

**BIDENOMICS & LAND MANAGEMENT:
THE MISGUIDED NATIONAL
STRATEGY TO DEVELOP
ENVIRONMENTAL ECONOMIC
DECISIONS**

OVERSIGHT HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
INVESTIGATIONS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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CONTENTS

	Page
Hearing held on Thursday, February 15, 2024	1
Statement of Members:	
Gosar, Hon. Paul, a Representative in Congress from the State of Arizona	1
Stansbury, Hon. Melanie A., a Representative in Congress from the State of New Mexico	3
Statement of Witnesses:	
Wykowski, Henry, Advisor, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Depart- ment of the Interior, Washington, DC	5
Prepared statement of	7
Questions submitted for the record	9
Additional Materials Submitted for the Record:	
Submissions for the Record by Representative Gosar	
Susie Feliz, Asst. Sec. for Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, U.S. Department of Commerce, Statement for the Record	25

**OVERSIGHT HEARING ON BIDENOMICS &
LAND MANAGEMENT: THE MISGUIDED
NATIONAL STRATEGY TO DEVELOP
ENVIRONMENTAL ECONOMIC DECISIONS**

Thursday, February 15, 2024
U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:44 p.m. in Room 1324, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Paul Gosar [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Gosar, Rosendale, Collins, Westerman, Hageman; and Stansbury.

Dr. GOSAR. The Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations will come to order.

Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess of the Subcommittee at any time.

The Subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony on Bidenomics and land management: the misguided national strategy to develop environmental economic decisions.

I ask unanimous consent that all Members testifying today be allowed to sit with the Subcommittee, give their testimony, and participate in the hearing from the dais.

Without objection, so ordered.

Under Committee Rule 4(f), any oral opening statements at the hearing are limited to the Chairman and the Ranking Minority Member. I therefore ask unanimous consent that all other Members' opening statements be made part of the hearing record if they are submitted in accordance with Committee Rule 3(o).

Without objection, so ordered.

I ask unanimous consent that the gentlewoman from Wyoming, Ms. Hageman, and the gentlewoman from Colorado, Ms. Boebert, be allowed to sit and participate in today's hearing.

Without objection, so ordered.

I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. PAUL GOSAR, A REPRESENTATIVE
IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ARIZONA**

Dr. GOSAR. Good afternoon, everyone.

First off, I want to thank the Department of the Interior for showing up today to discuss their contributions to the Administration's strategy to develop a national system of natural capital accounting. Regrettably, the Office of Management and Budget, OMB; the Office of Science and Technology, OSTP; and the Department of Commerce were not willing to come before the American people and stand behind their work on the National Strategy to

Develop Statistics for Environmental Economic Decisions, a U.S. system of natural capital accounting and environmental economic statistics, for short, the national strategy on natural capital accounting, tongue twister there, which could fundamentally change the management of our public land and water and the environment for years to come.

The Department of Commerce refused to testify, but committed to submitting testimony for the record. Well, as of this hearing, the Committee hasn't received any testimony from Commerce. They are now saying they will send the testimony next week, after the hearing. We will have to see about that. Don't hold your breath. Overall, it is clear the Biden administration has a complete aversion to accountability.

The congressional oversight is not a choice. These bureaucrats in DC need a shock to the system because they have forgotten who they really work for, who are the American people.

Additionally, this is not the first time OMB has obstructed the Committee's oversight efforts. In fact, during the 118th Congress, OMB has refused to discuss any of their work under the jurisdiction of the House Committee on Natural Resources. OMB's repeated refusal to testify sends a clear message from the Biden administration to the American people that we are above the law, above Congress, and accountable to no one.

The refusal to testify also allows us to draw the inference that OMB, OSTP, and the Commerce cannot justify, defend, or even explain this bizarre and radical scheme. The brazen defiance of congressional oversight by OMB, OSTP, and Commerce is unacceptable. The people deserve transparency and accountability. Regardless, this Committee stands ready to use every tool at its disposal to administer effective oversight of OMB, OSTP, and Commerce in reining this out-of-control administration in.

Now, turning to our testimony hearing today, as many of you know, the United States is a resource-rich nation unlike any other. In many ways, we already account for our nation's many priceless natural assets like minerals, timber, and oil and gas production on Federal lands. However, as governments around the world, international organizations, and the private sector attempt to formulize the treatment of natural resources as a form of capital, we must take great care so that our natural capital accounting system will best serve our nation, rather than serve as a weapon to achieve partisan goals.

I am also concerned that the United States will defer to international authorities to guide the development and implementation of a national system for our natural capital accounting, following standards set by organizations unaccountable to the American people such as the United Nations, European Union, International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank.

Unfortunately, but as expected, the Biden administration plans to use their national strategy for natural capital accounting to advance harmful mandates under the guise of climate stewardship, exclusionary and legally impermissible DEI initiatives, and radical anti-use priorities, rather than for the benefit of the American people.

Notably, the national strategy underpins numerous related initiatives for the Biden administration to include the America the Beautiful 30x30 Initiative; the Bureau of Land Management, BLM, proposed Conservation and Landscape Health Rule; and a recently withdrawn New York Stock Exchange proposal to list natural asset companies.

The Conservation and Landscape Health Rule represents a seismic shift in public land management that will fundamentally upend BLM's multiple use mandate, which has guided land management practice for nearly 50 years. This rule is a threat to rural communities across the West that depend upon the responsible use and development of our public lands. That is why I support H.R. 3397, the WEST Act, which will withdraw the harmful proposed rule.

The Conservation and Landscape Health proposed rule also supports the development of Natural Asset Companies, or NACs, corporations that will control the rights and management authority of certain areas, including public lands, for anti-use purposes. This is particularly concerning, due to the massive impact NACs could have on management of Federal lands, effective conservation of wildlife habitat, and responsible development of natural resources.

As Members of Congress, we must ensure that the ideas endorsed by the national strategy do not become another tool for the out-of-control Biden administration, radical eco-activists, non-profits, and the international organizations to control America's public lands.

As we have witnessed over the last 3 years, President Biden is determined to lock up public lands and water across the country from a sort of resource development, causing tremendous harm not only to our economy, but to our national security, as well. Russia and China are laughing at us as President Biden repeatedly jeopardizes our national security and the security of our great allies in Europe by handicapping vital domestic resource development.

We must determine a better path forward for the future of our land management and environmental policy for our nation, so I look forward to our conversation today.

I now recognize the Ranking Member, Ms. Stansbury, for her opening statement. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. MELANIE A. STANSBURY, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO

Ms. STANSBURY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for those who are joining us today.

You know, I am all for oversight of our nation's public lands and conservation policies. I think it is important to review them and understand how they will impact our communities. So, for that, I am grateful for the opportunity to have this hearing. But I do have to say, as we were preparing for this hearing and trying to understand what exactly it was about, we were a bit confused about how it was positioned.

In fact, it seems as though we have three unrelated public lands initiatives that are all designed to increase public participation and transparency and modernize the way that we do our natural

resources management as a country. But in the casting of this hearing, many features of the kind of conspiracy theories that we hear about on social media, foreign actors, socialism, globalism, China, were all a part of the conversation. And it even cast the New York Stock Exchange as some extremist leftist eco-activist organization, if you can believe it. So, I want to just kind of clarify what these initiatives are, and talk about that before we get into our Q&A.

The first is the National Strategy on Environmental Economic Decisions. This is a policy and a roadmap that has been put forth by the Administration to help address, really, an error in how we quantify the benefits of different uses of our public lands and natural resources. And it is based on the idea that if you essentially value the full value that a natural resource provides or a land provides, that you would make different decisions.

So, a good example is, as we dammed and diverted various streams and rivers in the West, many of the fisheries that were in those streams and rivers were impacted by those development activities, causing both cultural harm to the tribal and other communities, but also significant economic impacts to the fisheries communities. So, if you were to consider the full economic, social, and cultural values of those resources in your decision making, you might have come to a different conclusion before going down a certain road. And this helps to create a framework for bringing those economic and social valuations into consideration of Federal decision makings.

