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**Committee:** House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands  
**Event:** [Legislative Hearing on H.R. 184, H.R. 2785, H.R. 7695, H.R. 8682, H.R. 8686, H.R. 8688 and H.R. 8735](#)  
**Date:** May 21, 2026

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**Executive Summary:** On Thursday, May 21, 2026, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands held a hearing to discuss seven bills focusing on public land management, wildfire risk reduction, military land withdrawals, and historical preservation:

- [H.R. 184](#) — Action Versus No Action Act
- [H.R. 2785](#) — New Mexico Land Grant-Mercedes Historical or Traditional Use Cooperation and Coordination Act
- [H.R. 7695](#) — To provide that the final rule titled “Special Areas; Roadless Area Conservation” and issued on January 12, 2001 (66 Fed. Reg. 3244) shall have no force or effect and require the Secretary of Agriculture to construct certain roads on National Forest System lands, and for other purposes.
- [H.R. 8682](#) — Accelerating Forest Management Act
- [H.R. 8686](#) — To amend the Military Land Withdrawals Act of 2013 to withdraw and reserve certain public land in the vicinity of Yuma Proving Ground, Arizona.
- [H.R. 8688](#) — Forest Health and Wildlife Risk Reduction Act
- [H.R. 8735](#) — American Sovereignty and Monterey Historic Military Site Study Act

Republican members argued that excessive litigation, bureaucratic delays, and the 2001 Roadless Rule have crippled active forest management and fueled catastrophic wildfires across the West. Democrats countered that repealing the Roadless Rule and other land management policies would harm the environment and outdoor economy, arguing that development actually increases the risk of human-caused wildfire.

### **Member Toplines<sup>1</sup>:**

*Subcommittee Chairman Tom Tiffany (R-WI-07):* Tiffany stressed that decades of bureaucratic delay and avoiding active management have left millions of acres of federal land at high risk for catastrophic wildfires. Tiffany praised the Republican bills at hand for streamlining *National Environmental Policy Act* (NEPA) reviews, removing blanket prohibitions like the 2001 Roadless Rule, and codifying categorical exclusions for timber salvage and thinning.

*Full Committee Ranking Member Jared Huffman (D-CA-02):* Huffman strongly opposed the repeal of the 2001 Roadless Rule (H.R. 7695) and argued that building more roads will actually increase fires. He said the Trump administration’s efforts to repeal the rule are due to corporate influence, not concern for the health of federal lands.

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<sup>1</sup> Member opening statements not available at the time of this memo’s distribution.

*Subcommittee Ranking Member Joe Neguse (D-CO-02):* Neguse praised the Democratic bills before the Subcommittee as “community-driven” approaches to land management. He also expressed support for H.R. 8688 while criticizing other Republican proposals for repealing the Roadless Rule, reducing public involvement and transparency, and sidelining science.

***Witness Toplines - Panel I:***<sup>2</sup>

*Rep. Tom McClintock (R-CA-05):* McClintock spoke in support of his bill, H.R. 184, arguing that the current NEPA process causes "bureaucratic paralysis by analysis" by forcing agencies to painstakingly evaluate endless hypothetical alternatives while forests deteriorate. He said his bill would restore NEPA as a practical decisionmaking tool, allowing land managers to act before overgrown and stressed forests inevitably burn.

*Rep. Teresa Leger Fernandez (D-NM-03):* Leger Fernandez said H.R. 2785 would improve communication about existing authorities, rather than granting new powers, to prevent conflicts between the federal government and local communities.

*Rep. Paul Gosar (R-AZ-09):* Gosar spoke on his bill, H.R. 8686. He said the legislation would withdraw nearly 22,000 acres of federal lands to support the U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground's mission test while still protecting wildlife habitats, cultural resources, and recreation.

*Rep. Harriet Hageman (R-WY-AL):* Hageman said the Roadless Rule, which H.R. 7695 would repeal, created an "environmental catastrophe" by unilaterally locking up 58.5 million acres of federal lands from effective management. She argued that the rule was implemented in violation of several laws, including NEPA, and that limiting road access has severely hindered active management for fuel reduction, ecological restoration, and disease control.

*Rep. Troy Downing (R-MT-02):* Downing discussed his bill, H.R. 8682, noting that recent large-scale die-offs of forests have significantly increased wildfire risk without routine removal of dead and dying timber. He said H.R. 8682 would codify two Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposed categorical exclusions for timber salvage and reauthorize the Forest Ecosystem Health & Recovery Fund to support the BLM in rapidly responding to wildfires and restoring damaged forests.

*Rep. Jeff Hurd (R-CO-03):* Hurd advocated for his bill, H.R. 8688, which would codify a BLM NEPA categorical exclusion to speed up the review of targeted forest thinning projects on BLM lands. He said the bill focuses on projects under 5,000 acres and specifically excludes clear cutting, even age regeneration harvest, and the conversion of forests to non-forest uses.

*Rep. Jimmy Panetta (D-CA-19):* Panetta discussed the significance of his bill, H.R. 8735, to California's 19th congressional district.

