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Submitted by the Wilderness Society
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**Written Testimony to the House Natural Resources Federal Lands Subcommittee:
EXPLORE America250: Celebrating One Year of the Expanding Public Lands Outdoor
Recreation Experiences Act
Wednesday, January 21, 2026**

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the one year anniversary of passage of the EXPLORE Act. On behalf of our one million members and supporters, The Wilderness Society (TWS) joins in the celebration of the passage of this bill. This landmark legislation, if fully implemented, will significantly improve and expand recreation access on federal lands.

At the same time, our experiences over the last year have revealed potentially significant challenges in the implementation process. Our testimony will urge the Subcommittee to pay particular attention to the following issues:

1. During the past year, there have been significant staff reductions within the federal land management agencies. TWS urges the Subcommittee and the Congress to ensure that the agencies have sufficient staffing and budget to effectively implement this important legislation over the next five years.
2. The U.S. Forest Service has announced its intention to “repeal” its Travel Management Regulations at 36 CFR 212. This proposed action directly contradicts the terms of the EXPLORE Act and the MAPLand Act, 16 U.S.C. § 6854. We encourage the Subcommittee to verify that the Motorized Access provisions in section 127 of EXPLORE and in the MAPLand Act will be fully implemented through the agencies’ Travel Management Regulations.
3. When EXPLORE was enacted, the sponsors of the legislation acknowledged that the process of enacting the bill made it impossible to include a series of amendments that had been developed and negotiated on a bipartisan basis by the Committees of Jurisdiction. We urge the Subcommittee to begin the process of enacting an amendments package to refine and resolve some of the issues with the enacted version of the EXPLORE Act.

Impact of Changes Within the Agencies

We are grateful for the progress that has been made to date thanks to the efforts of agency staff. However, we believe that if the agencies had adequate staff and organizational capacity, the agencies could have made more progress implementing the provisions of EXPLORE.

Operations across the agencies have been significantly disrupted by staff reductions and agency reorganizations that have been implemented during 2025. Published reports indicate that the U.S Forest Service alone lost 16.5% of its staff, equal to 5,860 employees, between January and June 2025.¹ This scale of employee attrition represents a troubling and unprecedented loss of long term experience and institutional knowledge. This is exactly the kind of experience and knowledge that is needed for effective implementation of the EXPLORE Act.

Reports also indicate that over the next few months, the agencies may implement additional staff reductions as part of a broader effort to reorganize the Department of Agriculture.² Should the agencies continue to reduce their staff capacity, the remaining personnel will find it much more difficult to effectively implement and administer the provisions of EXPLORE. This will likely result in incomplete implementation of the law.

The Wilderness Society urges the Subcommittee and the Congress to take the necessary steps to ensure that the agencies have the staffing capacity required to effectively implement the EXPLORE Act. If the agencies do not have the resources they need, the benefits of the bill will never be fully realized.

Travel Management

The EXPLORE Act and the recently enacted MAPLand Act at 16 U.S.C. § 6854³ require the land management agencies to perform several functions relating to motorized travel on public lands that are currently mandated in the agencies' travel management regulations.

Specifically, EXPLORE requires the agencies to publish maps of roads and trails and identify which segments of each road and trail are open to use by motorized vehicles. MAPLand requires the agencies to provide status information on road and trail closures and to identify the classes of vehicles and types of recreational uses that are allowed on each segment of roads and trails. We believe the effect of these two laws, taken together, is

¹ USDA Office of Inspector General, 2025. Accessible at https://usdaoig.oversight.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2025-12/USDA%20Staffing%20Levels%20Final%20Report%20-%20Dec%2017_508-signed.pdf

² USDA Office of the Secretary, 2025. Accessible at <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/sm-1078-015.pdf>

³ Pub. L. 117-114 as amended by Pub. L. 118-234.

to codify portions of the agencies' longstanding Travel Management Regulations governing motorized use on federal lands.

Despite the codification of these requirements, the U.S. Forest Service has announced its intention to "repeal" its Travel Management Regulations governing motorized recreation on Forest Service lands.⁴ The agency's plan to repeal these regulations directly conflicts with the statutory mandates in EXPLORE and MAPLand.

We encourage the Subcommittee to use Wednesday's hearing to verify that the Motorized Access provisions in EXPLORE and in the MAPLand Act will be fully implemented through the agencies' Travel Management Regulations.

The Amendments Package

The U.S. Senate passed the EXPLORE Act on December 19, 2024, one day before the end of the 118th Congress. In order to get the bill to the President's desk, the Senate passed the version of EXPLORE that was passed by the House of Representatives in April of 2024.

Enacting the bill was a significant achievement. However, reverting to the April 2024 House bill meant that the Senate was unable to incorporate an extensive list of technical amendments and improvements into the EXPLORE Act before final passage. These amendments had been developed and negotiated during the summer and fall of 2024 on a bipartisan and bicameral basis.

The Wilderness Society believes many of the changes in the amendments package would significantly improve the bill and make it easier for both the agencies and general public to apply the bill in real world situations. For that reason, we urge the Subcommittee to use Wednesday's hearing as a catalyst and begin the process of enacting an amendments package to refine and resolve some of the issues with the enacted version of the EXPLORE Act.

Conclusion

The Wilderness Society thanks the Subcommittee for the opportunity to provide testimony on the implementation of the EXPLORE Act on the bill's one year anniversary.

⁴ Travel Management Rule Repeal, RIN: 0596-AD70, Office of Management and Budget, Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (Spring 2025). Accessible at <https://www.reginfo.gov/public/do/eAgendaViewRule?pubId=202504&RIN=0596-AD70>