

While modest in size, this land holds important local value. It currently houses a building previously used by the U.S. Forest Service which Perry County hopes to repurpose for local administrative use, public services, or other community-focused purposes.

The conveyance would be subject to existing rights and environmental safeguards and would be made without cost to the county, other than administrative and survey-related expenses, which Perry County would cover.

This is a commonsense, community-driven bill that reflects how Federal land policy can and should be responsive to local needs. It will ensure that unused Federal property can be repurposed for the public good while preserving transparency, accountability, and proper oversight.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. STAUBER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. HILL), the lead sponsor of this bill.

Mr. HILL of Arkansas. Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. STAUBER for the time.

I rise in support of my bill, H.R. 3187. First, I thank my good friend and fellow Arkansan Chairman WESTERMAN for advancing my bill from the committee to the House floor.

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I thank all the members of the Natural Resources Committee for their bipartisan and unanimous support.

As noted, my bill seeks to transfer ownership of a vacant Federal building owned by the U.S. Forest Service at 1069 Fourche Avenue in Perryville, Arkansas, to Perry County.

This property is no longer in use by the Forest Service, and there are no plans for its utilization by them. That has been the case, Mr. Speaker, for well over a decade.

Perry County is a very small, rural community with a population of around 10,000. About 16 percent of the residents there live below the poverty line. About 77 percent of the county is forested, and 72 percent of that land is privately owned.

The U.S. Forest Service is the largest public landowner in the county, managing 119,000 acres as a part of the Ouachita National Forest.

For several years, Perry County has mightily sought to acquire this property. However, due to limited resources and that high poverty rate, this small county has been unable to easily navigate the complex Federal rules and to find a way to purchase the property outright.

My legislation would enable the Federal Government to convey the property at no cost to the county with all the benefits that Mr. STAUBER outlined.

The building will require many significant repairs, but the county does have that repair budget appropriated. Once restored, the facility will support

many local programs. Specifically, the University of Arkansas extension program, the Perry County Conservation District, and, importantly, it will serve as a meeting place for our 4-H youth development program. These organizations are currently struggling with limited options for meeting space in Perryville. This cures that problem.

My bill provides Perry County with a much-needed facility to expand youth development, agricultural education, and community health initiatives.

I thank Perry County Judge Larry Blackmon, Perryville Mayor John Roland, the Perry County Extension Office, the Perry County Chamber of Commerce, and the Perry County Farm Bureau, all for working with us collectively both on the Natural Resources Committee staff and my staff to bring this forward and make it a reality.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join the committee and me in supporting a unanimous vote for H.R. 3187.

Mr. HERNÁNDEZ. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. STAUBER. Mr. Speaker, in closing, H.R. 3187 is about turning a Federal liability into a community asset. Right now, taxpayers are stuck with the cost of a vacant building that continues to deteriorate. With this bill, we can remove that burden, transfer the property to Perry County, Arkansas, and allow local leaders to put it to work serving their community.

This legislation will provide a permanent home for programs that strengthen conservation, support farmers and landowners, and create new opportunities for young people through 4-H extension services.

It is a practical, cost-effective solution that delivers real value. I, once again, thank Representative HILL for his hard work on this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of the bill today, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. STAUBER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3187, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the yeas have it.

Mr. STAUBER. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

APPLICATION OF MINERAL LEASING ACT FOR ACQUIRED LANDS TO HARDROCK MINERALS

Mr. STAUBER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3872) to amend the Mineral Leasing Act for Acquired Lands to make

that Act applicable to hardrock minerals, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3872

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. APPLICATION OF MINERAL LEASING ACT FOR ACQUIRED LANDS TO HARDROCK MINERALS.

The Mineral Leasing Act for Acquired Lands (30 U.S.C. 351 et seq.) is amended—

(1) in section 2 (30 U.S.C. 351)—

(A) by striking “Act ‘United States’” and inserting the following: “Act:

“(1) UNITED STATES.—The term ‘United States’”;

(B) by striking “Alaska. ‘Acquired lands’” and inserting the following: “Alaska.

“(2) ACQUIRED LANDS; LANDS ACQUIRED BY THE UNITED STATES.—The term ‘acquired lands’”;

(C) by striking “552). ‘Secretary’” and inserting the following: “552).

“(3) SECRETARY.—The term ‘Secretary’”;

(D) by striking “Interior. ‘Mineral leasing laws’ shall mean” and inserting the following: “Interior.

“(4) MINERAL LEASING LAWS.—The term ‘mineral leasing laws’ means”;

(E) by striking “Acts. ‘Lease’” and inserting the following: “Acts.

“(5) LEASE.—The term ‘lease’”;

(F) by striking “requires. The term” and inserting the following: “requires.

“(6) OIL.—The term”; and

(G) by adding at the end the following:

“(7) HARDROCK MINERAL.—The term ‘hardrock mineral’—

“(A) includes deposits of—

“(i) minerals found in sedimentary or other rocks;

“(ii) base metals;

“(iii) precious metals;

“(iv) industrial minerals; and

“(v) precious and semi-precious gemstones; and

“(B) does not include deposits of—

“(i) coal;

“(ii) oil;

“(iii) oil shale;

“(iv) gas;

“(v) sodium;

“(vi) potassium;

“(vii) sulfur; or

“(viii) mineral materials subject to disposition under the Act of July 31, 1947, commonly known as the Materials Act of 1947 (30 U.S.C. 601 et seq.).”; and

(2) in section 3 (30 U.S.C. 352), by striking “and sulfur” and inserting “sulfur, and hardrock minerals”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. STAUBER) and the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. HERNÁNDEZ) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Minnesota.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. STAUBER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on H.R. 3872, the bill now under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Minnesota?