But it is not just some radical idea that the Biden administration came up with. It has been backed by the National Academies, Nobel laureates, economists, and in fact, 80 countries around the world actually use this as a basis for decision making. So, this is really about bringing the United States into the mainstream in terms of how we do natural capital accounting in our own decision making.

I also think it is worth noting that this was an initiative that began during the Bush administration. In fact, some of our great conservationists who served as political appointees during that administration, as well as the Trump administration, helped to try to advance the accounting of natural capital that we are now looking at as part of this policy.

The second is the BLM Public Lands Rule. We have already had multiple hearings about this rule. Certainly, there are some wild conspiracy theories about trying to tie up public lands under this rule, but it is really about modernizing the Federal Lands Management Act and making sure that our communities and our tribes have a seat at the table and we consider the conservation impacts of development.

But the third one, which, frankly, I was kind of shocked to see as part of this hearing, is a proposal that was pulled from the New York Stock Exchange that would allow, essentially, a new kind of corporate entity to be traded that allows for investors to invest in natural capital, so in natural assets to ensure ecosystem integrity. That proposal was pulled ultimately, and we are not sure what the final fate of that will be, but it was intended as an economic tool to essentially invest in conservation and improvements, and I think

many people would find it hard to believe that the New York Stock Exchange is a radical leftist organization.

So, what all of these proposals really are about is about making sure that, as a country, as a nation, as an economy we are being responsible in our stewardship, especially as we are on the brink of a major catastrophic change with climate change, and that all of those communities, whether they are tribes or rural communities, have a seat at the table in deciding what happens to their lands.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I look forward to the conversation, and I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentlewoman. I just want to recognize some of her comments. Oversight is not debatable. This Committee is about these different rules. And what we are talking about is not about visitor participation on our public lands, it is about leveraging our public lands on the international stage.

When you start talking about the New York Stock Exchange, this was real. This isn't hypotheticals. They turned that down.

I also want to remember to tell everybody that our Federal lands are held in joint tenancy by the Federal Government on behalf of the states, so they are already leveraged. So, if we are trying to look at leveraging these parcels of land again, wrong answer.

On that, I am going to turn now to introducing our witness, Mr. Henry Wykowski, an Advisor of the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Department of the Interior in Washington, DC.

I want to say thank you for coming on behalf of the BLM and the Interior. As I said, the others did not show up.

Let me remind you that under the Committee Rules, you must limit your oral statement to 5 minutes, as you know since being here. It starts green, then it goes yellow at the last minute, and red when you want to terminate.

Just press the "on" button for your microphone, and you are now recognized, Mr. Wykowski, for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF HENRY WYKOWSKI, ADVISOR, BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Thank you. Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Stansbury, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on how the Bureau of Land Management's lands and programs directly and indirectly benefit the health, wealth, and well-being of communities across the United States.

On a personal note, it is an honor to appear before the Subcommittee today on this side of the witness table. I spent several years on the House Natural Resources Committee staff, including time as a professional staff member working on public lands issues, and I truly respect and appreciate the work this Committee does to support American communities and protect the health of our shared natural resources.

As you noted, Mr. Chairman, I am appearing today as an Advisor at the Bureau of Land Management.

On behalf of the American people, the BLM manages approximately 245 million surface acres and roughly 700 million

subsurface acres. Much of our work is governed by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, or FLPMA, which sets out the Bureau's multiple use and sustained yield mission. Under that dual charge, the BLM manages public lands to support a wide range of uses while protecting the health of those lands to secure the resources and benefits that they provide for future generations of Americans. Balancing these priorities, ensuring appropriate use while protecting the health of the nation's public lands, guides the Bureau in all of our work.

Activities related to the BLM's management of public lands have been and continue to be a driver of the nation's economy and a critical source of revenue and jobs for communities. BLM-managed public lands and waters supported roughly \$262 billion in economic output and 1 million jobs across the country in Fiscal Year 2022. Resource uses authorized by the BLM generated substantial revenues for the U.S. Treasury, as well as for state and local governments.

The importance of the sustained yield component of the Bureau's dual mandate is coming increasingly into focus as the BLM grapples with changing conditions on the landscape. Much like communities across the nation, the BLM is responding to extended droughts, increasingly large and intense fires, and influx of invasive species and extreme weather events. These changing conditions, largely driven by a change in climate, are making it more difficult to manage the public lands for the uses communities rely upon and wildlife require, from healthy forage to fire resilient ecosystems.

BLM-managed public lands are also experiencing unprecedented use and visitation as Americans flock to the world-class outdoor recreation opportunities that these lands provide. In fact, our public lands hosted more than 82 million visitors in Fiscal Year 2022. These changing conditions and uses pose challenges for the management of public lands and for the BLM's capacity to deliver a sustained yield for future generations of Americans.

Under the Biden-Harris administration, the BLM is using every tool available to meet our multiple use and sustained yield mission, leveraging the best available science and data and investing in land health while updating our regulatory frameworks to meet the needs of 21st century land management. The BLM is investing \$161 million from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act in targeted restoration projects across 11 Western states to repair degraded or damaged public lands resources. These projects, which are collaborative and partnership-driven, will restore wildlife habitat in the sagebrush steppe, recreate wetland meadows, and repair watersheds.

Additionally, the BLM is engaging in several key planning and regulatory updates that aim to guide future decision making in order to balance uses on public lands while protecting land health. This work benefits from accurate data on the conditions of public lands and the potential impacts of management actions.

When finalized, these proposed rules will help provide a more consistent framework for project applications, minimize potential conflicts with sensitive resources, and ensure healthy landscapes,

abundant wildlife habitat, clean water, and balanced decision making.

While the BLM was not directly involved in the development of the Biden-Harris administration's National Strategy to Develop Statistics for Environmental Economic Decisions, the BLM welcomes efforts that will contribute to a better understanding of the value of BLM-managed public lands and waters at the national level. Continuing to ensure the best available science and information as well as public input are included in Bureau decisions helps improve BLM management, and helps protect the important resources and values communities expect from their public lands.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify here today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Wykowski follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HENRY WYKOWSKI, ADVISOR, BUREAU OF LAND
MANAGEMENT, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Stansbury, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on how the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) lands and programs directly and indirectly benefit the health, wealth, and well-being of communities across the United States.

The Value of Public Lands

On behalf of the American people, the BLM manages approximately 245 million surface acres, located primarily in 12 western states, and approximately 700 million subsurface acres, roughly 30 percent of the nation's onshore mineral resources. The BLM is charged with stewarding a diverse array of resources for the benefit of all Americans.

Much of this work is governed by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), which sets out the Bureau's multiple use and sustained yield mission. Under that dual charge, the BLM manages public lands to support a wide range of uses, such as renewable and conventional energy development, livestock grazing, conservation, mining, watershed protection, hunting, fishing, and other forms of recreation, while protecting the health of those lands to secure the resources and benefits they provide for future generations of Americans. Balancing these priorities—ensuring appropriate uses while protecting the health of the nation's public lands—guides the Bureau in all of our work.

Activities related to the BLM's management of public lands have been and continue to be a driver of the nation's economy and a critical source of revenue and jobs for communities across the nation. BLM-managed public lands and waters supported \$262.7 billion in economic output and 1 million jobs across the country in Fiscal Year 2022.¹ Resource uses authorized by the BLM generate substantial revenue for the U.S. Treasury, as well as for state and local governments.

The importance of the sustained yield component of the Bureau's dual mandate is coming increasingly into focus as the BLM grapples with changing conditions on the landscape. Much like communities across the nation, the BLM is responding to extended droughts, increasingly large and intense fires, an influx of invasive species, and extreme weather events. These changing conditions, largely driven by a changing climate, are making it more difficult to manage the public lands for the uses communities rely upon and wildlife require, from healthy forage to fire resilient ecosystems. BLM-managed public lands are also experiencing unprecedented use and visitation as Americans flock to the world class outdoor recreation opportunities these lands provide. Our public lands hosted over 82 million visitors in Fiscal Year 2022, an increase of 9 million visitors since 2020. These changing conditions and uses pose challenges for the management of public lands and for the BLM's capacity to deliver a sustained yield of these lands and resources for future generations of Americans.

¹For more information, please see: <https://www.blm.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2024-01/Valuing%20America%27s%20Public%20Lands.pdf>.

Managing for Land Health & Balanced Use

The nation is increasingly aware of the benefits healthy public lands provide, and how important these benefits are for communities and our nation's economy: fire resilient forests and rangelands help protect homes, communities, and businesses from the impacts of wildfire; wetlands and healthy riparian areas keep water on the landscape; and habitat that supports pollinators is essential for our agricultural economy and food security—80 percent of the world's flowering plants need a pollinator to reproduce, and those pollinators are responsible for fully one third of the food we consume.

As we come to better understand the important services healthy lands and ecosystems provide for communities and how those services are threatened by climate-driven impacts, it is imperative that the BLM continue to fully embrace and meet our sustained yield mandate and protect the health and productivity of the nation's public lands for the benefit of current and future generations of Americans. Under the Biden-Harris Administration, the BLM is using every tool available to meet our mission, leveraging the best available science and data and investing in landscapes and land health while updating our regulatory and resource management frameworks to meet the needs of 21st century land management.

Investing in Land Health

As part of President Biden's Investing in America agenda, the BLM has identified 21 Restoration Landscapes across 11 western states and has invested more than \$161 million to target efforts to restore degraded or damaged public land resources. This once-in-a-generation investment from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will support collaborative and partnership-driven restoration work, coordinating investments from the Bureau's fuels management, range, wildlife, forestry, aquatics, and recreation programs where they can make the most meaningful impacts for communities and BLM-managed resources. Restoration Landscape projects will restore wildlife habitat in the sagebrush steppe of the high desert, re-create wetland meadows, and repair watersheds on former industrial timberlands.

In Arizona, for example, the BLM is focusing on projects in the mountainous Sky Islands to reduce fuel loads, improve groundwater management in the San Pedro River drainage (in partnership with Cochise County and the Department of Defense), protect critical wildlife migration corridors, and support recovery of threatened and endangered wildlife. In New Mexico, the BLM is continuing its long-term restoration investment through partnerships in the Lower Pecos River landscape. Restoration efforts will remove mesquite, which has invaded this landscape and damaged fragile soils, reduced native grasses, and decreased groundwater recharge. Restoring this landscape will improve water quality, increase forage for livestock and wildlife, and enhance recreation and hunting opportunities for rural communities in southeast New Mexico and west Texas.

Policy & Planning Updates

The BLM is engaging in several key planning and regulatory updates that, when finalized, will help guide future decision-making in an effort to balance uses on public lands while protecting land health. This work benefits from accurate data on the conditions of the public lands and how management decisions will affect natural resources and different uses. Efforts like the proposed update of the Western Solar Plan and the ongoing Sage Grouse Planning Amendments will help the BLM more effectively manage the public lands, driving development to the most appropriate areas while avoiding conflicts with sensitive habitats and resources that might delay or derail projects. Helping guide development will allow the BLM to maximize agency resources to review appropriate projects while responsibly stewarding the public lands. Similarly, regulatory updates like the proposed Fluid Minerals Leases and Leasing Processes Rule covering onshore oil and gas, and the proposed Rights-of-Way, Leasing, and Operations for Renewable Energy Rule will help meet BLM's statutory obligations under the IRA and provide a more consistent framework for project applications and reviews, while avoiding development conflicts.

The BLM's proposed Conservation and Landscape Health Rule would update the Bureau's regulatory framework, ensuring balance through multiple use and sustained yield management. The proposed rule would acknowledge conservation as being on an equal footing with other public land uses, thereby enshrining Congress's direction in FLPMA, while establishing a framework to ensure healthy landscapes, abundant wildlife habitat, clean water, and balanced decision-making on our nation's public lands.

The concepts of the proposed rule are consistent with strategies used by other state and federal land management agencies to ensure the federal government has tools and direction to identify areas in need of restoration or protection, as well as the ability to encourage investments in public lands to help balance the impacts of development. The proposal would direct land managers to make management decisions informed by empirical assessments of land health conditions. The proposal would also give the BLM new tools to work with appropriate entities interested in performing restoration or compensatory mitigation work on public lands.

The proposed Conservation and Landscape Health Rule would also further improve the BLM's use of science and data, supporting the expanded application of land health requirements and better incorporating the best available information into decision-making on the ground.

Incorporating the Best Available Science & Data into Land Management

Across all its work, the BLM gathers and considers the best available science, data, and information to inform decision-making. Ensuring that robust information and public input are incorporated into Bureau decisions helps to inform and improve BLM management, and also helps protect the important resources and values communities expect from their public lands.

On January 19, 2023, the Biden-Harris Administration released the *National Strategy to Develop Statistics for Environmental-Economic Decisions* (National Strategy), which initiated a multi-year effort to help the federal government understand and consistently track changes in the condition and economic value of land, water, air, and other natural assets, which underpin businesses, enhance quality of life, and act as a stabilizing force for economic prosperity and opportunity. Ultimately, the National Strategy will help bridge the gap between economic statistics and the environment, with an emphasis on better data to understand nature's critical contributions to the U.S. economy and to guide policy and business decisions moving forward.

While full implementation of the National Strategy will take a number of years, its key, foundational concept—gathering the best available science, data, and information to make reasonable decisions—is something that the BLM has been doing for decades. Moreover, as conceived, this effort will help ensure greater consistency across agencies in the collection and use of environmental data, which could help improve inter-agency coordination and decision-making.

While the BLM was not involved in the development of this National Strategy, the Bureau welcomes efforts that will contribute to better understanding of the value of BLM-managed public lands and waters. Nature has delivered natural assets to us for millennia. It is our job to ensure those assets are available to future generations. By continuing to collect and improve data and information on these resources, and by incorporating that information in all of its decision-making, the agency will be better equipped to ensure that public lands continue providing the exceptional resources that Americans know and love for generations to come.

Conclusion

The BLM is committed to managing America's public lands in a balanced, science-based manner for the benefit of current and future generations. The decisions we make about how we manage public lands will have a profound impact on Americans across the country, and the BLM takes that responsibility and its multiple use and sustained yield mission seriously. Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today. We look forward to working further with Congress on this issue, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO MR. HENRY WYKOWSKI, ADVISOR,
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Mr. Wykowski did not submit responses to the Committee by the appropriate deadline for inclusion in the printed record.

Questions Submitted by Representative Gosar

Question 1. What influence did natural capital accounting standards from the United Nations (UN) or other international bodies, such as the World Bank, have on the Biden administration's National Strategy to Develop Statistics for Environmental-Economic Decisions: A U.S. System of Natural Capital Accounting

and Environmental Economic Statistics (National Strategy for Natural Capital Accounting)?

Question 2. How do the Department of the Interior (DOI) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) use standards designed by the UN to align their work implementing natural capital accounting and ecosystem services valuation into agency decisions and actions?

Question 3. Did anyone at DOI and/or BLM consult with Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), or the Department of Commerce (Commerce) regarding the development or implementation of the National Strategy for Natural Capital Accounting?

Question 4. Can you provide the Committee with the list of people at DOI and BLM who consulted with OMB, OSTP, and/or Commerce on the National Strategy for Natural Capital Accounting? Additionally, provide the names of the respective OMB, OSTP, and Commerce officials and a list of topics and issues discussed.

