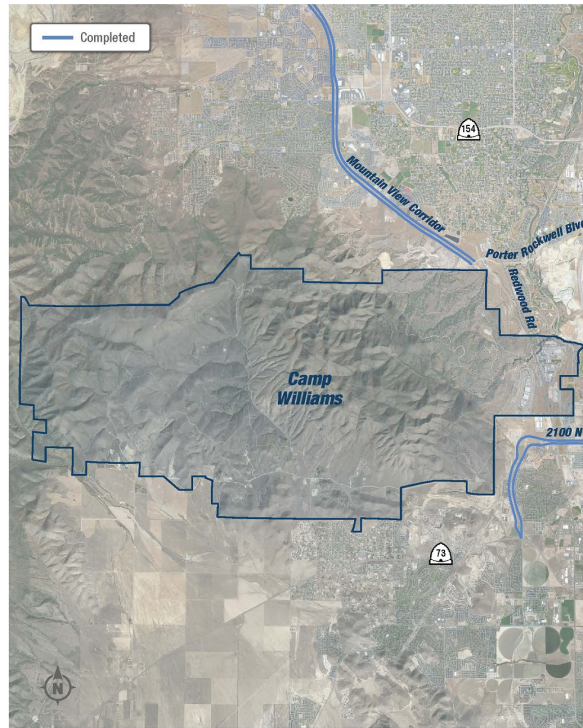


Exhibit 1





Exhibit 2



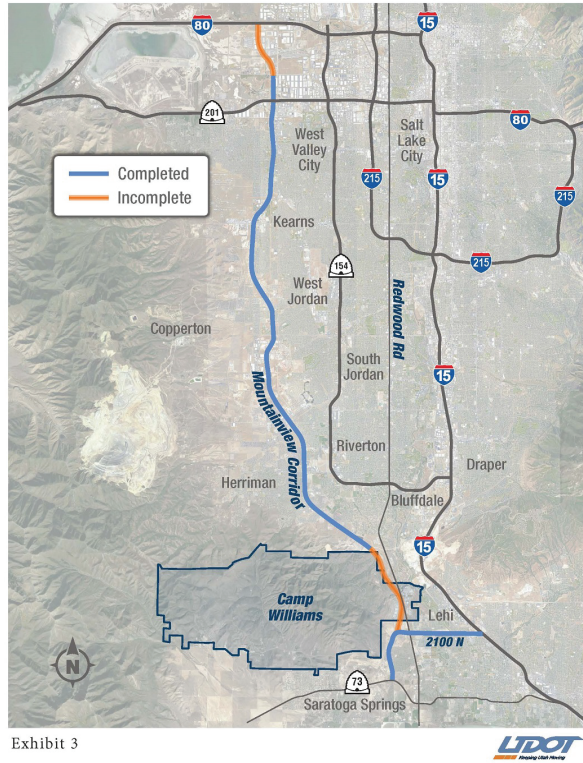


Exhibit 3

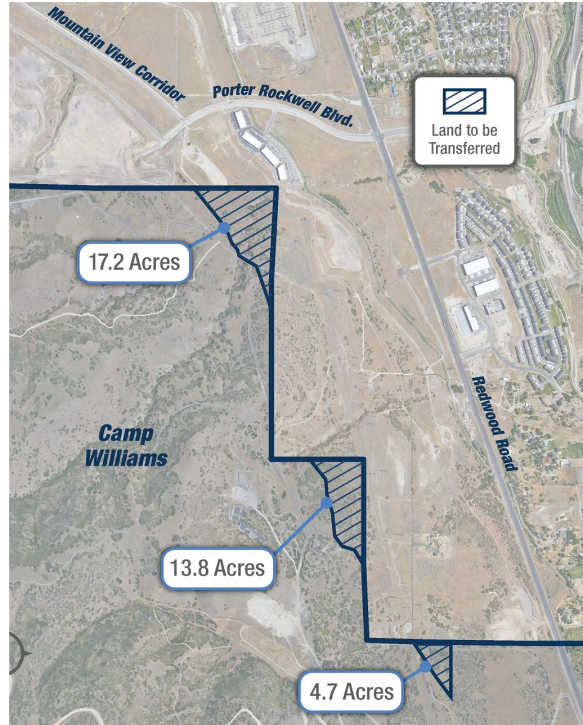


Exhibit 4





Spencer J. Cox
Governor
MG Michael J. Turley
The Adjutant General

State of Utah

UTAH NATIONAL GUARD

12953 MINUTEMAN DRIVE
DRAPER, UTAH 84020-9286
(801) 432-4400

NGUT-TAG

27 June 2023

MEMORANDUM FOR Utah Congressional Delegation

SUBJECT: 2024 NDAA Camp Williams Federal to State Land Transfers

1. The Utah National Guard supports the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) in acquiring the three parcels identified in the attached exhibit for the Mountain View Corridor project.
2. These parcels were previously included in a land transfer request in the 2018 NDAA. COL Wolff has submitted the Report of Availability (ROA) to the National Guard Bureau and the Corps of Engineers to allow UDOT access to the land in question for the highway. Transferring the property to UDOT will maintain the mission at Camp Williams, as they are situated on the extreme eastern perimeter.
3. The Utah National Guard has been coordinating for the past 15 years with the UDOT project team to minimize impacts and disruptions to Camp Williams and our missions. Although active military tasks have not been performed on these parcels for years, certification of no unexploded ordnances present will be completed before the land transfer.
4. The Utah National Guard requests a transfer to the State Armory Board of the remaining federal land on the lower garrison of Camp Williams and the track that runs off the installation. This was also requested back in 2018. This land was originally a railroad spur that the federal government purchased after the railroad had discontinued the line. Due to housing development, connecting the rail line to the other railroad line is no longer feasible. Transferring the land to the Armory Board will complete the garrison as entirely State Land, which it can manage more effectively for future development. The Armory Board will work with the local landowners adjacent to Camp Williams that the track affects to restore ownership.
5. The point of contact regarding this matter is COL Vincent P. Wolff, G9-CFMO, (801) 432-4440, or vincent.p.wolff.mil@mail.mil.

TURLEY.MICHAEL.J
AMES.1158421158

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Date: 2023.07.13 11:16:13 -0800

MICHAEL J. TURLEY
Major General
The Adjutant General
Commanding

Exhibit 5

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Deputy Director Wilson. I would now like to recognize Mr. Jeremy Villanueva, the Government Affairs Associate Director for the Wounded Warrior Project.
Sir, you have 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF JEREMY VILLANUEVA, GOVERNMENT
AFFAIRS ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, WOUNDED WARRIOR
PROJECT, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. VILLANUEVA. Thank you, Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Levin, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee on Federal Lands for this opportunity to speak before you.

Since our founding 20 years ago, Wounded Warrior Project has been helping post-9/11 wounded, ill, and injured veterans address their biggest challenges and reach their highest potential through impactful, no-cost programming and advocacy. Throughout our history we have explored new ways to tailor these programs to improve the mental, physical, and financial well-being of those we serve as effectively as possible.

Today, I am pleased to show our support for two bills before you based on our service to more than 190,000 veterans across the country.

First, I want to share our support for the Get Rewarding Outdoor Work for our Veterans Act, or the GROW for our Veterans Act. From our perspective, veteran employment is key to not just financial well-being, but also mental health. According to results from our 2022 Annual Warrior Survey, Wounded Warrior Project alumni are succeeding in finding work, but the unemployment rate is still higher than the U.S. veteran and general populations.

For the 6.8 percent of warriors who responded that they are unemployed, the top reported barriers to employment were mental health or physical distress, difficulty translating military skills to the civilian workforce, and lack of education. We believe that the GROW for our Veterans Act can address all three of these factors.

