



Opening Statement of Chairman Tom Tiffany

Subcommittee on Federal Lands

Oversight Hearing titled, “*EXPLORE America250: Celebrating One Year of the Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences Act*”

January 21, 2026

Good morning. Last year, Congress passed the EXPLORE Act, one of the most significant bipartisan recreation bills in a generation, and we are now overseeing how federal agencies are putting it to work.

Before I served in Congress, my wife and I owned and operated a riverboat cruise operation in northern Wisconsin called *Wilderness Cruises* for 20 years. Through this, we learned that public lands should be accessible not just in theory, but in reality.

Small outfitting and guiding businesses like the one I operated depend on public land access, clear rules, and reasonable permitting. My business employed local people; we served sportsmen, paddlers, hikers, and families; and we saw how outdoor opportunity sustains entire communities. To thousands of small businesses and gateway communities, the EXPLORE Act was a lifeline that made operating on public lands a little bit easier.

We are focusing our attention on implementation today because the enormous benefits of the EXPLORE Act cannot be

realized without aggressive action and attention from our federal land managers. Success or failure will mean the difference between whether veterans can access the outdoors more easily; whether kids can get outside and explore history and nature; whether sportsmen and women can reach target ranges and hunting areas; whether guides and outfitters can secure permits without losing a season; and whether families can access their parks during America's 250th birthday without being turned away from overcrowded infrastructure.

Luckily, the early signs are encouraging. And that's due to the steadfast leadership of President Trump, Secretary Burgum, and Secretary Rollins, who have been ensuring the EXPLORE Act meets every one of these benchmarks and more.

Agencies are digitizing passes, modernizing permits, expanding access for veterans and service members, identifying accessible trails, deploying Good Neighbor Authority to accelerate facility improvements, strengthening gateway community partnerships, and beginning work on expanded shooting ranges.

I am pleased to see Good Neighbor Authority, which Wisconsin helped pioneer, now being used to improve recreation infrastructure across the country. EXPLORE also expanded this vital tool so Tribes and counties can finally conduct vital cross-boundary forest management work. In conjunction, these improvements will allow non-federal partners to reduce fire risk, improve forest health, and build and maintain recreation assets on federal land instead of waiting years for Washington to notice a problem. Talk about a win-win.

The multitude of reforms in the EXPLORE Act matter for rural America. They support jobs, gateway communities, and small businesses that outfit, guide, feed, and house visitors. They will define how we experience America250. As families revisit our national battlefields, parks, and public lands this year, many will see new infrastructure, improved access, and period-accurate retellings of our shared story made possible through the EXPLORE Act.

On a final note, as we celebrate America's 250th anniversary this year, we remember that the freedom and liberties afforded to us by this great nation would never have been possible without the service and sacrifice of our brave men and women in the military. As we continue to honor our active-duty military service members, veterans, and Gold Star Families this year, I am encouraged to see both the Department of the Interior and Forest Service make the implementation of Title 2 of the EXPLORE Act a priority.

As we look toward the second year of the EXPLORE Act's implementation, I'd like to encourage both agencies to continue making the full implementation of this Title a top priority.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today and for the work that they do. We have a bipartisan panel with deep knowledge of the outdoor recreation economy, and I look forward to hearing more about what is working, what needs attention, and how Congress can continue to reduce barriers so more Americans can enjoy their public lands.

Thank you, and I yield back the balance of my time.