***Witness Toplines - Panel II:***

[Major Gen. Patrick Gaydon, Commanding General, Army Test & Evaluation Command \(ATEC\), U.S. Army:](#) Gaydon discussed ATEC's support for H.R. 8686.

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<sup>2</sup> Opening statements for Panel I were not available at the time of this memo's distribution.

[Chris French, Associate Chief, U.S. Forest Service \(USFS\), U.S. Department of Agriculture:](#) French expressed USFS's support for H.R. 184, H.R. 7695, and H.R. 2785. He praised the first two bills for creating the flexibility needed for effective forest management.

***Witness Toplines - Panel III:***

[Douglas J. Nicholls, Mayor, City of Yuma, Arizona:](#) Nicholls expressed support for H.R. 8686.

[Bobbie Daniel, Commissioner, Mesa County, Colorado:](#) Daniel supported H.R. 8688, arguing that proactive thinning tools are necessary to prevent increasingly catastrophic wildfires. She discussed how wildfires devastate local watersheds and rural economies, and put tremendous strain on local governments for response efforts.

[Wyatt Frampton, Acting State Forester, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation:](#) Frampton supported H.R. 8682, explaining that the current 250-acre salvage categorical exclusion limit is insufficient for modern fires that span tens of thousands of acres. He called for predictable, codified tools to capture the economic value of dying trees while working to prevent wildfires.

[Brett Storey, Principal Engineer II, West Yost Associates:](#) Storey praised H.R. 184, drawing on his experience managing a California forest restoration project where analyzing only an action versus a no-action alternative cut NEPA review time and costs in half.

[Juan Sanchez, Chairman, New Mexico Land Grant Council:](#) Sanchez supported H.R. 2785.

[Chris Wood, President & CEO, Trout Unlimited:](#) Wood strongly opposed H.R. 7695's repeal of the Roadless Rule, arguing it strikes a "common sense balance" by permitting hazardous fuels management, forest health treatments, and other multiple uses like mining without the need for costly new roads. He said the prohibition on new roads makes sense given USFS's significant maintenance backlog of existing roads. Wood disputed claims that roadless areas exacerbate wildfires, noting that 85 percent of fires are human-caused and overwhelmingly start near existing roads. He warned that repealing the rule would threaten habitats for native fish and wildlife.

[Mark Miller, Director of Environment & Natural Resource Litigation, Pacific Legal Foundation:](#) Miller supported H.R. 7695 and called for a "definitive congressional rejection of the concept of roadlessness on the national forests."

***Major Takeaways:***

The 2001 Roadless Rule (H.R. 7695)

- A central point of contention during the hearing was whether building roads increases or decreases wildfire risk. Democratic members, including Reps. Huffman, **Susie Lee** (D-NV-03), **Andrea Salinas** (D-OR-06), **Maxine Dexter** (D-OR-03), **Emily Randall** (D-WA-06), and **Melanie Stansbury** (D-NM-01) strongly opposed repeal of the rule and argued that roads are a primary driver of fire ignitions.

- Huffman pressed French to commit to an economic analysis showing the potential losses to the outdoor recreation economy if roadless areas are disrupted, and asked if USFS will allow states to propose their own roadless rules. French replied that the agency is required to do such a cost-benefit analysis and that states are already able to develop their own roadless rules.
- Reps. Lee, Salinas, and Exter emphasized data demonstrating that the majority of wildfires are human-caused and ignite near existing roads.
- Salinas and Huffman also argued that the repeal will put additional strain on USFS's significant existing road maintenance backlog.
- Hageman spoke at length on the need to repeal the rule and emphasized that national forests were intended to be resources, not national parks, hence why forests are managed by the Department of Agriculture, not the Department of the Interior (DOI). She also highlighted Japan's successful forest management program, claiming their officials were "mystified" by the Roadless Rule, as Japan relies heavily on road-building to actively harvest older growth, regenerate young forests, and successfully reduce fire incidents.
- Rep. **Pete Stauber** (R-MN-08) argued the rule was illegally promulgated by the Clinton administration. Miller agreed and added that the Loper Bright decision even more so shows the need for congressional repeal of the rule. Tiffany also asked Miller to explain how the rule violates NEPA.

#### Wildfire Response and Land Management (H.R. 184, H.R. 8682, H.R. 8688)

- Lee discussed the Trump administration's proposal to move USFS firefighting functions to DOI under the new Wildland Fire Service. She pressed French for assurances that USFS would not move ahead with that proposal until it completed an independent study and received congressional approval. French said the agency does not plan to make any changes until the study is completed.
- Rep. Leger Fernandez expressed concern that the cancellation of the Upper Pecos withdrawal application will lead to mining operations in the area. She also expressed concern over the potential for new uranium mining in New Mexico.
- Reps. Hurd and Daniel stressed that burdensome federal processes hinder state and local preparation for wildfires and their impacts.
- Reps. Downing and Frampton discussed the need to codify the Trump administration's efforts to streamline forest management. Frampton emphasized the need to move faster so states can capture the economic value of dying trees while reducing wildfire risk.