Several military occupations involve large amounts of time working outdoors in relatively harsh environments. These types of jobs leave veterans with wilderness survival skills, an understanding of various ecosystems, and other skills that are related to outdoor recreation. Despite this, GAO recently observed that veterans comprise a smaller proportion of employees in outdoor recreation positions than in the larger Federal workforce. Across all agencies in 2021, veterans and outdoor recreation positions accounted for 11 percent of the workforce, compared to 18 percent of all other Federal occupations.

In addition to the financial benefits that would accrue from increasing veteran employment, outdoor work can have important mental health benefits, and research has shown that direct sunlight exposure and being in nature can lead to reduced depression, improve physical and psychological well-being, social connection, resilience, and other benefits.

The GROW for our Veterans Act requires the Department of the Interior and the Department of Veterans Affairs to collaborate for a new, 2-year pilot program to connect veterans with Federal jobs in conservation, resource management, and environmental protection.

It would also direct VA to report to Congress, each Federal agency, about the best practices of its warrior training advancement course to help veterans find jobs during this pilot.

Wounded Warrior Project proudly supports the GROW for our Veterans Act, and shares its vision to help veterans find quality

Federal occupations that allow them to use their skills to conserve and protect our public lands. Helping veterans acquire the tools necessary to find meaningful employment and lead financially resilient lives are among our highest goals, and we appreciate Representative Levin for introducing this legislation, and urge its passage.

In that same vein, we are pleased to share our support for the Military and Veterans in Parks, or the MVP Act. This bill would help disabled veterans, members of our Armed Forces, and surviving families access our nation's public lands for activities to improve their mental and physical health and well-being. The MVP Act contains several important provisions, but today I would like to highlight three.

First, it would allow the creation of adaptive trails and adaptive recreation opportunities at each area managed by the Forest Service, each national park, and each area managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

Second, it would create partnerships between Federal agencies and state, tribal, local, and private entities to promote outdoor recreational programs among members of the Armed Forces and veterans.

And third, it would encourage these Federal agencies to hire veterans in all positions related to management of Federal recreational land.

Among many of the warriors we serve, we have witnessed the benefits that being outdoors, increased movement, time in nature, and the opportunity for reflection has on an individual's health and their relationships, particularly among those who require adaptive equipment or services. We have heard from warriors seeking to relocate to areas with more accessibility to adaptive sports, and from caregivers sharing stories about how adaptive recreational activities have made the veterans in their lives happier, more outgoing, and more eager to push their perceived limits.

We appreciate Representative Kiggans' work on this draft bill, and strongly encourage its introduction and passage in the House of Representatives.

Wounded Warrior Project once again extends our thanks to the Subcommittee on Federal Lands for its dedication to our nation's veterans, and this concludes my testimony, and I am happy to answer any questions you or the members of the Subcommittee may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Villanueva follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JEREMY VILLANUEVA, GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS ASSOCIATE
DIRECTOR, WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT

ON H.R. 1786 AND DISCUSSION DRAFT, H.R. _____, "MILITARY AND VETERANS IN
PARKS (MVP) ACT"

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and distinguished members of the House Committee on Natural Resources—thank you for the opportunity to submit Wounded Warrior Project's views on legislation pending before the Subcommittee on Federal Lands.

Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) was founded to connect, serve, and empower our nation's wounded, ill, and injured veterans, Service members, and their families and caregivers. We are fulfilling this mission by providing more than a dozen life-changing programs and services to over 191,000 registered post-9/11 warriors and

48,000 of their family support members, continually engaging with those we serve, and capturing an informed assessment of the challenges this community faces. We are pleased to share that perspective for this hearing on pending legislation that would likely have a direct impact on many we serve.

Discussion Draft, the Military and Veterans in Parks Act

Throughout our organizational history, WWP has explored new and innovative ways to offer care and support to those we serve. Across more than a dozen programs and services offered at no charge to warriors or their families, five often promote outdoor recreation in programming due to the multitude of health benefits from exposure to direct sunlight and nature: Physical Health and Wellness; Project Odyssey; Soldier Ride; Adaptive Sports; and the Alumni Connection Program. These nation-wide adaptive-capable offerings may include activities like biking, hiking, fishing, hunting, archery, camping, and snow and water sports in pursuit of improvement in social, physical, and mental well-being. Depending on the activity, staff experience, and local availability, we offer these opportunities to warriors independently or through a contracted vendor/organization. We have a comprehensive process dedicated to ensuring the quality of the event, accessibility for all warriors, and measurement of desired outcomes. These measurable outcomes include physical and mental well-being; improvements in physical activity, sleep, nutrition; and reductions in symptoms of depression and chronic pain.

In this context, we believe that the Military and Veterans in Parks Act, or the MVP Act, would help disabled veterans, members of our Armed Forces, and surviving families access our nation's public lands for activities to improve their mental and physical health and well-being. The MVP Act includes several provisions aimed at improving access and accessibility for veterans including six that we would like to highlight:

- Allowing the creation of at least one adaptive trail and at least one adaptive recreation opportunity at each area managed by the Forest Service, each National Park, and each area managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). [Section 2]
- Developing and disseminating materials for members of the Armed Forces and veterans to educate on the availability and location of resources to access outdoor activities in the areas maintained by the Forest Service, National Parks, and the BLM. [Section 3]
- Reducing amenity recreation fees and streamlining the recreation permit process for members of the Armed Forces, veterans, and Gold Star Families. [Section 4]
- Creating partnerships between federal agencies and state, tribal, local, and private entities to promote outdoor recreational programs among members of the Armed Forces and veterans. [Section 5]
- Creating a joint national strategy between the Departments of the Interior and of Agriculture to increase visits to federal recreational lands by members of the Armed Forces, veterans, and Gold Star Families. [Section 6]
- Encouraging these federal agencies to hire veterans in all positions related to management of federal recreational land. [Section 8]

In March 2022, WWP offered our perspectives on outdoor recreation to the Task Force on Outdoor Recreation for Veterans established by the COMPACT Act (P.L. 116-214 §203).¹ Points raised then are still relevant today, including our desire to increase public awareness campaigns about free and discounted opportunities for veterans, expand the availability of adaptive trails and water entry points, explore the potential of veterans-preference weeks or events at National Parks, and improve public awareness on the mental and physical health merits of the outdoors, specifically for veterans. WWP believes that the MVP Act addresses each of these issues and would create meaningful impact for those we serve.

Wounded Warrior Project believes in the healing and connection outdoor recreation can bring to veterans. We have witnessed the benefits that being outdoors, increased movement, time in nature, adoption of a new hobby, and the opportunity for reflection has on an individual's health and their relationships. And as more and more warriors experience these benefits, we have heard firsthand from warriors seeking to relocate to areas with more accessibility to adaptive sports and from

¹ See, Notice of Request for Information Regarding Veterans Outdoor Recreation, 87 FR 10,281 (Feb. 23, 2022) (WWP comment available at <https://www.regulations.gov/comment/VA-2022-VACO-0001-0147>).

caregivers sharing stories about how adaptive recreational activities have made the veteran in their lives happier, more talkative, and more eager to push their perceived limits. We appreciate Representative Jen Kiggans' work on this draft bill and strongly encourage its introduction and passage in the House of Representatives.

