

**WRITTEN STATEMENT OF GREG POSCHMAN  
PITKIN COUNTY COMMISSIONER  
U.S. House of Representatives Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands  
Hearing on H.R. 5499 and H.R. 6547  
March 20, 2024**

**INTRODUCTION**

Good morning, Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Committee. My name is Greg Poschman. I am a native Coloradan, an active outdoorsman and a Pitkin County Commissioner on the western slope of Colorado. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to H.R. 5499 and H.R. 6547 and to express Pitkin County's strong support for one of our bedrock federal laws, the Antiquities Act. Also, thank you for the opportunity to express our strong support for modernizing the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Resource Management Planning process.

**NATIONAL MONUMENTS & THE ANTIQUITIES ACT**

Eighty years ago, my father shipped out to chase the Nazis out of northern Italy. Through a cold late winter and spring in 1945, he and his fellow "Ski Troopers" of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division fought heroically in battle after bloody battle in the Apennine mountains, suffering one of the highest casualty rates of the war. They took Riva Ridge, Mt. Della Spe, and Mt. Belvedere, pushing the Germans across the Po Valley until their surrender at Lake Garda, Italy. Though never as famous as the storming of Normandy, taking northern Italy away from the Nazis helped win the war and defeat fascism. Seventy-seven years after their epic battles, Camp Hale, Colorado, their training ground, was designated a National Monument under the Antiquities Act. It was a proud moment for my family and the descendants of the 10th Mountain Division. Although my father was no longer alive to celebrate the new monument, he would have been grateful to see America finally honor his comrades, the ones who came back alive and those who didn't.

Like many Americans and visitors to the United States, I have had the great good fortune to visit the Grand Canyon with my family and witness its glorious scenery. As you know, President Theodore Roosevelt established the Grand Canyon as one of the earliest National Monuments under the Antiquities Act just two years after the act became law. Today, it is a national park, but like many of our great national parks, the path toward that designation started as a national monument.

In short, this act, signed into law in 1906, has led to the designation of more than 160 monuments, protecting our cultural heritage and some of our most treasured natural wonders. Of the eighteen presidents who have declared national monuments, nine have been Republicans, and

nine have been Democrats. This is clear testimony to its effectiveness and value for both parties and all proud Americans.

What I fear about the proposed legislation, H.R. 5499, is that it will weaken and water down a law written more than 100 years ago and a law that has worked so well for many years. Given Congress's deep divisions, land, statues, or buildings that need protection might easily be lost due to thoughtless and cynical political arguments. H.R. 5499 would sunset monument designations if not approved by Congress within six months or the end of that Congress (whichever is earlier). If passed, this bill would make permanent designations of places like Camp Hale much more challenging to achieve and a slap in the face to our veterans and to those who appreciate their sacrifice.

I want to remind you that Congress already has the power to pass legislation creating, revoking, or modifying national monuments on a case-by-case basis, so this cynically written legislation is completely unnecessary.

[Polling](#) has consistently demonstrated public support for national monuments. The [supermajority of Westerners](#) love national monuments and support their protections - [84 percent of Westerners](#) support presidents continuing to use their ability to designate existing public lands as national monuments to maintain public access and protect the land and wildlife for future generations.

People understand that a monument designation protects land from various types of industrial development and can help support their local economy. We can't let anti-conservation efforts undermine the president's ability to use the Antiquities Act. Bills like H.R. 5499 attempting to weaken the act are out of step with American conservation values.

### **BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT'S RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLANS**

H.R. 6547 would render useless essential updates to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) RMPs, taking us back to a time and place that no longer exists. The job of the BLM land in the West is no longer to lease exclusively for extractive potential. Growing populations in Colorado and the West are making new demands on our public lands. We have more ways to visit, enjoy, and utilize it and more sophisticated and comprehensive perspectives on protecting these essential public resources. The BLM draft resource management plans, as written, reflect a deeper understanding of the land and the diverse and growing population on it than previously.

