



March 4, 2026

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Chair
House Committee on Natural Resources
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jared Huffman
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Westerman, Ranking Member Huffman, and Members of the House Committee on Natural Resources,

On behalf of our more than one million members and supporters, The Wilderness Society writes to express our views on the bills below, which are scheduled to be marked up by the committee on March 5, 2026.

H.R. 41, the Unrecognized Southeast Alaska Native Communities Recognition and Compensation Act – SUPPORT

The Wilderness Society supports H.R. 41 by Rep. Begich (AK). We have a long, established history of advocating for the conservation and protection of our country's invaluable natural places, including areas like Alaska's Tongass National Forest. Our advocacy has evolved to include prioritizing inclusivity and intersectionality, as well as Tribal Sovereignty and Tribal Self-determination, acknowledging that Indigenous Peoples are a foundational partner in stewardship and conservation of our public lands.

While our defense of the Tongass continues, we must correct the injustices faced by certain Native communities in Southeast Alaska. We acknowledge the fact that five Native communities were wrongfully excluded from the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act when the bill was passed in 1971, and we must, at a minimum, support efforts to correct this. And we trust in the communities of Haines, Ketchikan, Petersburg, Tenakee Springs and Wrangell to continue to steward this land as they have since time immemorial through their newly formed corporations.

For these reasons, TWS urges the Committee to support this legislation.

H.R. 398, the Geothermal Cost-Recovery Authority Act of 2025 – SUPPORT

H.R. 398 from Rep. Ocasio Cortez (NY) would add a subsection to Section 6 of the Geothermal Steam Act of 1970 that would allow the Department of the Interior (DOI) to charge geothermal applicants a fee to recover the costs of processing permits, conducting reviews, and inspecting geothermal operations. By enabling BLM to enter into cost recovery agreements with geothermal developers, this legislation will help ensure that the geothermal leasing, permitting, and inspection apparatus at BLM receives dedicated funding—in addition to some annual congressional appropriations—to keep core functions operating with certainty while also enabling the agency to conduct efficient reviews and inspections, engage in longer-term programmatic planning, and hire staff. This authority already exists in law for oil, gas, wind, and solar production on public lands, as well as other non-energy uses, and should apply to geothermal as well.

TWS supports this legislation and urges members of the Committee to advance it.

H.R. 1077, Streamlining Thermal Energy through Advanced Mechanisms (STEAM) Act – SUPPORT

The STEAM Act from Rep. Lee (NV) would amend the Energy Policy Act of 2005 to add certain geothermal exploration and development activities to an existing categorical exclusion for oil and gas activities, putting geothermal on par with oil and gas in certain narrow circumstances—such as low surface disturbance exploration activities, drilling on previously developed and previously studies sites, among others.

Public input and NEPA analyses are critical to effective decision-making. They identify potential resource conflicts early and evaluate alternatives to avoid, minimize, or mitigate them. This upfront work makes project approvals more durable and can ultimately speed up permitting. That said, TWS supports the renewable energy build-out, including expanding geothermal energy—and we do not believe that renewable energy activities should be held to a higher standard than analogous oil and gas activities with the same level of surface disturbance.

This legislation could be strengthened by requiring all Sec. 390 activities—including oil and gas development—be subject to an extraordinary circumstances review, so BLM can determine if a more rigorous environmental review is appropriate. While we oppose the underlying categorical exclusion as written, we believe that as long as it exists in law for oil and gas, it should also apply to geothermal activities.

TWS supports H.R. 1077 and urges members of the Committee to advance it.

H.R. 2252, North Dakota Trust Lands Completion Act of 2025 –

The Wilderness Society supports HR 2252, the North Dakota Trust Lands Completion Act, by Rep. Fedorchak. The Wilderness Society supports the elimination of state trust lands located within the Little Missouri National Grasslands and Indian reservations, which will reduce the threat of inappropriate development in these areas. We encourage Members of the Committee to advance this legislation.

H.R. 3553, the Building Resiliency and Understanding of Shrublands to Halt (BRUSH) Fires Act – SUPPORT

The Wilderness Society supports H.R. 3553, the BRUSH Fires Act, introduced by Representative Min (CA-47). Understanding the implications and risks of wildfire for communities within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) must continue to be a key point of discussion within the wildfire community. Taking stock of and gauging the effectiveness of existing wildfire mitigation methods and tools deployed in and around those communities is an important exercise in understanding how best to respond and adapt to the growing risk of wildfire near highly urban regions across the nation. TWS is concerned about the Forest Service's overly broad interpretation and application of the WUI definition as prescribed by the Healthy Forests Restoration Act and encourages the bill sponsors to incorporate a science-based evaluation of its efficacy.

H.R. 5576, the Enhancing Geothermal Production on Federal Lands Act (Fulcher ANS) – OPPOSE

TWS supports the aims of H.R. 5576, the Enhancing Geothermal Production on Federal Lands Act from Rep. Fulcher (ID), but the bill as written includes unacceptable language that must be amended—and the ANS eliminates the main supportable provision from the introduced bill.