H.R. 1786, the Get Rewarding Outdoor Work for our Veterans Act

A variety of military occupations involve large amounts of time working outdoors in relatively harsh environments. These types of jobs leave many veterans with wilderness survival skills, a keen knowledge of various ecosystems, and other skills that are related to outdoor recreation. Despite this experience, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently observed that “[v]eterans comprised a smaller proportion of employees in outdoor recreation positions than in the larger federal workforce. For instance, veterans accounted for 11 percent of federal outdoor recreation employees. By contrast, veterans made up about 18 percent of employees across all occupations at the corresponding agencies.”² In addition to the financial benefits that would accrue from increasing veteran employment, outdoor work can have important mental health benefits. Research has shown that direct sunlight exposure and being in nature can lead to reduced depression, improved physical and psychological well-being, social connection, resilience, and other benefits.

The GROW for our Veterans Act would establish a two-year pilot program to employ veterans in federal positions that relate to conservation, environmental protection, and resource management. The program would be administered by the Secretary of the Interior—in consultation with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the Assistant Secretary of Labor for Veterans' Employment and Training—and would utilize best practices from the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Warrior Training Advancement Course (WARTAC) program to help veterans secure employment at the Department of the Interior. WARTAC connects veterans with real-world job opportunities to help them gain the skills and experience that are helpful for finding future careers. The GROW for our Veterans Act would also direct VA to submit a report to Congress and the head of each federal agency that details the best practices and hiring elements of WARTAC, and Department of Labor to report on how best to implement these recommendations at federal agencies.

Wounded Warrior Project proudly supports the GROW for our Veterans Act and shares its vision to help veterans find quality federal occupations that allow them to use their outdoors skills and passions to conserve and protect our public lands. We appreciate Representative Mike Levin for introducing this legislation and urge its passage.

Concluding Remarks

Wounded Warrior Project once again extends our thanks to the Subcommittee on Federal Lands for its dedication to our nation's veterans. We are honored to contribute our voice to your discussion about pending legislation, and we are proud to support these initiatives under consideration that would enhance veterans' access to our nation's great outdoors. As your partner in advocating for these and other critical issues, we stand ready to assist and look forward to our continued collaboration.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Mr. Villanueva. Next, I will recognize Mr. Marc Berejka, the Divisional Vice President of Community Advocacy and Impact for REI.

Mr. Berejka, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF MARC BEREJKA, DIVISIONAL VICE PRESIDENT, COMMUNITY ADVOCACY AND IMPACT, REI, KENT, WASHINGTON

Mr. BEREJKA. Chairman Tiffany and Ranking Member Levin, my name is Marc Berejka, and I serve as DVP for Community Advocacy and Impact at REI Co-op.

I am also joined today by my colleague, Naz Ahmed. Naz is an Army vet who was deployed in the Middle East, and served the

²U.S. Gov't Accountability Off., GAO-23-106149, Veterans Employment: GI Bill Benefits Can Help Lead to Outdoor Recreation Careers (2023).

United States honorably. At REI, she co-leads our employee resource group for veterans. On behalf of the entire co-op, thank you for starting this important conversation on the MVP Act, how to make our Federal lands more accessible to members of the Armed Forces and our veterans, especially those with disabilities.

As you may know, REI is an 85-year-old co-op. It was founded in the Pacific Northwest by 23 climbers who were pioneering routes throughout the area's mountains. The climbers formed a co-op in order to get easier access to high-quality gear that they could afford. Fast forward to today, and we have stores in almost every state, a robust online presence, and over 16,000 employees. Somewhat incredibly, the co-op now has over 23 million members. We are approaching 9 percent of the country's adult population.

What drives our success is our long-standing, authentic commitment to connecting people to time outside, to demystifying what might seem challenging, and to make nature approachable. We pursue this with a passion because we know that time outside is fundamental to our well-being.

As a co-op, we are also deeply committed to giving back. We are committed to stewardship, sustainability, and diversity. Each year, my team collectively provides about \$10 million in support to hundreds of not-for-profits across the country, including those like Blue Star Families, Minority Veterans of America, Adaptive Adventures, and more. Despite our work, we know that many, many people still face barriers to enjoying time outside. Our sector calls this the "nature gap." In fact, per trust for public land, more than 100 million people lack easy nearby access to safe, welcoming natural spaces.

We see this reality with eyes wide open. REI is regularly sharpening our impact agenda, and closing this nature gap is now a top priority. In fact, just last week in Anacostia Park, we announced a new, long-term initiative we call "Outside in 5". Its aim is to be more forthright in identifying access issues, and more determined than ever in addressing them.

Especially relevant to the MVP Act, we have been steadily investing in research around the intersection between nature and healing. Personally, I have had the honor to meet suffering vets who have described how their lives were literally saved by the mountains. To demonstrate that time in nature heals, REI has funded research at top universities with vets as enthusiastic participants, as well as trauma-suffering youth.

We know that demonstrating the benefits of time outside is one key to closing the nature gap. Another lays in feasibility, especially for people with disability. Here, REI has been supporting not-for-profits that are designing assistive gear, as well as adaptive programming.

The intent of the bill we discuss today is fully aligned with REI's belief that the outdoors should be available and accessible for everyone. We applaud the Committee for identifying specific ways to make Federal lands more accessible for both active duty military and disabled vets. Understanding that the draft is subject to change, I have a few comments for the Committee's consideration in addition to those in my written testimony.

Foremost, while it focuses on vets and military, we see the bill's benefits flowing to the broader disability community, as well. So, we suggest that edits be made to explicitly call that out, fostering accessibility of Federal infrastructure for the entire disability community.

Second, I would underscore the importance of the bill's awareness-raising goals. The bill should include guidance on how to work with vets' organizations and the disability community to update and amplify information on where accessible infrastructure exists. It is not enough to build it and just assume that they will come.

And then, as to the bill's mandate to build accessible trails and recreation facilities, one trail and one facility per region, per agency is a good start and can generate great learning. But we see value in more ambition, both to break ground on more initial projects and to complete them faster so that the bill's pivot in trail building modus operandi takes root more quickly.

To close, I want to emphasize how honored we are to be part of this important work. We look forward to contributing to the next version of the bill, and to seeing a bipartisan end product advance to the next stage. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Berejka follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MARC BEREJKA, DIVISIONAL VICE PRESIDENT, COMMUNITY ADVOCACY AND IMPACT, REI CO-OP

ON DISCUSSION DRAFT, H.R. ____, "MILITARY AND VETERANS IN PARKS (MVP) ACT"

Chairman Tiffany and Ranking Member Neguse, on behalf of REI Co-op, I would like to thank the committee for starting this important conversation on how to make our federal lands more accessible to members of the Armed Forces and this nation's veterans. I welcome the opportunity to provide the co-op's support for, and some comments on, the draft version of the Military and Veterans in Parks (MVP) Act.

At REI, we know that the outdoors brings people together—Republicans and Democrats, different generations, families, friends, and many others. Despite our many differences, we all love the outdoors and find common purpose in enjoying it together. As this legislation highlights, time outside, in nature, provides meaningful opportunities and solutions for many of us, not the least of which is our health and wellbeing. My team and I look forward to an ongoing dialogue with you and your staff on this important topic.

Statement of Interest

My name is Marc Berejka and I serve as the Divisional Vice President for Community Advocacy and Impact at the co-op. I am also President of the REI Cooperative Action Fund ("REI Fund"), a relatively new public charity created by the co-op to foster more equitable access to time outside.

REI is 85 years old this year. We were founded in the Pacific Northwest in 1938 by 23 climbers who were pioneering routes in and among the area's mountains. They had each other, as they mapped their way into the region's inspiring nature and its adventures. They found they needed quality gear at affordable prices. And since the region didn't have a provider, they created an entrepreneurial solution—a co-op for importing the best-available, European tools, selling them at a modest mark-up, and enabling them to be all they could be.

Fast forward to today and REI is in almost every state. We have over 180 stores, a robust online presence, and over 15,000 employees. We buy product from about 1,000 different small and medium-sized outdoor companies from around the country. And all told, the co-op now has over 23 million members, approaching nine percent (9%) of the country's adult population.

We are proud of our steady growth, our long-standing stewardship of our lands and waters, our commitments to sustainability and diversity, and our support for hundreds of nonprofits annually. To date, we have invested over \$125 million in our nonprofit partners across the country. But we also know the mission suffers a gap. We and others call it the nature gap. For all the work we've done over the decades

to introduce people to the outdoors—and its many benefits—we are fully aware that large swaths of the American public lack welcoming, accessible opportunities to connect with nature. In fact, based on available data, we believe that a full 100 million people in America face this nature gap.

To address it, just last week in Anacostia Park, we launched a new, long-term commitment and initiative we call “Outside in 5.” Its aim is to be more forthright in identifying access issues and more determined than ever in addressing them. The nature gap emerges in different ways among different communities, but at the core we see systems and policies that have led to exclusion and displacement from nature. Last week, we put down a marker that we will invest our treasure and time against this problem, and also use our advocacy voice, like we do here today.

We know that time outside is fundamental to human wellbeing. This is not a notion but an increasingly demonstrable fact. All of us know from our own experiences that time outside, in nature, is good for our wellbeing. But because of research we’ve sponsored, there’s also an increasing body of evidence that shows how, physiologically, time outside benefits us.

REI’s Commitment to the Purpose of this Bill

At REI, we have been steadily investing in research around the intersection of nature and healing and the importance of outdoor recreation to overall health and wellness for almost a decade.

We are especially grateful to have pursued some of this work in partnership with veterans and the veteran’s community. In Congress, you know well how important it is for us to demonstrate the nation’s respect and gratitude for our vets’ service. One focus of ours has been to highlight the unique role time outside in nature—facilitated via cohort or alone—can play in the rehabilitation and wellbeing of our vets. We commit ourselves to this work because America’s veterans have literally dedicated their lives to safeguarding this country and its lands and waters.

It should go without saying, but all of us—government, industry, nonprofits, and others—should do what we can to make it ever-easier for our military and former military to enjoy the places they’ve been protecting and to get the important benefits of being in nature. Personally, I have had the honor—on more than one occasion—to hear a suffering vet describe how his life “was saved by the mountains” or “by a fishing trip with guides and buddies” or “by a through-hike along the Appalachian Trail.” The fact that well-crafted time outside can heal should not be up for debate, but it still does seem to be a fact we have to prove.

So as one company, with our partners, we endeavor. We have supported research at some of the country’s top universities with vets as enthusiastic participants, as well as trauma-suffering youth. Several years ago, we helped stand-up a Nature and Health initiative at the University of Washington; and, recently, the REI Fund has provided seed investments for a national Nature and Health Alliance, as well as similar efforts at the Universities of Utah and of Maryland. For all these institutions, time outside is seen as a vehicle for rejuvenation and healing trauma.

We know that demonstrating efficacy is one key step. Another lays in feasibility, especially for people with disabilities. Here, the REI Fund is supporting both a national and several regional nonprofits that are designing assistive gear and facilitated, adaptive programs. These organizations—like Adaptive Adventures, Vermont Adaptive, Catalyst Sports, All Out Adventures and the Outdoors for All Foundation—are heroic in their own right. We are pleased to support them, their vets-focused programs, and their broader mission.

We are also proud to have worked closely with Congress, including this committee and the Committee on Veterans Affairs, on the 2020 passage of the “Task Force on Outdoor Recreation for Veterans,” which was included in the COMPACT Act. The Task Force is now up and running and working across federal agencies and alongside nonprofit stakeholders to help remove barriers to leveraging public lands for the treatment of veterans—effectively starting the conversation around the concept of “prescribing the outdoors” at scale. We are looking forward to seeing what recommendations this Task Force provides Congress.

Initial Comments on the Draft

The draft version of the Military Veterans in Parks Act appropriately prioritizes making some trails accessible to disabled veterans and active duty military and providing needed information about the location of accessible infrastructure across our federal lands. At REI, we strongly believe that the outdoors should be available and accessible for everyone, and we applaud the authors of this draft for taking an important step in finding ways to make public lands more accessible for both active duty military and disabled veterans.

We should—at every level of government—be identifying opportunities and areas to increase access to outdoor recreation for those with disabilities. This legislation would certainly take a significant step in formalizing that at the federal level.

With the understanding that this legislation is currently a draft and subject to changes, I would like to provide some comments about potential changes and additions for the Committee's consideration as you finalize the text.

First and foremost, this legislation has a focus on our nation's veterans and military, but this bill really benefits the broader disability community. We would strongly suggest that the direction and focus of the bill be inclusive—fostering accessible infrastructure on public lands for the broader community of people with disabilities. Through conversations with several federal agencies, we know there is good work being done for this community. This legislation would elevate that work and bring additional focus, which we support. The broader disability community deserves that focus and we are hopeful that the final text will ensure those who desperately need this access—our nation's active duty military, veterans and others across the disability community alike—are able to benefit from it.

In addition, we would like to underscore the awareness-raising aspect of the bill. Accessible trails and other accessible infrastructure are not useful if people who need them do not know they exist. I would encourage the Committee to include guidance on working with veteran's organizations and the disability community to appropriately distribute updated information on where accessible infrastructure exists and, if possible, what might be in the pipeline down the road. If something similar exists today, it is difficult to locate and the current and future work of these agencies deserves a broader audience.

As to the trails and recreation facilities themselves, I would encourage the Committee to aim higher and raise the bill's initial ambitions. One trail and facility per region per agency is a good start and can provide some key learnings, but ideally there would be more initial projects so that people would be able to access them, which will also provide needed information in growing this effort over time. These initial trails could be considered a pilot program for discovery around how to scale this across the country, including providing key learnings to non-federal land management partners in states. The same can be said about the bill's timelines. We would appreciate considering a shorter implementation schedule, if possible.

Lastly, I want to raise a flag around the permitting provisions. REI fully supports permitting reform and, in separate venues, have been trying to advance permitting reform. The SOAR Act, which has been introduced by members of this Committee and is the product of more than a decade's work, will streamline the permitting process on public lands. The permitting process is equally complex and frustrating at times. As the Committee looks to cut red tape around access for veterans and active duty military, I would ask the Committee to take care to avoid undermining permitting reforms and opportunities that will improve access for all lovers of the outdoors. We are happy to discuss specific language changes with the Committee at the appropriate time.

Conclusion

In closing, I want to reiterate how greatly the co-op and I appreciate the chance to testify on this important legislation. My team and I look forward to working with the Committee to ensure our nation's active duty military, its veterans and our disability community have greater access to our public lands. We also look forward to working with you and all stakeholders—federal agencies, groups that support the military community (like Blue Star Families), veterans organizations, and the disability community—on innovative ways to make our public lands more accessible. This is important work, which we are honored to be a part of. We look forward to contributing to the next version of this legislation and the bipartisan product that ultimately advances.

I would also applaud the Committee for its parallel work on an outdoor recreation legislative package, America's Outdoor Recreation Act. That legislative package will be historic and will help to both modernize and simplify access to the outdoors. Like the MVP Act, we look forward to the historic passage of that broader piece of legislation.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Mr. Berejka. Trust me, the Tiffany family has fully supported, with three daughters, REI over the years.

Mr. BEREJKA. We appreciate your membership.

[Laughter.]