There was no objection.

Mr. STAUBER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 3872, which would amend the Mineral Leasing Act for Acquired Lands, clarifying that all lands acquired by the Federal Government are eligible to be considered for hardrock mineral leasing.

I thank my colleague Representative FALLON for his work on the bipartisan piece of legislation.

Acquired lands comprise 10 percent of the Nation's Federal lands, or 64 million acres. The Mineral Leasing Act for Acquired Lands governs mineral leasing for a wide range of resources on these lands. However, the existing statute leaves out hardrock minerals. As a result, acquired Federal lands holding key critical minerals have effectively been locked up. This includes vast deposits in the Smackover Formation, which spans across the southeastern United States and hosts some of America's best lithium reserves.

Specifically, in northeast Texas, the Bureau of Land Management is currently unable to even consider hardrock mineral leasing for a lithium-rich portion of the Smackover Formation because it is located on land acquired by the Federal Government more than 80 years ago under a statute that does not explicitly allow hardrock mineral leasing.

H.R. 3872 would address this issue by providing a much-needed technical fix to the Mineral Leasing Act for Acquired Lands, giving the Secretary of the Interior the authority to tap into our vast mineral wealth across all types of acquired lands.

As we seek to reshore our mineral supply chains, we must ensure that no stone gets left unturned. By allowing greater access to tens of millions of acres of acquired lands, this legislation would help to break our reliance on adversarial nations like China.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, Mr. FALLON, for his work on this commonsense bill. I ask my colleagues to join me in supporting this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HERNÁNDEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 3872, a bill to amend the Mineral Leasing Act for Acquired Lands, clarifying that all lands acquired by the Federal Government are eligible for potential hardrock mineral leasing.

Most mining on Federal lands operates under a claims system, where U.S. citizens or U.S. subsidiaries of foreign companies can claim certain open areas of public land for their mineral rights. On most acquired lands, which are lands obtained through means other than the original public lands laws, like through a purchase or exchange, hardrock mineral rights are leased, similar to procedures for oil, gas, and coal. However, if the statute used to acquire that land doesn't explicitly authorize hardrock mineral leasing, then mineral leasing can't take place.

This is the case with the Department of Defense lands in Texas, specifically

the Red River Army Depot, which was acquired under various statutes that did not specifically authorize hardrock leasing.

A lithium exploration company applied for a permit to explore at the Army Depot, but the Bureau of Land Management did not have the power the authorize exploration.

The company already has industrial leases on adjacent private lands, and this bill would not grant any specific permits but would give BLM the authority to issue permits and leases if appropriate.

This is a good bill. It is a technical fix that will help us potentially develop lithium resources which are essential for the clean energy transition.

I will add that this bill authorizes hardrock leasing, which is a far better and more responsible practice than the claims staking system we have across the rest of our Federal lands.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. STAUBER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. FALLON), who is the lead sponsor of this bill.

Mr. FALLON. Mr. Speaker, if critical minerals like lithium are essential to our military and to our national security, if that is the case, then why are we still relying on our number one global adversary to supply them?

China is mining about 18 percent of all the lithium in the world. With the United States, that percentage is less than 1. As far as refining, China is about 67 percent, some estimates up to 80 percent, where the United States is at 2 percent.

For years now, the United States has been overly reliant on the communists in Beijing. It is in America's best national security interest to maintain deterrence against the CCP, not only in the Indo-Pacific, but especially here at home in our supply chains and critical industries. This is why I first introduced H.R. 3872, the MERICA Act, which would allow for the expanded extraction of critical minerals on Federal lands.

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In fact, we already have some of these critical minerals in abundance. A portion of the district I am privileged to represent falls within what is known as the Smackover Formation, a geological formation that encompasses areas from east Texas all the way to the Florida panhandle.

Thanks to a recent U.S. Geological Survey-led study, we know there are an estimated 5 to 19 million tons of lithium reserves in the Smackover Formation, and it is ready for extraction.

Lithium is essential for military and defense applications. It includes batteries and power systems used in unmanned aerial systems, such as the ones planning to be assembled under the Army's SkyFoundry Initiative, which is also absolutely critical for our Nation's future defense.

Under current law, these valuable lithium deposits are locked up on Federal lands, preventing their usage. The MERICA Act would amend the Mineral Leasing Act for Acquired Lands by adding hardrock minerals as part of the listed deposits subject to leasing so that all federally acquired lands can be considered for hardrock mineral leasing.

The MERICA Act would also give the Secretary of the Interior the authority to follow through on President Trump's executive order by ramping up mineral extraction and production on our own Federal lands.

We can't continue to play into the hands of Beijing by granting them de facto control of the global lithium supply chain—it makes absolutely no sense—whether through domestic mines or ones they have gained through other means, such as the Belt and Road Initiative.

The demand for lithium will only continue to increase as the days go by. We must bolster our national capabilities and work to address the ever-growing burden on our Nation's power grid. By passing the MERICA Act, we would take the commonsense step to utilize Federal lands to their full and utmost potential.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues very much for their consideration. For the sake of America's security, I urge all of my colleagues in this august Chamber to support H.R. 3872.

Mr. HERNÁNDEZ. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. STAUBER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, this is a great bill that would provide a much-needed technical fix to the Mineral Leasing Act for Acquired Lands. I again thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. FALLON) for his work on this bipartisan piece of legislation. I urge my colleagues to support this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. STAUBER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3872, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

REAUTHORIZATION OF JUNIOR DUCK STAMP CONSERVATION AND DESIGN PROGRAM ACT OF 1994

Mr. STAUBER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1098) to reauthorize the Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program Act of 1994, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows: