



Committee: House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy & Mineral Resources

Event: [Legislative Hearing on H.R. 8003, H.R. 9640, H.R. 9649](#)

Date: July 21, 2026

Executive Summary:

On July 21, 2026 the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy & Mineral Resources held a hearing on three permitting and minerals mapping bills.

- Members across both parties agreed that improving permitting efficiency, expanding geological data collection, and advancing innovative mapping technologies are critical to strengthening domestic resource production.
- Republicans emphasized that expanding project eligibility under Title 41 of the *Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act* (FAST-41), reauthorizing Earth Mapping Resources Initiative (MRI), and deploying quantum-enhanced surveying technologies will accelerate the development of American energy and mineral resources.
- Democrats expressed support for streamlining permitting and strengthening resource data, but stressed the need to maintain strict environmental reviews, tribal consultation, and neutrality across energy sectors.

Considered Legislation:

- Expanding the Fast Track Act of 2026 ([H.R. 8003](#))
 - Sponsored by Rep. **Chris Deluzio** (D-PA-17)
- Earth MRI Reauthorization Act of 2026 ([H.R. 9640](#))
 - Sponsored by Rep. **Rob Wittman** (R-VA-01)
- Quantum-Enhanced Critical Minerals Mapping Act of 2026 ([H.R. 9646](#))
 - Sponsored by Rep. **Jeff Hurd** (R-CO-03)

Member Toplines¹:

Subcommittee Chair Pete Stauber (R-MN-08): Stauber argued the bills under consideration would strengthen U.S. competitiveness by improving the identification and responsible development of critical energy, mineral, and infrastructure projects. He highlighted H.R. 8003 for expanding FAST-41 eligibility to mid-sized projects, H.R. 9640 for reauthorizing and enhancing the Earth MRI Program to strengthen critical mineral supply chains, and H.R. 9646 for establishing a quantum-enhanced U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) survey program to improve subsurface mapping.

Subcommittee Ranking Member Yassamin Ansari (D-AZ-03): Ansari argued that stronger scientific data and more efficient permitting are complementary priorities needed to build the infrastructure America requires. She supported H.R. 8003 for extending FAST-41's eligibility,

¹ Opening statements were not available online at the time of this memo's distribution.

but criticized the Trump administration for applying the program inconsistently by delaying wind and solar projects.

Rep. Jeff Hurd (R-CO-03) : Hurd described H.R. 9646 as a tool to expand domestic mineral discovery and reduce foreign supply chain dependence. He explained that improved subsurface mapping can reduce unnecessary exploratory drilling, protect federal land, and lower development costs.

Rep. Chris Deluzio (D-PA-17): Deluzio described H.R. 8003 as a bipartisan effort to streamline permitting without weakening environmental protections.

Rep. Jeff Crank (R-CO-05): Crank said H.R. 8003 would allow more energy, manufacturing, and infrastructure projects to benefit from a faster, more predictable permitting process.

Witness Toplines:

Emily Domenech, Executive Director, Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council:

Domenech highlighted the Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council's (Permitting Council) success in reducing average project timelines and expanding the number of projects on the FAST-41 dashboard. She emphasized that FAST-41 does not weaken environmental laws but instead improves transparency and coordination through concurrent federal reviews. Domenech supported lowering the investment threshold to \$50 million to expand eligibility for broadband, water, and smaller energy infrastructure projects.

Ruarri Day-Stirrat, President, Association of American State Geologists: Day-Stirrat emphasized that the Earth MRI Program provides foundational, pre-competitive geologic data that reduces investment uncertainty and improves public land management decisions. He highlighted the program's federal-state partnership model, which combines federal funding with state geological expertise to build a comprehensive national geologic database. Day-Stirrat urged Congress to reauthorize the program.

Matthew Kinsella, CEO, Inflection: Kinsella explained that quantum gravity gradiometry enables ultra-high-resolution subsurface mapping without ground disturbance, improving the precision of critical mineral exploration. He argued that advancing quantum surveying capabilities is a national security imperative to compete with foreign critical mineral industries. Kinsella asserted that integrating quantum sensors into the Earth MRI Program would significantly improve exploration accuracy while reducing the environmental footprint of mining operations.