Mr. TIFFANY. So, we are voting right now. We are going to take a break. I am hoping all of you will stay, and you don't have to stay in your seats, but if you would stay until we come back, I would expect about a half hour. Yes, we look forward to coming back at 10:45, and we will take questions from Members, and we hope you will stay around to accept those questions.

Thank you very much for your testimony, and we will break until 10:45.

The Committee stands in recess, subject to the call of the Chair.

[Recess.]

Mr. TIFFANY. The Committee will come back to order. We are now going to take questions from Members. Thank you so much for your patience as we cast a couple of votes there. I suspect you all flew, so what we were doing was rather important in regards to the FAA.

I am going to start with questions. Ms. Wilson, the process for the Mountain View Corridor has been underway for the better part of 15 years. Will you share with us the delays the Mountain View Corridor project has experienced as a result of the process of transferring the land?

Ms. WILSON. Yes. Actually, we started the environmental process for Mountain View Corridor in 2003. Construction has been going on for the last—

Mr. TIFFANY. Sorry about that. Did you say 2003?

Ms. WILSON. Yes, that is correct. That is when we started environmental. Construction of this highway has been going on for the last 15 years.

And this project hasn't been delayed, it has been built in phases, most of them in Salt Lake County to begin with. This is the final phase that will connect the projects. We would like to be able to start construction next year, so this transfer is of utmost importance at this point for us.

Mr. TIFFANY. But it is contingent upon us completing this legislation?

Ms. WILSON. Correct.

Mr. TIFFANY. Mr. Berejka, I want to go back to my notes from previously. During your testimony, I am just trying to come back to it, is there a definition for disability that is used? You talked about providing more opportunities, right? Is there a definition in Federal law that you guys reference in regards to disability?

Mr. BEREJKA. I would defer to people who are more expert than me for a definitive answer, but I would say that the starting point is the ADA, and that different agencies, whether they are Federal, state, or local would likewise refer to ADA regulations.

Mr. TIFFANY. You said there are some projects, that more projects could be done, I think, toward the end of your testimony, and perhaps get them done faster. Expand on that a little bit, what you were talking about.

Mr. BEREJKA. So, I read the legislation and was very enthused by it, and then I got to the last section and it said we, Congress, require one project per region per agency, and complete it within 5 years and report back on it after 6, something to that effect. And

I thought to myself, well, this must be a notion of a test-and-learn, or pilot projects, or something to advance this Congress' awareness and the agency's awareness of how to build accessible facilities.

And I thought to myself, if we are going to legislate, maybe we could be a little bit more ambitious. So, is construction in 5 years really too much time, frankly? Could it be done in less? Could there be more projects?

Mr. TIFFANY. Welcome to the Federal Government, sir.

Mr. BEREJKA. Just encouraging my friends in Congress.

Mr. TIFFANY. Yes, yes, for sure. Sometimes it is the case, though getting something started, and getting the process started leads to results in the future. I cast some encouragement that way. But yes, we get really frustrated with the pace of the Federal Government, especially in regards to permitting. It has been talked about ad nauseam in this Committee.

I am going to yield back, and next I will recognize Representative Stauber from Minnesota for 5 minutes for questioning.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Before I get into my questions I want to talk about the GROW Act, and I want to thank my colleague from California, Representative Levin, and my colleague from Virginia, Representative Wittman, for introducing the GROW Act.

It is an important piece of legislation that will help connect our veterans and retiring service members, put their skills to good use after their military careers. It will help these individuals continue their service to our country through important roles focused on conservation and management of our great public lands. Again, I want to thank both my colleagues for introducing that.

I want to also thank the panel for their testimony this morning, as well as their commitment to supporting our active duty military members, veterans, and their families. It is so incredibly important that we honor those who are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for all of us.

Mr. Villanueva, I want to thank you for the work that you and others have done with the Wounded Warrior Project on behalf of our veterans. Can you please share with the Committee the impact that allowing disabled service members and veterans to access, recreate in, and otherwise enjoy our public lands has on these individuals?

Mr. VILLANUEVA. Thank you, Congressman. That is a great question. I mean, there are a couple of things that we can look at.

Just right on its face, the physical well-being, the health benefits from going outdoors, just being exposed to sunlight. Vitamin D deficiency is something that is rampant right now in our country, right? And when you have vitamin D deficiency we are looking at things like depression, physical and muscle pain, extenuations, and even hair loss.

But getting them back out, and not just out getting what we would call windshield time, because a lot of windshields, they will filter out the vitamin D, we are talking about getting out, getting active, and being exposed to nature. That is right there, those are the health benefits. That is right on its face.

But in a more profound way, I think we need to look at, I know some of the panels earlier, there were multiple references saying

that giving the best to veterans, and they are rewarding them for their service. I don't look at it like that. Where I come from and growing up surrounded by BLM properties, Federal properties, national parks, going out there hiking, fishing, that was my life before I joined the U.S. military. And for a lot of veterans, that is the same. But because of their service, many of them came back missing limbs, having diseases that confine them to a wheelchair. Unfortunately, some of them are dying of ALS. And the fact that they can't access these same hiking trails, go to these same fishing spots, all we are trying to get them back is a sense of normalcy. That is what we want, something that they lost because of their time in service.

Mr. STAUBER. I have one more question, just because of the time commitment. You are exactly right. I can't imagine a veteran in a wheelchair that goes to a boat ramp, and it is not wheelchair accessible. I can't imagine that.

Mr. VILLANUEVA. Yes, sir.

Mr. STAUBER. And in 2023, that should never happen.

Mr. VILLANUEVA. No.

Mr. STAUBER. So, I think that is why the advocacy on this Committee, and led by the Chairman is extremely important, that we allow access. And I appreciate your comments.

One more question. Among the programs that you have partnered with, which kinds of programs do you think have been most successful, and are these locally run and organized programs, or programs run by the Federal Government?

Mr. VILLANUEVA. That is a really good question, and I know that there are a lot of programs that we have, but I will take that back for the record, and I would love to work with you, and get us in contact with our physical health and wellness teammates so that they can share with you some of those programs, the Federal programs and the local programs, that we have used because we utilize both with Wounded Warrior Project.

Mr. STAUBER. Yes, and just in my experience, it is the local programs in the local communities that will come up with the best options for the wounded warriors in our communities. And having been a city councilor and a county commissioner, now represent Minnesota's 8th Congressional District, it is important that we listen to you all with the boots on the ground, and listen to what those veterans need and want and their desires to make sure they are not left behind. We owe it to them.

Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. I would like to recognize the gentleman from Idaho, Mr. Fulcher, for 5 minutes.

Mr. FULCHER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, to the panel for being here and for your testimony.

And you are probably aware of this, but a number of us bouncing in and out aren't doing it because it is rude, it is because there is more than one Committee going on, but please know that we recognize your contributions here, and are thankful for that, and had a chance to go through some of your written testimony.

But my first question is going to go to Ms. Wilson, so I will give you that forewarning, but a comment or two here first.

I come from a state right next door in Idaho. And like you, we are around two-thirds of the land mass, which is federally controlled in our state. So, moves like this—in this case, to the benefit of our veterans and a very worthy cause—I am particularly pleased to see efforts to insert more local control, in this case a federal transfer to states. And I have just learned since being in office, this is my fifth year in office, that most Members, and I think most people, don't understand why there are a few particular states in the West that have such a huge amount of Western land.

Can I just ask you first, are you a native Utahn? Have you been in Utah a long time?

Ms. WILSON. Yes, sir. I have lived in Utah my whole life.

Mr. FULCHER. OK, so you understand the ramifications of that. And there is a particular reason in history, post-Civil War, all that, how states that came into the Union were treated differently with the land and whatnot. Most people don't understand that, and most people don't understand what it is like to be at the state level and govern when you are subject to all those Federal rules.

