

**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. 1614, Range Access Act**

March 28, 2023

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this Statement for the Record on H.R. 1614, the Range Access Act, which would require the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to establish and manage a developed shooting range in each of the respective agency's districts within five years of enactment.

Background

The Department of the Interior is committed to supporting the outdoor recreation economy and the many benefits that recreational activities offer for our communities and economies. President Biden reflected this priority by recommending increasing access for outdoor recreation as one of the six early focus areas of the America the Beautiful initiative, and re-launching the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation. In addition, the Department is advancing these priorities as guided by the Great American Outdoors Act; the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act (Dingell Act); Executive Order (E.O.) 14008, *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*; and E.O. 13985, *Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government*.

The BLM manages approximately 245 million surface acres, located primarily in 12 western states under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act. The BLM remains committed to its core mission of multiple use and sustained yield, which provides for a careful balancing across many uses and resources to steward the public lands for current and future generations. Under the BLM's multiple use mandate, the BLM manages public lands for a broad range of uses, such as renewable and conventional energy development, livestock grazing, timber production, hunting and fishing, recreation, and conservation – including protecting cultural and historic resources.

Outdoor recreation is one of the most popular activities on the public lands managed by the BLM. In 2022, BLM-managed public lands attracted approximately 81 million visitors – an increase of 8 million visitors from 2020. A remarkable variety of recreational activities are enjoyed on our nation's public lands, including camping, off-highway vehicle riding, mountain biking, river running, hiking, horseback riding, climbing, hunting, fishing, and more.

In general, target shooting is allowed on the vast majority of BLM-administered public lands, being prohibited only on developed recreation sites and areas specifically closed to recreational shooting. The BLM works with local communities to determine whether to establish designated shooting ranges through evaluating appropriate locations, and assessing interest, need, public safety, and the level of development for the site. By working with local communities, the BLM

has established nine shooting range sites in five different states, with plans to open two more in BLM Arizona's Phoenix District in the near future.

H.R. 1614, Range Access Act

H.R. 1614 would require the BLM and USFS, after determining if allowable under law and management plan, to establish and manage a developed shooting range in each district managed by the agencies that does not already have a range, within five years of enactment and subject to available appropriations. The bill allows the agencies to enter into an agreement with another entity to establish and maintain the shooting range. The two agencies are also required to coordinate with several groups on the construction of the ranges, including Tribes, State and local agencies, and shooting clubs, and to consult with these groups on ways to maximize private funding for the construction. Additionally, under the bill, both BLM and the USFS are to cooperate with these stakeholders and partners to ensure that any shooting range constructed under the bill will not impact any nearby non-Federal shooting ranges.

The bill further requires the agencies seek to ensure that there is a designated shooting range meeting the requirements of the bill or located adjacent to BLM- or Forest Service-managed lands and available for public use prior to closing an area to recreational shooting, except in emergency situations. The bill also specifies that agencies may not require a user to pay a fee to use the shooting ranges. Finally, H.R. 1614 requires submission of an annual report to Congress on progress toward meeting the requirements of the law.

Analysis

While the BLM recognizes the sponsors' interest in increasing access to designated shooting ranges and the need to do so in some places to ensure public safety and minimize user conflicts, the BLM cannot support the bill at this time due to the significant challenges in developing and maintaining the proposed number of shooting ranges, which would also involve removal of lead ammunition, clean-up of hazardous materials, and berm management. The BLM notes in some locations, exercising BLM's authority to charge a user fee may be warranted for the purposes in the bill, given the large number of designated shooting ranges envisioned. In addition, the bill does not acknowledge the importance of public input and assessing community interest in development of designated shooting ranges in its districts.

Further, while some districts need designated shooting ranges to promote safety and discourage leaving trash and lead waste on our public lands, others do not. Nor does every district have sites that would be optimal for management of designated shooting ranges. The BLM notes that over 99 percent of public lands are open to recreational shooting, and the BLM works with local communities and our partners to provide safe access for these opportunities, while continuing to identify areas that would function best as designated shooting area on public lands. In addition to the nine designated shooting range sites currently managed by the BLM, there are also 26 shooting ranges on public lands that are administered by non-Federal entities through a Recreational & Public Purpose (R&PP) Act lease, and 56 shooting ranges that have been patented and conveyed under the R&PP Act. In total, the BLM has provided support for a total of 91 designated shooting ranges through direct management under the R&PP Act.

The BLM defers to USFS regarding the bill's provisions affecting the management of lands under their jurisdiction.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this statement for the record.