Question 5. OMB has issued a number of directives on how Federal agencies should develop and enact policies to incorporate and institutionalize natural capital accounting and ecosystem services into Federal decision making and actions. These include Memorandum M-16-01, Incorporating Ecosystem Services into Federal Decision Making, and Memorandum M-22-15, the Multi-Agency Research and Development Priorities for the FY 2024 Budget.

5a) How are DOI and BLM adhering to the OMB directives to incorporate and institutionalize natural capital accounting and ecosystem services into Federal decision making and actions?

5b) Specifically with regard to OMB Memorandum M-22-15, how are DOI and BLM identifying and prioritizing R&D investments that advance ecosystem services?

Question 6. What are the next steps for DOI and BLM in the development of a system for natural capital accounting, ecosystem services valuation, and environmental-economic statistics?

Question 7. What further developments can we expect to see over the next year from DOI and BLM on developing and implementing a system for natural capital accounting, ecosystem services valuation, and collecting environmental-economic statistics?

Question 8. How will the implementation of National Strategy for Natural Capital Accounting potentially affect oil and gas leasing on federal lands?

Question 9. Has BLM conducted any sort of outreach to the oil, gas, and energy industry to hear their perspective on how the National Strategy for Natural Capital Accounting could affect oil and gas leasing on federal lands?

9a) If not, does BLM have plans to do so?

Question 10. The National Strategy for Natural Capital Accounting states that not having a natural capital accounting system impairs our nation's ability to fight climate change. What additional abilities BLM intends to gain from the National Strategy on Natural Capital Accounting to "fight climate change"?

Question 11. Given President Biden's terrible track record with resource development, how can you assure the American people that DOI and BLM will not abuse a national system for natural capital accounting to lock up public lands and waters from resource development?

Questions Submitted by Representative Hageman

Question 1. In a January 19, 2022 Press Release, Secretary Haaland is on record as promoting the non-profit organization "Foundation for America's Public Lands." That Foundation integrates public and private partnerships to promote conservation of BLM lands, and is reportedly led by BLM Director Stone-Manning, former BLM Director Kornze, and former Montana Governor Bullock.

Would you please share with this Committee how the Foundation for America's Public Lands implements Executive Order 14072 and the Administration's Natural Asset Capitalization program being promoted by the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy?

Question 2. If adopted by the Department of Interior, the Conservation Leasing System in BLM Conservation and Landscape Health Rule would impose—through

regulation—the targets of the Paris Agreement, the economic objectives of Executive Orders 13990 and 14008, and the monetized Natural Asset Inventory Policy being promoted by the White House.

Would you please share with this Committee why such transformative policy changes are needed, and how changes in BLM Regulations would affect the current Multiple Use and Sustained Yield Inventory system required of the Secretary under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act?

Question 3. Has the BLM begun incorporating ecosystem services impacts into their environmental analysis under NEPA or any other program such as land health assessments, evaluations and determinations?

3a) If so, what accounting system/framework is the BLM using to calculate this value?

3b) If not, when does the BLM anticipate adding these impacts into their assessments?

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman for his testimony and, once again, thank you for coming. I appreciate seeing you. I am going to recognize myself for my next 5 minutes.

As you are aware, the Foundation for America's Public Lands is the official charitable partner of the BLM. My question to you is, would you please share with the Committee how the Foundation for America's Public Lands implements Executive Order 14072? This is the strengthening the national forest communities and local economies executive order.

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Mr. Chair, the Foundation is a separate entity from the Bureau, acting as a non-profit, so I couldn't speak to their activities. But I don't believe they are under any obligation to act on executive orders by the President, as they are not part of the executive branch.

Dr. GOSAR. My understanding is they are in there to support the Administration. And in use over the parks and that aspect.

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I admittedly, representing the Bureau, don't engage directly with the Foundation. They do act as a partner chartered by the Congress to support some of BLM's activities, but I couldn't speak to exactly how they carry out that mission.

Dr. GOSAR. I am going to ask you another question. How does this work interface with the Administration's national strategy for natural capital accounting?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Again, Mr. Chairman, apologies. I am not engaged directly in the operations of the Foundation. It is a separate entity, so I couldn't speak to how they carry out that strategy.

Dr. GOSAR. Now I am going to switch gears. If adopted by the Department of the Interior, the Conservation Leasing System and BLM's Conservation and Landscape Health Rule would impose through regulation the targets of the Paris Agreement, the economic objectives of Executive Orders 13990 and 14008, and the monetized National Asset Inventory policy being promoted by this White House.

Mr. WYKOWSKI. I am sorry, Mr. Chairman, can you repeat the question? I am sorry, apologies.

Dr. GOSAR. Yes. Would you please share with the Committee why such transformational policy changes are needed, and how changes in the BLM regulations would affect the current multiple

use and sustained yield inventory system required of the Secretary under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As you said, the proposed public lands rule is really driven by our multiple use and sustained yield mission. We believe that there is an opportunity to continue to build on the great work that BLM has done for the past 50 years to ensure we are protecting the health of public lands to ensure a sustained yield for future generations of Americans.

And although the proposed rule isn't finalized, we believe that tools within it like the proposed conservation leases will be an effective tool to help better support that sustained yield mission.

Dr. GOSAR. So, you do know that these lands are held in joint tenancy for the states with the Federal Government, right? You do understand that.

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Mr. Chairman, I think that I would defer to the Department's solicitors on the appropriate relationship between the Federal Government and the states on the legal status of those lines.

Dr. GOSAR. So, states like Arizona were actually coerced into the States, they joined the Union, and we were coerced by Taft to actually accept those Federal lands aspects. And a lot of our budgetary aspects are determined, on BLM lands, by the way, on energy and mineral development, as well as grazing leases, right?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Certainly, Mr. Chairman, as I noted in my testimony, the Bureau has a significant economic contribution to both the Federal Treasury and state and local government revenues.

Dr. GOSAR. So, let me ask you, how do you amortize something like participation, the Ranking Member used this aspect, around the world, how do you monetize that?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. While the BLM was not involved in the development of the national strategy, as I noted, we definitely support opportunities to better understand the value of these resources and how we can use them to support the Bureau's sustained yield mission.

Dr. GOSAR. So, do you actually develop them? Is this process going to allow others to develop these resources when we can't develop these resources?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Are you referring to the conservation leasing process? Sorry, I just want to make sure I am understanding.

Dr. GOSAR. I am talking about this asset program.

Mr. WYKOWSKI. The national strategy? Again, the Bureau was not involved in the development, but my understanding of the strategy as I prepared for this hearing is that it is a 15-year phased approach, so I think it would be probably a little bit premature, exactly, to speculate on how it might, if it all, impact land management decisions in the future.

Dr. GOSAR. OK. Well, it seems very awkward to me that we are amortizing these lands when first in line is our states, because we utilize those, as you know, in minerals in Arizona; there is oil and gas and coal and Wyoming. So, these are all very important aspects of the budgetary process that tries to maintain a balance of conservation with multiple-use doctrines, whether it be energy, mineral, timber, and also leasing processes.

With that, I have run out of time, so I am going to give the Ranking Member her 5 minutes so she is on a plane too.

Ms. STANSBURY. OK. I do want to just take a few moments to try to clarify a little bit about history, land tenure, leasing, and what we are talking about with natural capital and some of these rules.

First of all, I think it is important just to understand the history of the West. The lands that are now currently in my state, in Arizona, and in the rest of the West are Indigenous lands. They have been stewarded for thousands of years by our Native communities, and they were then a part of Spain and Mexico. They were invaded by the United States in the 1840s and came into the United States' public land holdings in 1848 under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which was actually decades before either of our states became states.

So, while the states have state lands that are administered and owned by the states and administered for the purposes of getting value out of them, the Federal Government holds tenure to Federal lands. So, there are two systems there, and they are managed under two different governance systems, and this is really about Federal lands. These rules, this framework would only pertain to Federal lands, not state lands. So, let's make sure that we are clear on that.

