

**Statement for the Record
Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Department of the Interior**

**House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Federal Lands**

H.R. 7979, Public Lands Access Restoration Act

March 26, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this Statement for the Record on H.R. 7979, Public Lands Access Restoration Act.

The bill would establish a presumption that roads and trails on BLM-managed public lands that are currently designated as available for public motorized vehicles will remain available to such use unless the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) determines that there is clear and convincing evidence that a closure or restriction is necessary for resource protection or public safety. Within 180 days of enactment, the Department of the Interior (Department) would be required to issue or revise regulations to implement this new motorized vehicle access framework.

The bill would also create procedural requirements for any road and trail closures consistent with the new access framework, including posted signage, updated official maps, notice in the *Federal Register* and a local newspaper, and a 30-day public comment period. In addition, the Secretary would be required to review the closures every five years to determine whether they are still justified. Finally, H.R. 7979 would require the BLM to accept and consider proposals submitted by the public for additions to the designated motorized roads and trails network at any time, including during the development and revision of travel management plans. These nominations can include the designation of new motorized roads or trails, the repurposing or conversion of existing roads or trails, or the inclusion of roads or trails not previously identified in the BLM's route inventories. In considering such nominations, the Secretary would be required to give priority to proposals that improve connectivity within existing road or trail networks; protect natural resources; enhance access for fuels reduction, wildfire response, or other land management activities; or provide additional or enhanced opportunities for motorized recreation. Consideration of any proposal for the conversion of an administrative or currently closed road to a designated motorized road or trail must be completed as expeditiously as possible, but not later than 90 days after submission.

Secretary Burgum recently reaffirmed the Department's commitment to expanding public access to the land and waters it manages by issuing Secretary's Order 3447, *Expanding Hunting and Fishing Access, Removing Unnecessary Barriers, and Ensuring Consistency Across the Department of the Interior Lands and Waters*, which among other things, directs agencies to expand access and opportunities where compatible with law, safety, and conservation needs. The Department supports the Sponsor's goal of ensuring access to public lands in a manner that is safe, predictable, and consistent with the BLM's multiple use mandate under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and other applicable law.

The Department appreciates the bill's focus on improving access to public lands and recognizes the importance of ensuring that access decisions are clear, transparent, and consistent for the public. We note that developing and finalizing regulations to implement the new evidentiary standard for future road or trail closures would require more time than is currently provided by the bill, particularly given the likely interest in this important issue from State, Tribal, and local governments and the public. In addition, the bill's requirements to re-evaluate any future closures or restrictions every five years and to consider nominations for new motorized vehicle route designations within 90 days could divert staff and resources from other work prioritized by the Administration, including important energy and mineral development projects.

As noted above, the Department supports the Sponsor's goals of increasing access to BLM-managed public lands, which align with the Administration's efforts to implement the Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences (EXPLORE) Act. By expanding access, H.R. 7979 also aligns with Executive Order 14313, which prioritizes expanding access to public lands and waters for recreation, hunting, and fishing and with the Administration's Freedom 250 initiative because it would help highlight and celebrate the important resources available on public lands managed by the BLM. The Department would welcome the opportunity to work with the Sponsor and the Subcommittee on a few technical modifications to H.R. 7979 to aid implementation, refine timeframes, and ensure that the BLM can continue meeting its multiple use mandate under FLPMA. For example, we recommend that the bill language be adjusted to ensure that the BLM can still issue temporary closures, which are critical – yet limited – tools for emergency, public safety, and resource protection purposes.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this Statement for the Record.