Section 2 attempts to expedite permitting for geothermal exploration test projects and related covered activities—like off-road travel and access road maintenance and construction—by declaring them non-major federal actions, thereby waiving them from NEPA requirements entirely.

TWS holds that legislated NEPA waivers—where federal actions are deemed not subject to environmental review carte blanche—are unacceptable. We believe that existing NEPA mechanisms, including but not limited to effective programmatic planning and the analyses and tiering that come with it, provide ample authority and flexibility for efficient geothermal leasing and permitting. In fact, after a public input and environmental review process, the BLM finalized an administrative categorical exclusion for many categories of geothermal exploration test projects earlier this year. Should the Secretary, in consultation with lands management agencies, determine that additional categories of geothermal exploration test projects will not result in individually or cumulatively significant impacts, then another administrative categorical exclusion may be appropriate.

TWS opposes the ANS to H.R. 5576 as written and urges members of the Committee not to advance it.

H.R. 5587, the Harnessing Energy At Thermal Sources (HEATS) Act (Westerman ANS) – OPPOSE

The HEATS Act from Rep. Kim (CA) would amend the Geothermal Steam Act by adding a new Section 30 that eliminates the requirement that a geothermal operator apply for a federal

drilling permit in instances where a state-level permit has already been issued and where the subsurface geothermal estate is less than 50% federal. If enacted, this bill would exempt operations on millions of acres of split-estate lands from the federal permitting process, circumventing NEPA, Endangered Species Act, and National Historic Preservation Act requirements.

Such a measure would invalidate the public's right—as well as the right of impacted landowners with holdings over subsurface federal geothermal estate—to participate in the management of these lands and resources. Additionally, it would deny federal land management agencies the valuable contributions that the public and Tribes often provide in furthering the efficient and equitable management of federal resources. If enacted, the public and impacted split-estate landowners would also be denied the right to seek redress when resource management decisions occur that may violate the law.

Instead, operators would need only to seek state permits. State agencies often lack the capacity or authority to conduct holistic environmental reviews, engage federal, state, Tribal and local stakeholders, and identify any public health or safety concerns or other potential resource conflicts. We strongly believe that DOI should remain involved in all decisions pertaining to the federal subsurface estate to maintain an appropriate level of environmental review, public engagement, and adherence to the BLM's multiple-use and sustained yield mandate. While the bill does require states to provide a 30-day notification period to DOI of any approved permits, it does not empower the Department to decide whether permits should move forward.

TWS opposes H.R. 5587 and urges members of the Committee not to advance it.

H.R. 5617, the Geothermal Gold Book Development Act – SUPPORT

This legislation from Rep. Ansari (AZ) directs DOI to, within one year, create standard procedures and guidelines for efficient and responsible geothermal leasing and permitting. It then requires DOI to publish a “Geothermal Gold Book” within 180 days, for use by both BLM field offices, geothermal developers, and the public. The legislation also includes stipulations for consultation, what to include, and when to revise the Geothermal Gold Book.

The BLM's Gold Book for oil and gas leasing and permitting is a set of best practices for BLM staff and oil and gas operators to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to surface resources. It has become a critical tool not only for oil and gas developers, but also for BLM field staff responsible for leasing, permitting, and enforcement decisions. Having a corollary for geothermal developers and BLM field staff will help improve consistency and certainty across geographies.

TWS supports H.R. 5617, and we urge members of the Committee to advance it.

H.R. 5631, the Geothermal Ombudsman for National Deployment and Optimal Reviews Act – SUPPORT

This legislation from Rep. Hurd (CO) would create an ombudsman role at the BLM to help facilitate geothermal energy permitting, including knowledge sharing between field offices, best practices, and liaising with the geothermal industry. TWS supports these functions.

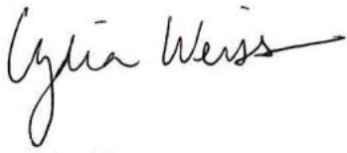
Notably, however, the legislation does not provide new funding to carry out its requirements. TWS remains concerned about congressional appropriations for the BLM, and for the Renewable Energy Management Program and Renewable Energy Coordination Offices – and adding this bill's requirements to the agency's long list of duties could deprive resources from other important clean energy permitting activities.

Moreover, the legislation directs the ombudsman to develop geothermal best practices for permitting and leasing. This would be best accomplished by the more holistic process set forth by H.R. 5617.

For this reason, TWS supports passage of H.R. 5631, H.R. 5617 and H.R. 398; the whole of this suite of bills is greater than the sum of the parts. The funding from H.R. 398 and the development of consolidated best practices directed by H.R. 5617 are both essential to the success of H.R. 5631.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Lydia Weiss" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Lydia Weiss
Senior Director, Government Relations
The Wilderness Society