In terms of the use of natural capital, it is kind of a really nerdy concept, so I think it can be difficult for folks to understand. It really comes out of environmental economics from the 1960s and 1970s, and it was this idea that when you are valuing natural resources, if you have a commodity like, say, minerals or oil and gas, it is already traded on a market, so you are able to put an economic value on it. If you are doing a cost benefit analysis, you can say, all right, if we develop this resource we are going to get this value out of it, and ultimately we can provide a monetary value.

But I think over the last four or five decades, we have really understood that by only considering the economic value of commodities that can be sold, that you undervalue other assets on these public lands that may have also economic benefits, things like protecting forests that are part of our vital watershed, other ecosystem benefits like fisheries, for example, of our rivers and streams. And by providing an economic value, then when you do a cost benefit analysis you can put on equal footing and more transparency to say is it worth developing this mineral or this particular natural resource at the expense of this other resource which we didn't previously value? So, it is really an economic concept.

And as I understand it, Mr. Wykowski, I know you have already said here today that you weren't involved in the development of the framework, but the valuation framework that the Administration has put forward and would ultimately become a part of how agencies do evaluation would be in the context of things like NEPA, public land set-asides, things like that. Is that correct?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Certainly, and we would definitely follow the law, even as we work through how to implement this strategy.

Ms. STANSBURY. But at the end of the day, it really is a way to value resources that were not previously valued, correct?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. That is my understanding of the strategy assets, as you mentioned, to expand the consideration of assets that are not adequately valued currently, so—

Ms. STANSBURY. But it would still happen through a public process. So, that valuation, whether it was done through an administrative process of public land management policy, or the creation of a new monument, or a deciding whether or not to open a specific area for leasing would still follow the same public process whereby those who have an interest in the land, tribes, others would participate in that process. Is that correct?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Again, as the strategy is a 15-year approach, I think we are still a long way from considering directly how we will participate in these processes. But that said, we certainly welcome opportunities to better understand the value of these resources so that we can build them into things like those NEPA processes, and allow opportunities for adequate public comment and help better inform decisions.

I think that there is a great potential there for that process to work closely with many ongoing processes at the Bureau.

Ms. STANSBURY. I know I am going to run out of time here, but I just want to clarify for everyone out there who is listening. This doesn't replace existing processes. This is a way of bringing another factor into cost-benefit and to decision making so that we don't undervalue resources that our communities depend on and our ecosystems depend on. So, I think it is just really important that people understand this is about leveling the playing field, creating transparency, and making our decision making more robust.

Thank you. I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. Just a quick question, Mr. Wykowski. In this system, you have nothing. You don't have something that you can show. When I mine something, I have something to show and I can sell. Now what we are putting forward is a value on what conservation, or what we are looking at, clean air or whatever. You are not giving anything. You feel good about that aspect, but you have nothing, right?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Well, Mr. Chairman, again, while we were not directly involved in the development, my understanding is that the accounts would cover a wide variety of values, including energy and mineral resources, fisheries, timber, as well as some of these harder-to-measure resources, like the value of clean water and fire-resilient forests.

Dr. GOSAR. I would have a hard time believing that we are going to leverage our current mining, which doesn't exist very much. I mean, it takes over 20 years to get a mining permit, actually, to a position, and I doubt it, it even takes longer than that.

But from that standpoint, I think we are pigeon-holing this Ponzi scheme because all you are doing is you are making it feel good because you don't own anything. That is the basis of a Ponzi scheme, you keep going down the road trying to invest, but there is nothing there for you to inherently say this is what I did, right?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. I am not familiar with the structure of Ponzi schemes, but my understanding is that the strategy is driven by the Office of Management and Budget; Science, Technology, and Policy; as well as our colleagues at the Department of Commerce,

and that it is a whole-of-government effort to capture the value of these resources that we are currently not adequately valuing in our national economic considerations.

Dr. GOSAR. I see this very problematic all the way across the board, and——

Ms. STANSBURY. Some people actually value clean air, though.

Dr. GOSAR. Oh, and I think our clean air is actually cleaner than it was——

Ms. STANSBURY. And addressing our climate crisis.

Dr. GOSAR. Well, I would actually like to debate that, too, because I think current policies don't show us that we are actually embracing climate change. We are actually doing it worse off, because we are actually utilizing more oil and gas that are dirtier than what we produce. So, I think we could argue that back and forth.

Ms. STANSBURY. I think you just made the point of why we need this. So, that is a great place to end——

Dr. GOSAR. I don't think I did, I don't think I did.

The gentleman from Montana is recognized.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and Ranking Member Stansbury, for holding the hearing today.

It is no secret that the Administration has used our Federal lands to try to implement their most egregious climate and environmental-focused policies. Their actions over these past 3 years have done nothing to help Americans who rely on this land for their livelihoods and also, despite their claims, have done nothing to keep our American landscapes clean and beautiful.

Take, for instance, the Judith Gap in central Montana. Once a pristine expanse, it is now marred by towering wind turbines that disrupt local wind patterns and frequently fail to generate energy during Montana's harsh winter conditions. I have posted online just 3 weeks ago this very event. It is 30 degrees below zero, I drove through the middle of the wind farm, and not a single one of the turbines was turning.

It is extremely concerning how an administration whose apparent goal is environmental protection could force such a visually intrusive and unreliable energy source onto the American people. And this is just one example of the shortsighted and poorly-thought-through policies concerning Federal lands and enacted by this Administration.

Consider the Conservation and Landscape Health Rule proposed last summer, which initially seemed like another instance of the Administration appeasing the climate zealots. However, subsequent developments revealed a much more concerning agenda: the Conservation Lease BLM Rule, which clearly violates the Taylor Grazing Act and the BLM's mandate for multiple use, appears to pave the way for leasing parcels of land to Natural Asset Companies.

While public outcry and this Committee's intervention compelled the SEC to retract its plan for Natural Asset Companies, recent information suggests that the group behind this scheme is undeterred. The notion of commodifying public land for foreign entities and prohibiting the resources that are located on the land from being developed, allowing them to profit from taxpayer-owned

resources while treating water and air as commodities is truly dystopian.

With all this in mind, and while it should be no surprise that the other three witnesses did not come here to defend their decisions by testifying today at this Committee hearing, I have several questions for you, Mr. Wykowski.

First and foremost, thank you for your willingness to come in to testify before this Committee and showing the courage that, unfortunately, the other witnesses lacked. However, with that in mind, how do you square your agency's Conservation Lease Rule with its blatant violation of the Taylor Grazing Act?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Thank you for the question, Congressman. The public lands rule is really driven by our multiple use and sustained yield mission, and will help us to better manage the resources across the landscape while ensuring a sustained yield for future generations of Americans.

I think we might have to agree to disagree on its interaction with other laws, but I personally am not an attorney, and would refer to the Department's attorneys on the relationship between the Taylor Grazing Act and—

Mr. ROSENDALE. So, what I will tell you is that the Taylor Grazing Act, it calls for, and it is in statute, that the priorities are for agricultural purposes, much of which is to sustain food sources for people across the United States. This was put into place back in the 1930s, and that is when they were focused on that.

And now, the BLM rule is literally taking conservation measures and placing it above that food production, that agricultural use, which is completely in contrast to the statute itself. So, that is why we have had so much of a problem watching BLM propose a rule that truly is in conflict with the statute itself.

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Congressman, as I noted, the proposed rule really derives from our obligations under FLPMA. It doesn't elevate conservation above other uses, but ensures that we are providing for adequate conservation use alongside other multiple uses so that we can deliver a sustained yield for future generations of Americans across our public lands.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Regarding the SEC and New York Stock Exchange recently-withdrawn rule regarding the Natural Asset Companies, do you see any issue with allowing foreign countries or entities to invest in and control U.S. Federal lands, and profit from prohibiting the use of the resources that are located on those lands? Do you see any problem or conflict with that?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Congressman, I am only familiar with the SEC's proposal from what I have read about it in the popular media, but the Department has been quite clear that we were not involved or engaged in the SEC process. So, I would hesitate to speculate on how that might play out if it were adopted.

