



March 20, 2024

The Honorable Tom Tiffany
Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Joe Neguse
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and Members of the Federal Lands Subcommittee:

On behalf of our more than one million members and supporters, The Wilderness Society (TWS) writes to express views on legislation being heard before the Subcommittee on March 20, 2024. We respectfully request that this letter be included in the hearing record.

H.R. 5499, Congressional Oversight of the Antiquities Act

TWS opposes H.R. 5499, sponsored by Representative Miller-Meeks (R-IA). Since it was signed by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1906, the Antiquities Act has been used on a bipartisan basis by 18 Presidents to protect America's most significant natural, scientific, cultural, and historic places, including the Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni - Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon, Statue of Liberty, Fort Monroe, and Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley National Monuments. This legislation represents a direct assault on this bedrock conservation law by seeking to impose restrictive measures that undermine the Act's fundamental principles and jeopardize its efficacy in preserving our nation's most cherished places.

The legislation would forcibly sunset national monument designations while limiting future designations, which blatantly undercuts the original intent of the Antiquities Act to protect places at urgent risk. It would also undermine the meaningful Tribal engagement at the center of many modern designation efforts, disregarding the sovereignty and expertise of indigenous communities whose cultural heritage and ancestral lands are often central to monument designations. Finally, Congress already has the power to pass legislation creating, revoking or modifying national monuments on a case-by-case basis. TWS therefore sees this additional layer of oversight completely unnecessary.

Furthermore, national monuments poll very well with voters across party lines. Per the Colorado College's 2024 Conservation in the West Poll, 85% of westerners support creating new national parks and monuments to protect historic sites and areas for recreation.

For these reasons, TWS opposes this legislation and urges members of the Subcommittee not to advance it.

H.R. 6085, To prohibit the implementation of the Draft Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for the Rock Springs RMP Revision, Wyoming

The Wilderness Society opposes H.R.6085 sponsored by Representative Hageman. The bill would block implementation of the Bureau of Land Management's Rock Springs Resource Management Plan. Finalization of a new Rock Springs Resource Management Plan is long overdue and there is an urgent need to update management for this landscape according to new research and community values.

This bill would undermine the extensive public process convened in Wyoming over the last decade to inform this plan. Among them have been many opportunities to discuss and provide input on the future management of these BLM lands for local stakeholders. Local governments, state agencies, and representatives from the Governor's Office regularly met with BLM to craft the plan components over the last decade. In 2023, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon convened a Rock Springs-focused taskforce with a variety of interest groups and elected officials, which successfully crafted multiple consensus-based management recommendations for BLM to consider. BLM also received comments from tens of thousands of individuals, elected officials, organizations, and businesses, which will inform adjustments for the final Rock Springs plan—unless this bill gets in the way.

Blocking implementation of this plan disregards years of public input from Wyomingites and the collaborative task force convened by Governor Gordon. Delaying the much-needed updates to land management prescriptions will harm Wyoming communities and jeopardize areas of critical wildlife habitat, cultural resources and unique recreational opportunities—not to mention create uncertainty public lands users for years to come. For these reasons, TWS opposes this legislation and urges the Subcommittee not to advance it.

H.R. 6547, Colorado Energy Prosperity Act

TWS opposes H.R. 6547, sponsored by Representative Boebert, which would circumvent a court-ordered public process to chart public land management in western Colorado for decades to come. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is conducting a public process to update its resource management plans for the Colorado River Valley and Grand Junction field offices as the result of a U.S. District Court of Colorado ruling and subsequent settlement agreement. The court found that the BLM violated the law with respect to its environmental analysis during the previous planning process for the Colorado River Valley Field Office and ordered the BLM to broaden the range of alternatives for oil and gas leasing and conduct a more robust analysis of air quality impacts. The new plan also considers areas of Tribal significance for increased protection. The Grand Junction plan suffered from the same legal deficiencies, and a challenge to that plan was settled between the parties and combined with the Colorado River Valley plan for additional analysis.

H.R. 6547 would prevent the BLM from completing its work on this public process and updating these two plans. If signed into law, this bill would force the BLM to disregard robust comments from the general public, including conservation stakeholders, municipalities, counties, and the State of Colorado on the draft plan, as well as feedback received through formal Tribal consultation. This landscape contains wilderness-quality lands, important wildlife habitat, cultural resources, recreation opportunities, and other natural resources. We are grateful for the work by the planning team at the BLM to improve management prescriptions throughout the field offices. We urge the Subcommittee to reject this legislation, and to instead allow the BLM to complete its public process, as required by the federal courts.

H.R. 7006, To prohibit natural asset companies from entering into any agreement with respect to land in the State of Utah or natural assets on or in such land

TWS opposes Representative Curtis's legislation to prevent a natural asset company from entering into any agreement with respect to land in the State of Utah or natural assets on or in such land.

The proposal for establishing natural asset companies was to facilitate investment in preserving natural areas, working lands, and ecosystem restoration. The objective was to assign monetary value to the land itself, rather than solely valuing the resources extracted from it.

This legislation propagates a baseless conspiracy theory linking these non-existent companies (the proposal never advanced past the conceptual stage) with the Bureau of Land Management's Conservation and Landscape Health Rule. Claims suggesting that these companies would have been part of a plot to harness the rule to privatize public lands are unequivocally unfounded.

This legislation is a red herring and TWS urges members of the Subcommittee not to advance it.

H.R. 6209, Sloan Canyon Conservation and Lateral Pipeline Act

The Sloan Canyon Conservation and Lateral Pipeline Act would expand the Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area by adding contiguous federal lands and provide for a right-of-way across federal public lands for the purpose securing water resources for Las Vegas valley residents. While the Wilderness Society is supportive of the NCA expansion, we have concerns with the current bill language and recommend that the Subcommittee make adjustments before reporting the bill.

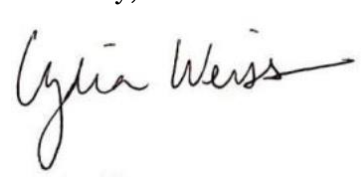
Specifically, The Wilderness Society supports the bill's provisions providing for the addition of 9,290 acres to the Sloan Canyon NCA. Protecting these lands is important to securing bighorn sheep habitat connectivity that allows movement to and from the NCA and the South McCullough Wilderness and Avi Kwa Ame National Monument to the south.

We are concerned about the bill's provisions regarding the public land resources outside of the NCA, which will see the most impact from the Horizon Lateral project. While the bill explicitly states that the Secretary of the Interior may include reasonable terms and conditions under FLPMA to protect "Conservation Area" resources, it is critical that the Secretary retain authority to protect public land resources inside *and* outside of the NCA. We accordingly urge the Subcommittee to amend section 3(h)(3)(A) to include other public land resources.

TWS generally believes the Secretary should retain discretion over when and where rights-of-way across public lands are granted, that industrial projects are not appropriate within units of the National Landscape Conservation System, and that grantees of rights-of-way should pay fair market value for the use of public lands. TWS also understands the unique geographic and public interest circumstances at issue here, and we appreciate the sponsor including provisions that ensure that the natural and cultural resources within the NCA will not be permanently adversely affected. We recommend that a mitigation and/or restoration fund be created with the cost savings of this alternative to be used to ensure all temporary impacts to the NCA and other public lands are restored and provide BLM funding to manage the NCA for its intended purposes of protecting natural and cultural resources.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lydia Weiss". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Lydia Weiss
Senior Director, Government Relations
The Wilderness Society