And one of the major things that is important to me is local stakeholder control. Not necessarily a transfer. It can take many forms. And I know in Utah, in the not too distant past, there has been a number of attempts to do transfers, to have more local control.

And if you have been there your whole life, I know, like in Idaho, there have been state legislative attempts, there have been transfer attempts, there has been nibbling around the edges and some very good partnership programs like GNA, Good Neighbor Authority, roadless rule, those types of things. This is going to be a win, and I am very supportive of these bills, and I know you are, as well.

But from your vantage point, what is the best approach for those of us in the West and these dominated Federal lands to try to engage with more local stakeholder control with the Federal Government?

Ms. WILSON. I can't speak to the larger issues. I can speak from a DOT perspective. And in this particular case, we have worked very closely with our Federal partners. We have worked closely with Camp Williams on a regular basis. We have for my whole career, and they have been really great partners.

The BLM, too, in the area, they are very willing to work with us and help us. So, I think those local relationships are really important—

Mr. FULCHER. Is it a legislative approach? Is it statute through these channels? What is most effective?

Ms. WILSON. Well, in this case, we wouldn't be here except for the fact that this land was set aside by presidential executive order and the BLM doesn't have a mechanism to transfer it to us. If that weren't the case, this bill wouldn't be in front of you.

Mr. FULCHER. OK. And not to cut you short, but I want to give Mr. Cline an opportunity to address the same thing.

What is the best approach? You are coming from a similar type environment.

Mr. CLINE. Yes, sir, Congressman, thank you for that. In our county, we are 97 percent owned by public lands, so everything we

do deals with public lands. Having the partnership and everything with our local governments is a big help.

It still has issues, as well. One of the biggest issues we deal with on anything on the public lands is the NEPA process and the ability to really work through that in order to manage those lands.

Mr. FULCHER. And not to segue too much, I only have 30 seconds, but what would happen to your county without PILT and without SRS?

Mr. CLINE. We would dry up and blow away.

Mr. FULCHER. And that encapsulates the challenge, I think, for myself and the Members of the West trying to communicate some of the issues we face. Most people have no idea. So, thank you for that.

Sorry on the time, I didn't get to the rest of the panel, but I appreciate your insight.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. I would like to recognize the Chairman of the Full Committee, Mr. Westerman.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you, Chair Tiffany, and thank you again to the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Villanueva, I especially thank you for your service and also for your testimony today in which you noted that the Wounded Warrior Project has received feedback from your members, and that there is strong need for more adaptive trails and recreation opportunities. Can you please expand on the feedback that you have received, and how the MVP Act would help wounded warriors broadly?

Mr. VILLANUEVA. Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We actually had discussions with what we call our physical health and wellness teammates. We call them PH&W. But they were adamant with a lot of their programs, that they have warriors going out and they said that we need more adaptive trails.

But not only that. Specifically, what types of trails. What is going to be the usage for it? Because what is a good trail for hiking for someone with prosthetics is not going to be the same, or not rated the same, for someone who is using either a motorized or a tracked wheelchair, or if they are using a recumbent bike. These trails need to be specified, and probably signage put up letting them know this trail is good for these certain adaptations.

But I think that the MVP, we were extremely pleased to see this drafted legislation come to us because it answered a lot of the issues that we have seen. And one of the most important that I don't think we have even really talked about that much was the outreach.

I have testified in a lot of different hearings in front of House Veterans Affairs committees, Subcommittees, Senate Veterans Affairs committees, and it seems like it always comes down to the knowledge of the programs that are already out there for veterans. The veterans want to go out and be active. They want to go out and do these things, but they just are not aware what is already there and available to them, so that portion I am extremely, extremely hopeful to have that out.

Mr. WESTERMAN. OK. Thank you for that, and I hope you will continue. I know you will stay engaged with us as we move through this process. Your feedback is very valuable.

Mr. Berejka, your testimony mentioned the extensive research REI has conducted into analyzing the effects nature and outdoor recreation have for our veterans. Can you please talk about what this research has found, particularly as it relates to veterans suffering from PTSD?

Mr. BEREJKA. Yes. Thank you for the question, Mr. Chairman.

For about a decade now, REI has been putting dollars into different research projects at different universities, and I have the privilege of overseeing a lot of those investments in research and, as a result, have been very committed to focusing where we can on the veterans community through personal interactions. And I am sure this may be true for others on the panel and yourselves. Veterans speak very directly about their suffering and their troubles with TBI or PTSD, and then also very directly about how time outside soothes their symptoms.

So, there are some Doubting Thomases, and we put research dollars at Cal Berkeley into a program that showed how what I will call a curated experience, a facilitated experience, whitewater rafting among vets and with a bit of counseling—this is one example—led to sustained weeks of reduced stress hormone. So, if you can reduce the stress hormones coursing through a vet's system through that type of activity, you have, I think, some magic in your hands.

We did follow-on research with hiking in the Cascade Mountains through the University of Washington, and these are just examples of the types of projects that we have tried to foster.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you for that. I am not a veteran, but I am an outdoorsman, and I can relate to everything you said. After being here in DC and getting back to the natural state of Arkansas, spending time outdoors, fishing, hiking, or just being at my farm, it is rejuvenating and refreshing, and I can see how it would be very beneficial to veterans and our whole country, and that is why we are trying to promote access to outdoor recreation and access to our public lands for all of America.

I think it could be very beneficial to our children, as they grow up, to have those outdoor experiences, as well.

Mr. BEREJKA. For sure. On fishing in particular, I would recommend to you Rivers of Recovery. They have done some research on the benefits of fishing for mental health.

Mr. WESTERMAN. It is good for mine.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. Not always good for mine because I do a lot more casting than catching.

[Laughter.]

Mr. WESTERMAN. That is why it is called fishing and not catching.

Mr. TIFFANY. I would like to recognize the gentleman from Oregon for 5 minutes.

Mr. BENTZ. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank all of you for attending today.

Mr. Berejka, I am happy to say that we, my wife and I, shop at your stores a lot, way more than I would like. But wonderful, wonderful materials that you sell.

I am extremely interested in your efforts to make sure that access to these public lands is preserved. And to that point, there is a movement, and it has been around for a long time, to lock up these lands and to turn them into spaces where no one can really go. Has your committee addressed this issue?

I bring it up because I am from Oregon. I actually represent about three quarters of the state, and there is a huge amount of public land within my district. The challenge has always been to maintain the ability to access those lands. And as time has passed, many, many acres of those lands, many, many square miles, have been locked up, preventing anybody from really going into them. And there has been a movement in the national forests to do away with roads, to make it even more difficult for anyone to access, much less those who have disabilities.

So, my question is, I think you mentioned 22 million people that are customers of your co-op. That is a lot of political power. Is your committee addressing these access issues? And if so, how?

Mr. BEREJKA. We are still trying to assemble the political wherewithal, if you will, the advocacy wherewithal of our member base. We appreciate it when Members of Congress are also members of REI.

On land closures or loss of access, our lived experience is that individual cases often bring individual circumstances and battles, if you will. So, at a national level, if you will, it is really, really hard for REI Co-op to make a general statement about the types of problems that you are referring to. When there is an access issue in the vicinity of our stores or where our members are concentrated, we are a co-op, we do engage, but we do try to find those win-win outcomes.

Mr. BENTZ. It would be hugely helpful, given the scope of your customer base, if you could take more of an aggressive position in maintaining this access because you have a huge footprint. So, I am just saying there is a great danger in people not standing up and saying we can't access these lands any longer because of whatever type of approach has been used to lock them up. And I guarantee you there are approaches to lock them up that cover, literally, millions of acres. So, I would just encourage that.