Mr. ROSENDALE. OK, Mr. Chair, I would yield back. Thank you so much for the opportunity.

Mr. COLLINS [presiding]. The Chair now recognizes the gentlewoman from Wyoming for 5 minutes.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

In October 2023, the SEC proposed a rule to approve the New York Stock Exchange's request to list Natural Asset Companies. I

led on a letter to the SEC with 31 other Members in the House, expressing strong opposition to the process and the proposal itself. Thousands of stakeholders across the country wrote to the SEC in opposition to this proposal, due to the surrendering of local control to elite investors, radical environmental groups, and even foreign governments.

Briefly, NACs would have prohibited the “unsustainable activities” on public and private lands. In bureaucratic language, this is code for blocking all legitimate economic development, including energy development, food production, grazing, logging, and access to other raw materials needed for housing and industrial construction.

In short, what NACs would do would be to allow someone like Bill Gates to buy the natural assets of, say, Shoshone National Forest in the state of Wyoming and block essentially all access management and use to that resource. But not just someone with billions of dollars, such as Bill Gates. It would also allow China, Venezuela, Iran, Russia, and other malign actors from purchasing the natural assets of these lands, both Federal lands, BLM, U.S. Forest Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service lands, but it also would apply to private lands or any private lands who had conservation easements on them. So, those farmers and ranchers who had placed conservation easements on their property could wake up one day and be in partnership with the Chinese Communist Party.

Obviously, this is something that was one of the most dangerous rules I have ever seen, and I am pleased that the New York Stock Exchange saw the light and withdrew it.

But Mr. Wykowski, I just have a couple of questions for you. I know you weren’t involved in the SEC’s proposal, but I am highlighting these concerns because the BLM is responsible for the management and mismanagement of these resources on 10 percent of this country’s acreage, and I can’t even imagine that the BLM would think that the SEC’s or the New York Stock Exchange’s proposal was appropriate or that it would be a good thing to do. Do you know whether the BLM weighed in with the SEC, challenging the SEC or the New York Stock Exchange’s ability to sell the natural assets of BLM lands?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Congresswoman, my understanding is that the Department has been clear that we had no engagement with the SEC on this proposal.

Ms. HAGEMAN. So, you had no engagement with the SEC at all? The SEC never contacted the BLM and said, “We are going to sell your”—or the New York Stock Exchange, they didn’t contact you and say, “We are going to sell the natural assets to the BLM lands?”

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Congresswoman, I would have to refer you to the SEC for how they go about their—

Ms. HAGEMAN. No, I am asking the BLM.

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Well, as I noted, the Department has had no engagement with the SEC on this withdrawn proposal.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Interesting. Did you call them up and say, “We don’t like this idea?”

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Again, Congresswoman, we have not had any engagement with the SEC on this proposal.

Ms. HAGEMAN. So, why don't you think that the BLM should weigh in on this proposal that would have sold all the natural assets to the BLM lands, to say, China?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Again, I am not familiar with the content of the proposal—

Ms. HAGEMAN. So, the BLM is just not taking a position.

Mr. WYKOWSKI [continuing]. Only from what I have read in the popular media, but we, in all our land management work, are committed to following the law and meeting the tenets of our multiple use and sustained yield mandate.

Ms. HAGEMAN. OK. Mr. Wykowski, do you believe that just perhaps our foreign adversaries would have a reason to cripple our access to raw materials needed for legitimate economic development? Don't you think that would be something that our foreign adversaries would want?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Congresswoman, I am here today to represent the Bureau of Land Management, so that is outside of my area of expertise.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Well, the BLM is where we access coal and oil and gas. It is where we have grazing rights, and trona. It can't be outside of your expertise. That is what we do on our BLM lands.

Mr. WYKOWSKI. And certainly we are committed to meeting all those multiple uses on the public lands through our management.

Ms. HAGEMAN. In the case of the New York Stock Exchange's proposal, they didn't include any kind of investment exclusion for foreign adversaries. In fact, the Intrinsic Exchange Group, who worked closely with the New York Stock Exchange, explicitly stated that foreign governments could invest in these NACs. They are not just OK with it, they actually extended the invitation.

I think that that is of grave concern, and something that the American people should understand, that the New York Stock Exchange, along with the SEC, were inviting foreign governments to come in in purchasing, for example, the natural assets associated with all of our BLM lands.

But I also think it is important for the American people to understand that the BLM did nothing to push back on that kind of a radical idea.

With that, I yield back.

Mr. COLLINS. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Arkansas for 5 minutes.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank the witness for being here today.

And I do want to make a clarification here. The idea of valuing our natural assets I don't think is a bad idea, and I think the United States is probably behind in that, in creating standards. And my understanding is that some foreign entities, even China, are working on international standards that could be used against us, be used against products produced in America.

My first question is, and I want to make the distinction between developing standards and using those standards in a nefarious way. So, can you tell me where we are on the international stage as far as the United States leading on developing standards for valuing our natural assets?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Thank you for the question. My understanding, although the Bureau was not directly involved in the development of this proposal, is that it is an opportunity to participate in an ongoing process that, I believe 80 countries globally are developing standards, so this is an effort by the U.S. Government to coordinate across several agencies to develop these standards in a cohesive manner to support interagency engagement.

This is a 15-year phased strategy, and we are very early in the beginning stages of that strategy.

Mr. WESTERMAN. I am concerned that we are getting behind, and we are allowing people who don't have our best interests at heart to develop these standards, where the United States has generally been a leader in standards development around the world.

Now, with that said, the Committee has heard concerns from every corner of the country that the proposed Conservation and Landscape Health Rule could be used to restrict currently permitted activities on BLM lands such as grazing, energy production, and recreation. So, how would a national system for natural capital accounting potentially affect conservation leasing, as outlined in the proposed Conservation and Landscape Health Rule?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Congressman, as I noted, we are relatively early in the development of this strategy. It is a 15-year phased approach, so it is potentially a little early to speculate on how it might be used. But as I noted in my testimony, we welcome opportunities to use better data to understand the value of these assets to inform our decision making.

Mr. WESTERMAN. In the proposed Conservation and Landscape Health Rule, why did BLM decide to allow foreign entities to apply for conservation leases?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Thank you for the question, Congressman. That was a comment we heard loud and clear during the comment period on the proposed rule, and it is one that, as we move towards finalizing the rule, we are certainly mindful of and hoping to address as we move forward.

Mr. WESTERMAN. That doesn't really answer why we allowed them to do that in the first place.

[Chart.]

Mr. WESTERMAN. But in the interest of time, the poster behind me, which is taken from an April 2023 presentation from the Department of the Interior, outlines how natural capital accounting aligns and supports DOI and BLM priorities in the Biden administration, which, that being said, it is ironic, with Ms. Hageman's questioning, that BLM or DOI had no contact with the SEC or the New York Stock Exchange throughout this process.

Can you explain how DOI and BLM will use natural capital accounting to advance your DEI and environmental justice goals?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Again, Congressman, this is a 15-year strategy, so I think it would be early to speculate how, if at all, this might impact land management decisions on the ground at the BLM.

Mr. WESTERMAN. You didn't talk about DEI and environmental justice goals. How are you going to use that?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. As I noted in my testimony, the Bureau was not involved in the development of this national strategy, but we look forward to working with our colleagues across government to figure

out the appropriate implementation, to work within the multiple use and sustained yield mandate provided by Congress.

