

WINTERGREEN EMERGENCY EGRESS ACT

FEBRUARY 23, 2026.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. WESTERMAN, from the Committee on Natural Resources,
submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany H.R. 6365]

The Committee on Natural Resources, to whom was referred the bill (H.R. 6365) to require the Secretary of the Interior to issue a right-of-way for an emergency exit on certain National Park Service land in the State of Virginia, and for other purposes, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon with an amendment and recommends that the bill as amended do pass.

The amendment is as follows:

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Wintergreen Emergency Egress Act”.

SEC. 2. RIGHT-OF-WAY FOR EMERGENCY EXIT, BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY.

Section 2 of the Act of June 30, 1936 (49 Stat. 2041, chapter 883; 54 Stat. 250, chapter 277; 16 U.S.C. 460a-3), is amended—

(1) by striking “Secretary of the Interior may issue” and inserting the following: “Secretary of the Interior—

“(1) may issue”;

(2) by striking the period at the end and inserting “; and”; and

(3) by adding at the end the following:

“(2) shall issue the right-of-way generally depicted as ‘Proposed Egress’ on the map entitled ‘Blue Ridge Parkway, Proposed Wintergreen Emergency Egress Near Milepost 9.6’, numbered 601/194,694, and dated September 2024, if the Secretary reports to the Committee on Natural Resources of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the Senate that—

“(A) an evaluation has been completed of alternatives to the right-of-way for egress that do not cross Federal land that includes evaluating whether existing trails can be converted to roads;

“(B) an analysis of expected fire ecology behavior in the event of a fire emergency has been completed with respect to the right-of-way; and

“(C) any required reviews with respect to the right-of-way have been completed in accordance with—

“(i) the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.); and
 “(ii) division A of subtitle III of title 54, United States Code.”

PURPOSE OF THE LEGISLATION

The purpose of H.R. 6365 is to require the Secretary of the Interior to issue a right-of-way for an emergency exit on certain National Park Service land in the State of Virginia, and for other purposes.

BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR LEGISLATION

Wintergreen is a resort and residential community located off the Blue Ridge Parkway in Nelson County, Virginia. The community has only one road in and out, a longstanding safety concern for residents and first responders.¹ Over the past decade, Wintergreen’s population has grown from roughly 150 to nearly 500 year-round residents, in addition to thousands of seasonal visitors who depend on the same narrow access point during peak periods. Local officials warn that this single chokepoint slows emergency response and would severely impede evacuation during a wildfire, winter storm, or medical emergency.² The danger posed by limited evacuation routes is well documented. For example, the 2023 Lahaina Fire claimed the lives of more than 100 people, many of whom were trapped in their vehicles on clogged roads as flames overtook neighborhoods.³ The 2025 Eaton Fire in Altadena, California, and the 2018 Camp Fire in Paradise, California, similarly choked designated evacuation routes with fleeing traffic, costing numerous lives and preventing first responders from accessing residents in distress.⁴ The lesson learned from each of these instances is that the difference between survival and catastrophe often comes down to whether there is more than one way out during times of emergency.

As a town that faces similar structural vulnerabilities, the Wintergreen community proposed constructing a secondary, emergency-only egress route connecting to a secondary evacuation route to the Blue Ridge Parkway. The route follows an existing dirt path on National Park Service (NPS) land and requires approximately 30 feet of gravel to make it passable for emergency vehicles.⁵ This route would not serve daily or public use and is deliberately designed to be non-intrusive, for emergency use only.⁶ Wintergreen spent more than 24 years navigating federal processes, and the community invested over \$100,000 in environmental studies to complete this

¹ Charlotte Matherly, “At Wintergreen, a gravel road to nowhere prompts a bill in Congress,” Cardinal News, February 5, 2024, <https://cardinalnews.org/2024/02/05/at-wintergreen-a-gravel-road-to-nowhere-prompts-a-bill-in-congress/>.

² *Id.*

³ Jennifer Kelleher, “Lahaina wildfire victims made it just blocks before becoming trapped by flames, report says,” PBS News, September 14, 2024, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/lahaina-wildfire-victims-made-it-just-blocks-before-becoming-trapped-by-flames-report-says>.

⁴ Jean Lee, et al., “The families of L.A. wildfire victims confront the failures that prevented escape,” NBC News, February 8, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/los-angeles-california-wildfires-victims-no-escape-rcna191087>. J. Matt, “Paradise Redux,” Places Journal, March 2024, <https://placesjournal.org/article/paradise-redux-five-years-after-camp-fire/#:~:text=The%20Camp%20Fire%20in%20November,85%20percent%20of%20its%20buildings>.

⁵ Charlotte Matherly, “At Wintergreen, a gravel road to nowhere prompts a bill in Congress,” Cardinal News, February 5, 2024, <https://cardinalnews.org/2024/02/05/at-wintergreen-a-gravel-road-to-nowhere-prompts-a-bill-in-congress/>.

⁶ *Id.*

road.⁷ However, despite strong community support, the project stalled for decades due to an NPS legal interpretation that new road connections cannot be authorized unless they existed at the time the Parkway was established.⁸ The town has already constructed all portions of the road that traverse non-federal lands and requires access to only a small footprint of federal land to fully complete this project.⁹ Without this right-of-way, completing the final gravel segment, even during a life-threatening evacuation, could expose responders to federal penalties.

To address this clear and preventable danger, Rep. John McGuire (R-VA-05) introduced H.R. 6365, the “Wintergreen Emergency Egress Act,” which directs the Secretary of the Interior to issue a right-of-way to Wintergreen for its emergency route upon the completion of any required reviews. This legislation ensures that residents, visitors, and first responders are not trapped in a catastrophic event with no safe way to escape, while minimizing disturbances to federal land.