On page 11 of the Veterans in Parks Act, there is a mention of permit streamlining. And, of course, we have been working here in this Committee to try to streamline the use of NEPA and other things. And it is no surprise that this paragraph is in this bill because many folks, I am guessing veterans, don't really have 4 or 5 years to wait for permitting to actually happen. So, another thing that your group could help us with is encouraging the streamlining approach that we have been trying to use with NEPA, and for reasons far greater than those, or in addition to those that are in this bill.

And, again, you have this Committee, you have this 22 million people. I am just encouraging you to use that power to accomplish the purposes that I think that are set forth in these bills. Can you

give us any hope that you might be able to do that in your committee, or is it just too difficult, politically?

Mr. BEREJKA. It is not too difficult politically, especially relative to permitting. In fact, Congressman, at the break my colleague, Naz, and I were talking about the challenges that she faces as an REI employee in securing permits from the Federal Government for the programs that the co-op facilitates on Federal public lands, and the wait time. It is a drag on our business.

As a result, we have actually been working on permitting reform up here on the Hill for almost close to a decade. But I am told that we should be cautiously optimistic that this Committee and on the Senate side there will be passage of the SOAR Act, and inclusion in a bill that may see the President's signature by the end of the year. So, on permitting specifically, cautious optimism after a decade of work.

On the engagement of our member base, my colleague back at headquarters, Alicia, will be overjoyed to hear that Congress is asking that we step up our use of our member base to use their voice, and I will bring that to the company leadership and say Congress is asking us to do a little bit more with our member base in terms of advocacy. Thank you.

Mr. BENTZ. As long as that is our kind of advocacy.

[Laughter.]

Mr. BEREJKA. We are all here because we love the outdoors.

Mr. BENTZ. Yes. I yield back, thank you.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. I want to echo what he just said. I think about my three daughters, all young adults who have shopped at REI. You can have a great influence on them with this message, because they hear the message in regards to, generally, environmentalism and things like that, and they hear it from you folks, amongst many other sources. It would be really good for them to hear a little bit of that flip side that, if we have such stringent regulations in place, that projects are not going to get done, and projects that I think they would view as being very important and good for people generally. So, you guys have a powerful voice in that and I sure hope, just as Mr. Bentz said, that you will use that platform that you have, because it is influential.

Mr. BEREJKA. Thank you, and I really appreciate the fact that there is a camera here and that we are recording this, because I am going to take this back and we are going to share it around the leadership team, no doubt.

Mr. TIFFANY. I would like to recognize the gentleman from Arizona for 5 minutes, Mr. Crane.

Mr. CRANE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate it, and I did want to say something to Chairman Westerman real quick, sir.

Though you may not be a veteran of our Armed Forces, you most certainly are a veteran of this place. And as somebody who has been deployed three times into combat, I can tell you that this might be one of the most dangerous environments I have ever worked in. So, I am glad, sir, that you are getting out into the wild and fishing or casting, or whatever you are doing.

On that note, Mr. Cline, thank you again for being here, sir. I want to ask really quickly, sir, this land that we are trying to

convey from the Federal Government to Gila County, what is it currently being used for?

Mr. CLINE. Well, thank you, Congressman. Can you restate that? What it is currently used for?

Mr. CRANE. Yes, sir. What is this land and the buildings and structures on this land currently being used for?

Mr. CLINE. As I mentioned earlier, it was a combined district with another one, so it was totally vacated. Part of it, there are 10 acres of this property that is currently being used for fire suppression activities. They have an engine crew station there. The rest of it, the 232 acres is what Gila County has under permit. And currently, we have just been going through the remodels and setting the site up for the veterans retreat.

Mr. CRANE. Thank you. So, the part that we are looking at conveying right now isn't being used actively for anything, is that correct?

Mr. CLINE. That is correct.

Mr. CRANE. OK. Thank you, sir. What about the buildings that are on the site? Were they scheduled to be torn down?

Mr. CLINE. Yes. According to the conversations I had in 2017 with the district ranger at the time, there was going to be an effort taking place to auction off what they could, and then dismantle and remove what they couldn't on the buildings.

Mr. CRANE. And that is one of the things that I love so much about this project, is that you are not coming here, Mr. Cline, and asking the Federal Government for any money. You are actually trying to take something that is a beautiful piece of land that is not being used anymore, and revitalize it into something amazing for some of our nation's finest individuals. Is that correct?

Mr. CLINE. That is correct. We want to totally repurpose all the buildings that are there, and also looking to adding one or two more in the next stage.

Mr. CRANE. Yes, thank you so much. Gila County, Arizona is home to over 500,000 veterans. Mr. Cline, can you briefly explain to the Committee how much passing this legislation would mean for the veteran community in your county?

Mr. CLINE. This site will only be one of two sites in Arizona. There is one in the southern part of Arizona and one in the northern part. We have numerous veterans across the rim country right there, in the northern part. It is not only for Arizona, but it will be opened up for the nation, for whatever group or individual has a use for it.

It is huge for our local community, as well. We have a local veteran group there of about 100 people, right there in that small town. And then right there between us and Payson there are roughly another 5,000 to 7,000 more right there.

So, having this accessible not only to the local members, the state members, the national members, but also we are adjacent to the White Mountain Apache Tribe that is not very far away, that has a number of veterans in that reservation, as well, that have been a big supporter of this project. So, it means everything to these folks.

Mr. CRANE. Thank you, sir.

A little bit about myself really quickly. I deployed in the SEAL teams in 2006, 2008, 2010, all three times to Iraq. I lost a lot of friends while I was overseas, and even when I left. When I came back, I struggled with a lot of different issues that I don't typically talk about a lot, and I can tell you one of the best things for me in my healing process was to get out into the wild.

And I appreciate that you have spearheaded this effort, sir, that you have worked on it for so many years, and I think it is going to be a real blessing to the district and to the county. So, thank you so much for doing it.

Mr. CLINE. Thank you, sir.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields.

We want to thank you for your service to our country and all the work you did, and we thank you for your continued service out here in Washington, DC.

I think we went through everyone here. I would like to thank all the witnesses for their testimony and Members for your questions.

Members of the Subcommittee may have additional questions for the witnesses, and we will ask that you respond to those in writing. Under Committee Rule 3, members of the Subcommittee must submit questions to the Subcommittee Clerk by 5 p.m. on Tuesday, July 25, 2023. The hearing record will be held open for 10 business days for those responses.

If there is no further business, without objection, the Subcommittee on Federal Lands stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:23 a.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

[ADDITIONAL MATERIALS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD]

Statement for the Record
Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Department of the Interior
on H.R. 2468, Mountain View Corridor Completion Act

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this Statement for the Record on H.R. 2468, the Mountain View Corridor Completion Act. The bill directs the conveyance of approximately 36 acres of Federal lands within the administrative jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to the state of Utah to be used for public or transportation purposes.

The parcels proposed for conveyance under H.R. 2468 have been withdrawn for military purposes since 1914 and are not actively managed by the BLM. The BLM has no objection to the bill and would welcome the opportunity to work with the sponsor on certain technical modifications.

Background

According to the Record of Decision issued by the Federal Highway Administration, Utah Division, the construction of the Mountain View Corridor freeway is intended to address the need for a continuous north-south transportation facility from western Salt Lake County to northern Utah County, which has been identified in long-range transportation plans since the 1960s. The corridor is in the vicinity of the approximately 24,000-acre Utah National Guard training site at Camp Williams, which is comprised of both Federal and State lands.