Mr. WESTERMAN. So, this presentation and meeting behind me, you are saying basically it didn't happen, that you are not——

Mr. WYKOWSKI. I am here today as a representative of the Bureau of Land Management. I would have to refer to the Department of the Interior for questions about other agency priorities.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Well, my next question is how will DOI and BLM use natural capital accounting to advance the America the Beautiful Initiative and 30x30 goal to lock up 30 percent of America's lands by 2030.

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Again, Congressman, it is early in the development of this natural capital accounting strategy, so I would hesitate to speculate on how it might be implemented on management on the ground.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Speaking of 30x30, Congress has been asking this question for a long time, and I hope we can finally get an answer today for the American people: How much progress has been made towards the 30x30 goals so far?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Congressman, at the BLM, we are working hard to support the vision of the America the Beautiful that the President has laid out for supporting locally-led conservation, for protecting the health of our natural resources, and engaging with communities across the country.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Do you make a distinction between conservation and preservation?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Yes, Congressman.

Mr. WESTERMAN. What is that distinction?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. It depends on the context, but certainly there are a variety of definitions we use to help govern our land management in different situations.

Mr. WESTERMAN. I have seen preservation cloaked as conservation many times, and I have a real problem with that.

It has been over 3 years since President Biden took office. When will DOI provide a report on the metrics being used to measure progress and exactly how much land and water has been locked up in the 30x30 Initiative?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. I don't have an answer for you today on that, Congressman, but I would be happy to take a question back for the record and get you an answer from the Department.

Mr. WESTERMAN. If you could do that, and I am out of time, but I will submit some more questions for the record.

I appreciate you coming over today, and I yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Do you want a second round?

Mr. COLLINS. All right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to say the rookie in me came out. I should have acknowledged that you were the Chairman of the Full Committee, and I didn't.

We are going to entertain a second round of questioning, if you would like. The Chair is going to recognize the gentlewoman from Wyoming, Ms. Hageman, again for 5 minutes.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Well, thank you for that opportunity. I have so many questions for the BLM.

Forty-eight percent of the surface estate in the state of Wyoming is owned by the Federal Government, and about 65 percent of our mineral estate is owned by the Federal Government. So, when those resources are mismanaged, it has an enormous impact on my state and the citizens of my state.

And when you have programs such as the 30x30, what you now call America the Beautiful, which I would vehemently disagree with because I don't believe that that is ultimately what will happen with those efforts, I think you will see what we have been seeing over the last several years, which is the continuing of catastrophic forest fires for failure to properly manage our National Forest Service lands. Removing grazing from our BLM lands is going to have very serious impacts not only on the economy throughout the state of Wyoming, but it will impact the quality of those lands and the grasses, as well.

So, I am going to talk to you specifically about some of the things that the BLM has been doing in the state of Wyoming. In mid-August of this last year, the BLM Rock Springs Field Office introduced their draft Resource Management Plan for revision for the Rock Springs Planning Area, which makes up 3.6 million acres of land in the state of Wyoming. In total, under the preferred alternative, about 2.5 million acres would be off the table for consideration for new rights-of-way, and about 1.6 million acres would have been denied any type of access for grazing, oil and gas development, trona, those sorts of things.

By the way, Wyoming is the largest trona producer in the nation, the largest coal producer in the nation, and one of the largest oil and gas producers in the nation. So, these issues are extremely important to us.

That would have been an increase of more than 480 percent in acreage off limits to important things like power lines, pipelines, and maintaining roads. And this proposal would also heavily restrict trona mining, as well as oil and natural gas development, which are key contributors to our economy.

We learned from a former BLM employee that this proposed alternative took a very short time to develop. It was alternative B, and he said all of their efforts and the \$8 million that they spent on this effort was actually focused on developing alternative D, as in dog, compared to alternative B, as in boy. In his words, he said, in coming up with alternatives B and C, B basically denying access, management, and use to the vast majority of these lands, "We sat down and in 1 week they developed them together." So, over the years they spent years developing alternative D and about a week on B and C. Yet, because of this Administration, alternative B was the one that was chosen by the BLM.

And having been someone who has dealt with NEPA for decades now, NEPA requires you to take a hard look at the alternatives and the decision that is going to be made. Would you agree with me that spending years on alternative D, as compared to 1 week on alternative B, demonstrates that the BLM never did take a hard look at alternative B before deciding that that was the plan that they were going to go forward with?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Congresswoman, I am not aware of these assertions by a former BLM employee, but certainly agree that NEPA

requires us to take that hard look, and we will do that across all land management planning efforts, including the Rock Springs RMP.

Ms. HAGEMAN. OK. Well, would you agree spending years on something would be considered a hard look, and spending a week on something probably wouldn't qualify?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Again, Congresswoman, I am not aware of the assertions by this former employee, so I would hesitate to speculate, but I am certain that on the Rock Springs RMP we did take that hard look that NEPA requires, in compliance with the law.

Ms. HAGEMAN. OK. And really, in large part you are avoiding my question because you recognize that spending a week on alternative B isn't most likely going to pass court muster, especially when the \$8 million in the years were spent on studying alternative D.

So, I just want to make sure that the BLM truly understands the implications of what happens when decisions are coming out of Washington, DC rather than the local offices, and rather than in conjunction with the state and the stakeholders that actually know how to manage the resources in Wyoming. It is extremely damaging when you have an environmental agenda coming out of DC that folks don't understand how to manage those resources, what it can do to not only a state like Wyoming, but actually the country as a whole.

The war on coal, the war on oil and gas, the war on affordable energy is affecting everyone in this country. It is why I have introduced the Energy Poverty Prevention and Accountability Act, because I want to make sure that agencies like the BLM are actually having to quantify the costs associated with the decisions that they make. I think the American people deserve that.

And I will again say I think that the BLM needs to come to the table with the state of Wyoming and come up with a legitimate resource management plan for not only the Rock Springs district, but the remainder of Wyoming that BLM controls.

With that, I yield back.

Mr. COLLINS. All right, the Chair now recognizes himself for 5 minutes.

Mr. Wykowski, I know you have answered a lot of what I am going to ask you, because I have heard it throughout your testimony, but I just want to go through it again just so that I get it on my record as what we are doing.

And I have spent some time reviewing the National Strategy to Develop Statistics for Environmental, Economic Decisions and natural capital accounting. Since you referenced it throughout your testimony, you are familiar with this document, the National Strategy for Natural Capital Accounting, correct?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Although the Bureau was not directly involved in its development, in preparation for this hearing I familiarized myself, certainly.

Mr. COLLINS. You can say yes.

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Yes.

Mr. COLLINS. OK.

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Certainly.

Mr. COLLINS. Now, according to the strategy itself and information from the White House, the lead authors of the National

Strategy for Natural Capital Accounting are the Office of Management and Budget, the Office of Science and Technology Policy, and the Department of Commerce. Is that your understanding, as well?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. That is my understanding, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. COLLINS. OK. So, as the sole representative over there for the Biden administration, can you explain to me why the OMB, OSTP, and Commerce all refused to come here today to discuss their work and explain to the American people just what the heck the natural capital accounting and ecosystem service valuation is all about?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Congressman, I can say that the Department of the Interior does its best to accommodate witness requests from the Committee at every opportunity, and I am pleased to be here today to talk about the work we are doing at the BLM.

Mr. COLLINS. Let me just ask you point blank, then. Why are OMB, OSTP, and Commerce refusing to testify in front of Congress on this important issue?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Again, Congressman, I can only speak for the Department of the Interior that I know the Department does its best to accommodate witness requests from the Committee. And I am pleased to be here today to speak about the work of BLM.

Mr. COLLINS. Do you think it is fair that OMB, OSTP, Commerce, and, frankly, the White House just left you here all alone, stranded on that island over there, just to answer questions about a national strategy document that was authored by other agencies? Do you think that is fair?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Congressman, again, I really can only speak to the Department. I know that at the Department of the Interior we do our best to accommodate witness requests from the Committee at every opportunity.