COMMITTEE ACTION

H.R. 6365 was introduced on December 2, 2025, by Rep. John McGuire (R-VA). The bill was referred to the Committee on Natural Resources, and within the Committee to the Subcommittee on Federal Lands. On December 11, 2025, the Subcommittee on Federal Lands held a hearing on the bill. On January 22, 2026, the Committee on Natural Resources met to consider the bill. The Subcommittee on Federal Lands was discharged from further consideration of H.R. 6365 by unanimous consent. Chairman Bruce Westerman (R-AR) offered an amendment designated Westerman 050. The amendment was agreed to by unanimous consent. The bill, as amended, was ordered favorably reported to the House of Representatives by unanimous consent.

HEARINGS

For the purposes of clause 3(c)(6) of House rule XIII, the following hearing was used to develop or consider this measure: hearing by the Subcommittee on Federal Lands held on December 11, 2025.

SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

Section 1. Short title

Section 1 names the legislation the “Wintergreen Emergency Egress Act.”

Section 2. Right-of-way for emergency exit, Blue Ridge Parkway

Section 2 of the bill amends Section 2 of the Act of June 30, 1936, to direct the Secretary of the Interior to issue the right-of-way depicted on the reference map of NPS land in Virginia. This issuance of this right-of-way is contingent on the Secretary of the Interior reporting to the House Committee on Natural Resources and the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources that

⁷*Id.*

⁸*Id.*

⁹*Id.*

an evaluation of alternative routes, analysis of fire ecology behavior, and all environmental reviews have been completed.

COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding clause 2(b)(1) of rule X and clause 3(c)(1) of Rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee on Natural Resources' oversight findings and recommendations are reflected in the body of this report.

COMPLIANCE WITH HOUSE RULE XIII AND CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET ACT

1. *Cost of Legislation and the Congressional Budget Act.* Pursuant to clause 3(c)(2) of House rule XIII and section 308(a) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, and pursuant to clause 3(c)(3) of House rule XIII and section 402 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, the Committee has requested but not received from the Director of the Congressional Budget Office a budgetary analysis and a cost estimate of this bill.

2. *General Performance Goals and Objectives.* As required by clause 3(c)(4) of rule XIII, the general performance goal or objective of this bill is to require the Secretary of the Interior to issue a right-of-way for an emergency exit on certain National Park Service land in the State of Virginia, and for other purposes.

EARMARK STATEMENT

This bill does not contain any Congressional earmarks, limited tax benefits, or limited tariff benefits as defined under clause 9(e), 9(f), and 9(g) of rule XXI of the Rules of the House of Representatives.

UNFUNDED MANDATES REFORM ACT STATEMENT

An estimate of federal mandates prepared by the Director of the Congressional Budget Office pursuant to section 423 of the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act was not made available to the Committee in time for the filing of this report. The Chair of the Committee shall cause such estimate to be printed in the Congressional Record upon its receipt by the Committee, if such estimate is not publicly available on the Congressional Budget Office website.

EXISTING PROGRAMS

Directed Rule Making. This bill does not contain any directed rule makings.

Duplication of Existing Programs. This bill does not establish or reauthorize a program of the federal government known to be duplicative of another program. Such program was not included in any report from the Government Accountability Office to Congress pursuant to section 21 of Public Law 111-139 or identified in the most recent Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance published pursuant to the Federal Program Information Act (Public Law 95-220, as amended by Public Law 98-169) as relating to other programs.

APPLICABILITY TO LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The Committee finds that the legislation does not relate to the terms and conditions of employment or access to public services or accommodations within the meaning of section 102(b)(3) of the Congressional Accountability Act.

PREEMPTION OF STATE, LOCAL OR TRIBAL LAW

Any preemptive effect of this bill over state, local, or tribal law is intended to be consistent with the bill's purposes and text and the Supremacy Clause of Article VI of the U.S. Constitution.

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW MADE BY THE BILL, AS REPORTED

In compliance with clause 3(e) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, changes in existing law made by the bill, as reported, are shown as follows (existing law proposed to be omitted is enclosed in black brackets, new matter is printed in italics, and existing law in which no change is proposed is shown in roman):

SECTION 2 OF THE ACT OF JUNE 30, 1936

AN ACT To provide for the administration and maintenance of the Blue Ridge Parkway, in the States of Virginia and North Carolina, by the Secretary of the Interior, and for other purposes.

SEC. 2. In the administration of the Blue Ridge Parkway, the [Secretary of the Interior may issue] *Secretary of the Interior—*

(1) *may issue* revocable licenses or permits for rights-of-way over, across, and upon parkway lands, or for the use of parkway lands by the owners of lessees of adjacent lands, for such purposes and under such nondiscriminatory terms, regulations, and conditions as he may determine to be not inconsistent with the use of such lands for parkway purposes[.]; and

(2) *shall issue the right-of-way generally depicted as “Proposed Egress” on the map entitled “Blue Ridge Parkway, Proposed Wintergreen Emergency Egress Near Milepost 9.6”, numbered 601/194,694, and dated September 2024, if the Secretary reports to the Committee on Natural Resources of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the Senate that—*

(A) *an evaluation has been completed of alternatives to the right-of-way for egress that do not cross Federal land that includes evaluating whether existing trails can be converted to roads;*

(B) *an analysis of expected fire ecology behavior in the event of a fire emergency has been completed with respect to the right-of-way; and*

(C) *any required reviews with respect to the right-of-way have been completed in accordance with—*

(i) *the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.); and*

(ii) division A of subtitle III of title 54, United States Code.