What the BLM draft RMPs do, quite frankly, is modernize and correct a long-standing and narrow policy of taking land from the American people and leasing it to extractive boom and bust industries.

H.R. 6547 would prohibit the implementation of the Draft Resource Management Plan and Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the Colorado River Valley and Grand Junction field offices. The BLM controls more federal land than any other agency—close to 245 million acres nationwide. A recent [analysis](#) by The Wilderness Society shows the oil and gas industry has had access to lease more than 90% of this vast expanse of land. That number is even higher in Colorado: 94% of the 8.3 million acres in Colorado.

After over 111 years of federal subsidy with the people's money, the oil and gas industry has been stockpiling leases, and currently, more than 6,700 approved leases are going unused. Of the 36 million acres under lease across all BLM lands, only 12.6 million acres (35%) are in production, leaving more than 23 million acres of American land locked up by the oil and gas industry and under real threat of degradation.

This is an industry that does not go light on the land. Anyone who has ever flown over, driven, or hiked the west where leases have been developed will see a vast network of roads, settling ponds, pipes, and compressor stations. What were once pristine landscapes are now heavily industrialized, ruining vast stretches of wildlife habitat, hunting country, and what might have been great areas for American recreation. With our current essential focus on reducing carbon emissions, it has been discovered that thousands of these wells and pipelines are leaking methane and other greenhouse gasses, exacerbating an existential problem.

With the BLM's Draft RMPs and Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, the agency is finally right-sizing its planning process to balance other uses, including conservation and recreation, which have become more valuable to the American people. H.R. 6547 would prohibit the agency from considering the extensive input it received through public comment.

The BLM's proposed management plans seek to fairly consider important stakeholders that represent significant value beyond the oil and gas industry. Among those stakeholders are the tens of thousands of men and women whose livelihood depends on the recreational uses on BLM land. Consider this: In 2021, oil and gas provided about 20,000 jobs in Colorado. Outdoor recreation provided more than sixfold that number at close to 125,000 jobs. And, of course, over 40 million Americans downstream depend upon clean water that flows from these lands, for they are our national "water towers," containing the mountain aquifers and streams that support our lives and livelihoods.

One of the goals of Pitkin County, the Colorado General Assembly and the nation at large is to address climate change's imminent and obvious dangers. Whether you're a rancher or farmer witnessing severe droughts, a tourism operator worried about dry summers and about winters shortened by over a month, or a wildlands firefighter risking your life to fight repeated and disastrous fires on federal lands, the dangers of climate change caused by the continued use of

carbon-intensive oil and gas cannot be denied by any but those most willfully refusing to study the science, and those who profit from intentional neglect. To wit, a 2023 [study](#) by the Union of Concerned Scientists found that 37% of the area burned by forest fires in the western U.S. and southwest Canada since 1986 can be attributed to heat-trapping emissions from the world's largest fossil fuel producers.

My community is surrounded by federal lands that will be directly impacted by the BLM's Colorado River Valley RMP.

Over 83 percent of Pitkin County is federal public land. It is home to the White River National Forest and the iconic 14,000-foot Maroon Bells. These public lands contribute to our world-class outdoor recreation experiences and help ensure our local economy thrives. Numerous grazing allotments on BLM and Forest Service lands maintain the historic ranching cultural identity alongside tourism and ski resorts throughout Pitkin County.

Our public lands, farming, ranching heritage, and thriving outdoor recreation economy make Pitkin County a uniquely desirable place to hunt, fish, ski, hike, bike, and raft. However, our public lands are challenged by a changing climate, continued population growth, and increased demand for natural resources, development, and outdoor recreation.

Oil and gas leases last at least ten years whether the company drills or not and if wells are drilled, then leases can be extended for decades, precluding other activities like recreation, cattle grazing or hunting. The lands under lease also take away the opportunities to manage these lands for conservation purposes, including protecting watersheds and wildlife habitat.

