

Statement for the Record
U.S. Department of the Interior
Before the
House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Legislative Hearing on
H.R. 34, Land and Social Security Optimization Act;
H.R. 1329, Smithsonian American Women’s History Museum Act; S. 282, Katahdin Woods
and Waters National Monument Access Act

February 10, 2026

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Department of the Interior’s (Department) views on the following legislation: H.R. 34, Land and Social Security Optimization Act, H.R. 1329, Smithsonian American Women’s History Museum Act; S. 282, Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument Access Act.

H.R. 34, Land and Social Security Optimization Act

H.R. 34, Land and Social Security Optimization Act (LASSO Act) would require the Department and the Department of Agriculture (the Agencies) to deposit 10 percent of annual revenue generated from public lands activities during the prior fiscal year into the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance Trust Fund. Importantly, the bill does not authorize the Agencies to raise fees or prices for activities on covered public lands, nor does it reduce existing revenue-sharing obligations to states, Indian Tribes, territories, or local governments.

Since 1982, the Department has collected through mineral leasing alone more than \$400 billion, with approximately \$220 billion directed to the U.S. Treasury. The Department recognizes the significant benefit these and other public-land revenues provide to the American people and the critical support public-land revenues deliver to states, Tribes, individual Indian mineral owners, deferred maintenance and various dedicated funds.

We appreciate the goal of H.R. 34 to strengthen Social Security consistent with the President’s unbreakable commitment to protecting and strengthening this vital program. However, we have concerns regarding the broad language used to define impacted revenues. The Department’s revenue collections fund numerous essential activities, including deferred maintenance on public lands, preservation of historic national treasures, hazardous fuels reduction, and wildfire prevention. Any reallocation of these funds must ensure that these critical responsibilities remain fully supported.

As currently written, the Department opposes H.R. 34. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the Subcommittee to refine the bill's language to clearly identify revenues that are not previously obligated by statute. This clarification will help achieve the legislation's objectives while safeguarding the Department's ability to fulfill its core missions.

H.R. 1329, the Smithsonian American Women's History Museum Act

H.R. 1329 would authorize the establishment of the Smithsonian American Women's History Museum (Museum) within the Reserve, the central cross-axis of the National Mall, as defined by the Commemorative Works Act (40 USC 89 et seq.) (CWA). The bill would authorize siting the Museum within the Reserve without specifying a location or requiring further review or approval. The Department supports establishing the Museum and recommends the bill authorize the President to determine the site location or identify a specific site location and establish a framework for interagency review and approval of that siting and design, consistent with the guidance and purposes of the CWA. We further recommend the National Park Service (NPS) be reimbursed for costs incurred by NPS to address impacts to park resources and accommodate increased vehicle and pedestrian traffic and other visitor services. We look forward to working with the Committee to ensure the bill identifies a suitable location that can accommodate a major museum building while maintaining the defining open-space character, protecting the National Mall's historic landscape, and avoiding substantial disruption to the visitor experience and ongoing operations.

The Department also wishes to convey the Administration's position that H.R. 1329 needs to include a statutory prohibition on the American Women's History Museum from depicting or identifying biological males as females or women. It is the policy of the United States to recognize the reality that sex is biologically determined and unchangeable.¹ The purpose of the American Women's History Museum is to recognize and honor women's history and contributions to the United States.² That purpose would be undermined by exhibits that falsely portray biological men as women.

Congress already has legislated guardrails on the American Women's History Museum's content, such as requiring that exhibits reflect the diversity of political viewpoints held by women of the United States.³ The Administration believes a statutory requirement that the Museum accurately define "women" is an additional guardrail necessary for this project to advance. This will prevent the Museum from being used to propagandize for an ideology that "attack[s] women by depriving them of their dignity, safety, and well-being."⁴

¹ Executive Order 14168 of January 20, 2025.

² 20 U.S.C. § 80t-1(b).

³ 20 U.S.C. § 80t-2(b)(4).

⁴ Executive Order 14168 of January 20, 2025.

S. 282, Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument Access Act

S. 282 would authorize land acquisition of approximately 2,500 acres adjacent to Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument for maintaining recreational activities such as fishing, hunting, noncommercial timber harvesting, and fiddlehead fern gathering. The bill would also provide the ability to establish an administration and maintenance facility in a gateway community that is serviced by commercial utilities.

While the Department supports expanding access to recreation for national park visitors, we do not support S. 282, as the NPS is focusing its resources on addressing existing critical needs, including reducing the deferred maintenance backlog. Adding more land to the Federal estate will further strain existing resources.

Should Congress choose to advance this legislation, the Department has several concerns and would like to work with the Committee to address them. In particular, the subject roads are part of a larger 2004 Crossing Rights Agreement among more than 30 local landowners for commercial land management, timber harvesting, and transportation of forest products. Each landowner is responsible for road maintenance and improvements and must indemnify other landowners against damages arising from the exercise of crossing rights. Unless a current landowner or another third party agrees to retain those obligations, NPS may be prevented from acquiring the roads and assuming those maintenance or indemnification responsibilities.

We would also like to work with the Committee on amendments to provide NPS with the flexibility to respond to changing circumstances over time, ensuring consistent management and reducing confusion for the public.