Mr. COLLINS. So, do you think it is fair OMB and OSTP authored a strategy and issued directives on how the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Land Management should implement the strategy, but then left you here to answer all the questions about their strategy and the directives? Do you think that is fair?

Mr. WYKOWSKI. Congressman, again, I really can only speak to the Department of the Interior's considerations for witnesses, but—

Mr. COLLINS. Well, I will tell you what, I will answer it for you. No, it is not fair. It is absolutely a shame that the Biden administration left you here all by yourself to answer the questions about a major national strategy that was written by three other agencies who refuse to testify in front of Congress here today.

And I will tell you what. We may have different views on policies and politics, but I kind of feel bad for you sitting over there, with the OMB, the OSTP, and the White House tossing you out here to the wolves alone while they don't show up. And I don't blame you if you decide to leave the Biden administration, call me, we will help you get a job somewhere.

But let me just finish by saying this. It is absolutely outrageous that the Office of Management and Budget, the Office of Science and Technology Policy, the Department of Commerce, and the White House sent you here today by yourself to answer for stuff that they have done. But it is not surprising. I mean, it speaks

volumes, and it is a complete lack of accountability from this Administration.

And as we know from the elderly man with poor memory in the White House all the way down, that the Biden administration doesn't like getting questions. But we are going to keep asking questions, and we are going to keep getting answers whether President Biden likes it or not.

With that, I yield back, and seeing no other Members asking questions—

Ms. STANSBURY. Mr. Chairman, I will just make one final comment, which is that we are grateful that the Bureau of Land Management and Department of the Interior came and joined us here today. I think it was an educational hearing for my colleagues who are newly being introduced to the concept of natural capital.

I especially appreciate Mr. Westerman's comments about how the United States is behind other nations, and needs to standardize the way in which we do economic accounting of our natural resources, and grateful that we have a forester in the Majority who serves on this Committee, who understands the value that our natural resources have as we are making decisions. So, I think that is important.

And I do thank you, Mr. Wykowski, for coming to testify today. I think the policies that this Administration is continuing, which were begun decades ago by other administrations, including conservative and Republican administrations, are vital to the modernization of our public lands, our natural resources, and our competitiveness internationally. So, I appreciate your work on that.

With that, I think we are done. Thanks.

Mr. COLLINS. All right. I thank the witness for his testimony and Members for their questions.

The members of the Committee may have some additional questions for the witness, and we ask you respond to these in writing. Under Committee Rule 3, members of the Committee must submit questions to the Subcommittee Clerk by 5 p.m. on February 22. The hearing record will be held open for 10 business days for these responses.

If there is no further business, without objection, the Subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:43 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

[ADDITIONAL MATERIALS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD]

Statement for the Record**Susie Feliz****Assistant Secretary for Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs
U.S. Department of Commerce**

Consistent with the Department's agreement with the Subcommittee's staff, I am pleased to provide this Statement for the Record on behalf of the Department of Commerce. The Department remains committed to cooperation with our congressional partners.

The Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and the Department of Commerce (DOC) organized and co-chaired an Interagency Policy Working Group to develop the National Strategy to Develop Statistics for Environmental-Economic Decisions ("National Strategy"). The National Strategy outlines how the U.S. Federal statistical system can better integrate economic and environmental data, with an emphasis on environmental-economic accounts as a means to understand nature's critical contributions to a competitive and sustainable U.S. economy. The National Strategy provides a roadmap for a multi-year effort to measure stocks of (and flows of value from) natural capital assets—such as land, water, timber, mineral resources, and other critical components of the U.S. economy—in a way that complements and aligns with our existing national economic accounts. The National Strategy recommends a 15-year phased approach for Federal agencies to develop natural capital accounts, charting a path from research-grade environmental-economic accounts to core statistical products that would eventually be presented alongside our core economic statistics.

The main objective of the National Strategy is to improve the Nation's statistical infrastructure. The National Strategy does not have specific use cases or policy goals.

At present, natural capital assets are largely absent from the Nation's balance sheet, effectively understating U.S. national wealth and distorting our asset position relative to countries that have already begun integrating these assets into their economic accounts by following the latest statistical standards. The United Nations Statistical Commission, which governs international statistical standards such as the System of National Accounts (SNA), approved new statistical standards in 2012 and 2021 (System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, or SEEA) that provide a policy-neutral, rigorous accounting framework for developing environmental-economic statistics that dovetail with our existing national accounts. Coordinating international standards in this way mirrors the approach used for gross domestic product (GDP) and other components of National accounts. As of 2021, 90 countries have already produced or have begun compiling SEEA-based accounts. Indeed, the United States has moved to a leadership position, including signing a Joint Statement with Australia and Canada to exchange technical information in support of quantifying the value of natural assets. The United States, Australia, and Canada are large resource-rich nations that will be key players in the measurement of natural capital assets. Ultimately, however, the United States remains independent from other countries in how we implement our environmental-economic statistics and reserves the right to implement differing approaches that better serve the needs of U.S. data users.

The Administration is working within its existing authorities, making use of the substantial expertise within Federal departments and agencies, including by coordinating across agencies. Moreover, the measurement of natural capital is hewing closely to SNA and SEEA standards, which are internationally agreed upon standards, and not trying to exaggerate or undersell the value of natural assets.

However, production of new national accounts does not occur overnight. The development of our existing system of national economic accounts has taken decades, given the technical, methodological, and data collection challenges of measuring the complex and evolving U.S. economy. Current work across the Federal statistical system is in the initial pilot stage to assess feasibility, data availability, and resource needs. The Office of the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs has been coordinating Commerce's collaboration with the White House and technical work on the National Strategy.

Within Commerce, the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) will play a leading role in the development of technical standards and compilation of statistics that are consistent with existing economic measures such as GDP. BEA's sister agency

within Commerce, the Census Bureau, will be a key partner for much of this work, collecting the foundational data used to compile BEA's higher-level products. Initial research will focus on natural capital assets and environmental activities within the asset boundary of the SNA and SEEA's Central Framework (which is one part of the SEEA standards). The asset boundary restricts analysis to goods, services, and assets, whether natural or produced, from which owners may extract economic benefit, and valuation follows market prices. For certain environment-related activities, such as the emission of air pollutants, current standards only provide guidance for measurement on a physical flow basis.

Initial research within BEA has focused on Phase I and Supporting Activities within the National Strategy. These activities include the production of pilot tables that "restructure" existing input-output data to quantify environmental activities in the U.S. economy, such as waste and wastewater management, production of renewable energy, and soil remediation. BEA has also produced experimental statistics on the total value of land in the United States (residential, commercial/industrial, and agricultural land). For reference, other countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia have already added aggregate land value as a separate item on their national balance sheet and currently produce a detailed land account, among other natural capital assets.

Also, as part of Phase I work within Commerce, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) will lead the development of pilots for marine natural accounts that are within the asset boundary of the SNA through FY 2026. Pilots were selected based on the following criteria: (1) they support one or more sectors in the Marine Economy Satellite Account (MESA); and (2) they are within the SNA boundary, as required for Phase I marine accounts. The selected pilots were offshore oil and gas exploration and production (a component of the MESA Offshore Minerals sector), and commercial fishing (a component of the Living Resources MESA sector).

The offshore oil and gas research phase has involved identifying data for the development of physical accounts. Resource estimates published by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) have been analyzed and combined into accounting tables, consistent with SEEA. The research phase for commercial fisheries has involved the identification of available fisheries data and selection of species to be part of the pilot.

In addition to the marine natural capital pilots, NOAA is participating, along with other federal agencies, in the hazards and extreme weather natural capital accounting interagency working group. The goal of this account will be to capture the net costs of natural hazards to the U.S. economy.

All of these research efforts will help identify viable methods to develop the accounts, as well as data-related and other challenges, and potential solutions.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to submit this Statement for the Record.