It's important to note that the BLM is conducting a public process to update its management plans because a federal court found the agency violated the law in approving the prior version of these plans. H.R. 6547 would prohibit the agency from considering the extensive input it received through public comment from Pitkin County and the general public by prohibiting the agency from finalizing this process.

As stated in an [article](#) by E&E News, "One of the primary explanations BLM offers for reducing oil and gas access is to protect specific cultural and Native American sites from drilling, roads and pipelines that could damage them, reflecting their larger stated goal of increasing tribal consultation and answering a long-standing complaint of Native American leaders."

Most of Colorado's oil and gas-producing regions have been in production for decades, some for over 50 years. The industry has had plenty of time to lock up as many federal lands for oil and gas leasing as it has desired. The BLM's proposed new plan for these areas is emblematic of what a balanced, multiple-use management plan should look like from the agency, where lands

with no, low and moderate potential and lands with significant ecological or cultural resources are closed to future oil and gas leasing; and existing leasing and development would be able to continue.

It is important to stress that our region's economies are changing and diversifying. A 2023 [report](#) by the Colorado Fiscal Institute shows that continuing the BLM's status quo oil and gas leasing process could negatively impact Colorado's economy and recreation economy in particular.

The report illustrates that winter recreation in Colorado, like skiing, “generated about \$1.3 billion in economic activity in 2021, or about a quarter of snow sports' \$5.2 billion in economic output in the entire country.”

Notably, the report states that, unlike oil and gas extraction, winter recreation sports don't “require the cleanup and plugging of abandoned wells. Also, the outdoor recreation industry doesn't contribute to climate change and the increasing severity of forest fires as the fossil fuel industry does.

The report concludes, among other things, “that in choosing to downsize oil and gas development in tourist areas of Colorado, the BLM will fall in line with recent climate goals set by Congress and the Colorado General Assembly to address ‘the harmful impacts that the oil and gas industry have on our health, economy, and climate’ and, possibly, help protect one of Colorado's most important economic drivers.”

Protecting our natural resources while maintaining a thriving economy is a balancing act. The BLM's Resource Management Planning process is critical for achieving this balance. It considers the input of all stakeholders on how a BLM area should be managed. It helps elected officials like me and my constituents to work with the BLM in managing the delicate ecosystems we rely on for clean air and water for recreation and agriculture. Protecting these areas by recognizing their actual value to a diverse population of beneficiaries is especially important with the imminent threats to western water and the increased wildfire dangers. RMPs promote the BLM's multiple-use mission and allow collaboration among users, including timber, grazing, extraction, mining, and recreation - for the benefit of all.

The BLM's Resource Management Plans (or RMPs) are a critical planning tool for managing landscapes for multiple use. However, many of the BLM's RMPs are woefully outdated and don't reflect current conditions on the ground or adequately address current needs.

Eighty-five percent of BLM lands in our Colorado River Valley Field Office have been open to oil and gas development for decades. These include popular recreation and wildlife areas on the Colorado and Eagle Rivers.

These BLM lands are essential in supporting world-class recreation opportunities that create Colorado's \$9.6 billion outdoor recreation economy. Tourism and outdoor recreation account for over 50% of Pitkin County's annual revenues. Pitkin County has worked hard to create a diversified economy that includes and balances development while conserving our public lands. We rely on having federal land management partners that work with us to balance these needs.

If enacted, H.R. 6547 would tie the hands of the BLM, undermining the agency's ability to manage critical public lands in my county, across western Colorado, and around the West.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, I commend the BLM agency staff for leading an inclusive public process to update our RMP. They have conducted extensive outreach to solicit public comments from all stakeholders. H.R. 6547 would undo all that work.

I support the Antiquities Act and modernizing the BLM's Resource Management Planning process. As climate change, energy development, and recreation and tourism continue to grow in Pitkin County and Colorado, the Antiquities Act and updated RMPs are critical tools for preserving America's historic and cultural sites and treasured landscapes for future generations.

Thank you.