H.R. 2468

H.R. 2468 directs the Secretary to convey approximately 36 acres under the administrative jurisdiction of the BLM to the State of Utah within 60 days of enactment and without consideration. Under the bill, the proposed conveyance would revert to the Department if the Secretary and the Governor determine that any portion of the land is sold or not used for public or transportation purposes. The bill also requires the BLM to create a map and legal description of the lands proposed for conveyance.

Analysis

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 stipulates that the conveyance or sale of public lands may occur when it is determined to be in the public interest and is consistent with approved land use plans that have been developed with public involvement and environmental analysis. FLPMA also requires that such lands be conveyed for no less than their appraised fair market value. However, Congress has provided mechanisms to transfer public lands to local governments and nonprofits at little or no cost to be used for public purposes in certain circumstances. The BLM is not aware of any natural resource management concerns on the 36 acres proposed for conveyance and has no objection to the bill given its assurance that the lands to be conveyed will be for public purposes or to meet transportation needs benefiting the public and the Utah National Guard at Camp Williams.

Additionally, the BLM notes that finalizing the boundaries of the conveyance and completing necessary environmental reviews may not be possible within the 60-day time frame provided to complete the conveyance. The BLM recommends allowing additional time to define and adjust the boundaries as necessary to ensure the final proposal is sufficient to meet any requirements for use as a public road operated by Utah Department of Transportation. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the sponsor on technical modifications to address these issues.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this statement for the record.

Submissions for the Record by Rep. Westerman

Statement for the Record

**Duane Taylor, Director
Safe and Responsible Use Programs**

On behalf of the Motorcycle Industry Council¹ (MIC), Specialty Vehicle Institute of America² (SVIA), and Recreational Off-Highway Vehicle Association³ (ROHVA)—together referenced as the Associations, I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in support of, and asking for additions to, the discussion draft titled Military and Veterans in Parks (MVP) Act which seeks to improve access and opportunities for military service members, veterans, and Gold Star Families to enjoy outdoor recreation on federal lands.

At the outset the Associations thank you for this draft legislation. The powersports industry and its broader community of activists, enthusiasts, riders and drivers have long supported our veterans and others with physical disabilities by hosting rides and other events. As a result, we recognize this legislation would create new opportunities for returning service members and others with challenges.

The industry itself has stepped up to make sure our veterans and others with disabilities can get outdoors and recreate. Just last month Indian Motorcycle and Veterans Charity Ride partnered to celebrate June as Veteran Motorcycle Therapy Month which included several motorcycle rides throughout the month and an off-road excursion to Gateway, Colorado. Late last year “Can-Am and the Road Warrior Foundation (RWF) hosted an epic “Adventure Therapy” ride for a group of military Veterans that covered more than 1,000 miles aboard the Can-Am Spyder.”

One of many examples of industry sponsored organizations that get veterans outdoors on off-highway vehicles is the Warfighter Made Mission. This organization, sponsored by Polaris, and Fox among others provides, “. . . Recreational Therapy to service members, veterans, and their families with a fleet of Polaris RZR’s for enjoyment on a private off-road course. Several vehicles are adapted for those with catastrophic injuries. These events improve quality of life, mental health, and bring families together in a fun and positive environment.”

State and local off-highway vehicle clubs and associations also host veterans’ rides across the country. One such example is the annual Thank You for Your Service ride hosted by the Iowa OHV Association. The first such event, held in 2018, “. . . consisted of thirty members from Iowa’s off-highway vehicle (OHV) clubs (who

¹The Motorcycle Industry Council (MIC) is a not-for-profit, national trade association representing several hundred manufacturers, distributors, dealers and retailers of motorcycles, scooters, motorcycle parts, accessories and related goods, and allied trades.

²The Specialty Vehicle Institute of America (SVIA) is the national not-for-profit trade association representing manufacturers, dealers, and distributors of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) in the United States. SVIA’s primary goal is to promote safe and responsible use of ATVs.

³The Recreational Off-Highway Vehicle Association (ROHVA) is a national, not-for-profit trade association formed to promote the safe and responsible use of recreational off-highway vehicles (ROVs—sometimes referred to as side-by-sides or UTVs) manufactured or distributed in North America. ROHVA is also accredited by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) to serve as the Standards Developing Organization for ROVs. More information on the standard can be found at <https://rohva.org/ansi-standard/>.

trailed their multi-passenger recreational off-highway vehicles (commonly referred to as “side-by-sides”) to the Iowa Veterans Home to give 100 veterans and staff members a ride on the grounds of the 150-acre facility.” Veteran’s Home staff were thrilled with the ride. “I was very excited to be part of this event. I’ve never seen so many happy residents,” said Matt McAllister, Recreational Therapist.” And “I have had many staff and residents express how great the opportunity was for the residents and how smoothly it went. There were a few residents who just were not sure of riding, but once they went, they wanted to go again,” said Emily Hall, Recreation Bureau Chief.

OHVs offer an opportunity for those with disabilities to engage in outdoor recreation that may not be available through other means. Dan Kleen, who was the catalyst for the Thank You for Your Service rides in Iowa, is an incomplete C-6 quadriplegic. Dan shared that he doesn’t take rides for granted, instead he views them as a gift he has been given as there was a time that he didn’t believe he would be able to get outdoors ever again. He recounted a story that means a lot to him. “I was at a Jamboree and participants were offered the chance to ride a new model ATV that was being premiered at the event. I left my wheelchair in my truck and set out on the ride with a group of riders and industry representatives that I didn’t know. When we stopped for lunch, I rode my ATV up to the picnic table and ate alongside the other riders. After 8 hours of riding, we returned to the trailhead and a friend brought my chair over so I could dismount. The other riders were stunned as they hadn’t realized that I had any limitations. That was a pretty fun day for me as I was able to keep up with all the riders and I felt 100% engaged in the sport.”

OHV recreation can provide important opportunities for many with disabilities to access the outdoors, and industry and enthusiasts are ready to step up to the plate and help. As a result, we support the Military and Veterans in Parks (MVP) Act and recognize that nothing in the legislation as drafted would disallow federal land management agencies from developing adaptive trails and opportunities that feature OHV recreation. But we suggest that OHV recreation should be specifically mentioned in two sections of the draft legislation.

First, we suggest adding “off-highway vehicle recreation” on page 4, line 7 of the draft, so section (a)(5) reads:

(5) CONFLICT AVOIDANCE WITH OTHER USES.—In developing each adaptive trail under paragraph (1), the Secretary concerned shall ensure that the adaptive trail——

(A) does not conflict with——

(i) the uses in effect before the date of the enactment of this Act with respect to any trail or road that is part of that adaptive trail;

(ii) multiple-use areas where biking, hiking, horseback riding, *off-highway vehicle recreation*, or use by pack and saddle stock are existing uses on the date of the enactment of this Act.

Secondly, please again add “off-highway vehicle recreation” on page 6, line 4 of the draft so section (b)(3) reads:

(3) ADAPTIVE RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES.—The adaptive recreation opportunities developed under paragraph (1) may include improving accessibility or access to—

- (A) campgrounds and camping areas;
- (B) hunting, fishing, shooting, or archery ranges or locations;
- (C) snow activities, including skiing and snowboarding;
- (D) water activities, including kayaking, paddling, canoeing, and boat launches;
- (E) rock climbing;
- (F) *off-highway vehicle recreation*
- (G) biking; and
- (H) any other recreation opportunities identified in consultation with stakeholders under paragraph (2).

As we have indicated above, off-highway vehicle recreation can be a vitally important way to get those with disabilities outdoors. So, again, we support the draft legislation, but urge the two minor suggestions above be implemented before introduction.

Thank you for your consideration.