Matthew Heller, State Geologist, Virginia Department of Energy: Heller explained that Earth MRI funding has helped spur private-sector development of Virginia's heavy mineral sands resources and has facilitated critical mineral identification within abandoned mine waste, creating opportunities to offset legacy environmental cleanup costs. He praised the program for establishing consistent geologic mapping and data standards across participating states.

Eric Beightel, Federal Strategy Director, Environmental Science Associates: Beightel testified that expanding FAST-41 eligibility would extend project management and interagency

coordination practices to smaller, regionally significant infrastructure projects. He argued that the current administration has slowed clean energy permitting and said FAST-41's accountability measures lack sufficient authority to compel timely agency action. Beightel also urged Congress to strengthen public comment requirements, arguing that meaningful community engagement ultimately reduces project risk and improves outcomes.

Major Takeaways:

FAST-41 and Permitting Reform

- Stauber highlighted H.R. 8003's proposal to lower the FAST-41 eligibility threshold from \$200 million to \$50 million, arguing that expanding eligibility would allow more mid-sized infrastructure projects, particularly in rural communities, to benefit from streamlined permitting.
 - He emphasized that FAST-41 improves coordination while maintaining existing environmental review requirements.
- Rep. **Jeff Crank** (R-CO-05) attributed improved interagency coordination and project progression to independence of the Permitting Council.
- Reps. **Susie Lee** (D-NV-03) and **Jared Huffman** (D-CA-02) supported H.R. 8003, but questioned whether newly eligible solar and wind projects would actually benefit from FAST-41 if the Department of the Interior continues to delay clean energy projects.
 - They argued that permitting reform must be technology and project neutral rather than beholden to changing administration priorities.

Permitting Coordination and Federal-State Partnerships:

- Rep. **Yassamin Ansari** (D-AZ-03) and Huffman argued that most permitting delays are caused by staffing shortages rather than regulatory requirements.
- Hurd highlighted the Permitting Council's agreements with Utah, Alaska, and Idaho as examples of successful federal-state partnerships that align permitting timelines and reduce bottlenecks.
- Huffman emphasized that permitting improvements should ensure certainty and transparency for project developers, tribes, local governments, and surrounding communities.

Critical Minerals and Earth MRI:

- Rep. **Bruce Westerman** (R-AR-04) supported H.R. 9640 to reauthorize Earth MRI, emphasizing the importance of expanding domestic geological mapping.
- Rep. **Debbie Dingell** (D-MI-06) highlighted that Earth MRI helps communities, businesses, and land managers make informed decisions on mineral development.
- Rep. **Nick Begich** (R-AK-AL) emphasized the importance of ensuring Earth MRI investments match Alaska's scale and unique geological resources.
- Rep. **Rob Wittman** (R-VA-01) argued that Earth MRI will help identify and develop the critical minerals needed for the U.S. to compete with China and reduce reliance on foreign supply chains.
- Stauber noted that Earth MRI can support not only new mineral development but also abandoned mine land remediation and the cleanup of legacy mining sites.

Geologic Hydrogen:

- Wittman and Dingell highlighted geologic hydrogen as a promising new energy resource, and emphasized the need for expanded mapping, research, and data collection to better assess scale and viability.

Quantum Technology and Critical Mineral Mapping:

- Hurd highlighted H.R. 9646, explaining that the bill would direct USGS to test quantum-enhanced surveying technology with national laboratories and the private sector and to incorporate results into the Earth MRI database.
 - He added that H.R. 9646 is intended to improve public knowledge and invest in technologies that can locate additional critical minerals and water resources.

Environmental Reviews and Public Participation:

- Rep. **Luz Rivas** (D-CA-29) argued that judicial review remains an essential accountability mechanism in the permitting process.
- Rep. **Adelita Grijalva** (D-AZ-07) cited concerns from her constituents regarding the South32 Hermosa mining project, arguing that FAST-41 did not provide sufficient flexibility for extended public comment periods. She emphasized that streamlined permitting must not come at the expense of environmental analysis, tribal consultation, or scientific review.
 - Eric Beightel acknowledged concerns regarding the South32 Hermosa Project and apologized for the experience of Grijalva's constituents, noting that agencies can extend permitting timelines when justified.
 - He suggested that Congress consider requiring public comment opportunities for draft environmental documents.
- Grijalva also criticized the Trump administration for permitting a uranium mine in 14 days with only a seven-day tribal consultation process.