

## **Statement for the Record**

**U.S. Geological Survey  
U.S. Department of the Interior**

**House Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources**

### **Legislative Hearing**

**July 19, 2022**

Chair Lowenthal and Ranking Member Stauber, thank you for this opportunity to provide the views of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) on H.R. 3681, the Sinkhole Mapping Act. The USGS has previously conducted sinkhole research via several projects, drawing on expertise from variety of programs within our Natural Hazards, Water, and Core Science Systems mission areas. For example, in 2020 at the Sinkhole Conference at the University of South Florida, the USGS announced the publication of a comprehensive map of the karst topography of the conterminous United States, which are geologic regions that feature limestone and can be susceptible to sinkhole formation.<sup>1</sup> This was a first-of-its-kind effort to map these structures at a nationwide scale. The USGS is undertaking limited research and mapping activities on sinkhole processes and hazards and the requirements of this bill are much more expansive. Development of reliable and routinely updated sinkhole hazard maps and assessments at the scales required in this bill to inform hazard avoidance and risk reduction would require the USGS to undertake a more expanded and sustained effort and would need to be achieved using existing resources that are currently committed for other purposes.

### **H.R. 3681, Sinkhole Mapping Act**

H.R. 3681 directs the USGS to study the short- and long-term mechanisms of sinkholes and develop maps of sinkhole risk. These maps would be published online and updated at least once every five years.

As noted above, the USGS does have the expertise required to conduct this analysis related to sinkhole processes and hazards. For instance, the USGS is establishing Integrated Water Availability Assessments in select basins, which could contribute to improved understanding of sinkhole formation. However, the ability to develop maps, especially on five-year schedules, at the scales required to inform hazard avoidance and risk reduction would require a substantially expanded and sustained effort. Furthermore, unlike the national scale karst topography map produced in 2020, an operational program assessing hazards across the country would require many local scale efforts. Sinkholes are highly localized geologic processes, meaning that, while they can happen in many places, the triggers and dynamics in a particular area depend very much on aspects of the local geology. State geologists provide this local expertise. Some of this local scale work is already undertaken by state geologists, but the maps contemplated by H.R. 3681 would require substantial additional work.

The USGS appreciates the intent of the bill and recognizes the need to address sinkhole hazards. The program as envisioned in H.R. 3681 would, however, impact other priorities, including those authorized by the Energy of Act of 2020 and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021. We would like to work with the bill's sponsors to address these priorities without impacting other critical USGS work.

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel H. Doctor et. al, *Progress Toward a Preliminary Karst Depression Density Map for the Conterminous United States*, 16<sup>TH</sup> SINKHOLE CONFERENCE, UNIV. OF S. FLA., (May 2020), <https://doi.org/10.5038/9781733375313.1003>.

**Statement of  
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Bureau of Land Management  
U.S. Department of the Interior**

**House Natural Resources Committee  
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources  
H.R. 5522, Federal Land Asset Inventory Reform Act**

**July 19, 2022**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.R. 5522, the Federal Land Asset Inventory Reform Act. The bill directs the Department of the Interior (Department) to develop and maintain a current multipurpose cadastre of Federal real property and provide a report to Congress on such property. The Department supports the goals of H.R. 5522 to modernize and make publicly available the nation's inventory of Federal real property assets and would welcome the opportunity to work with its sponsors on a number of issues discussed below.

**Background**

Cadastral surveys create, restore, mark, and define boundaries and subdivisions of land. First proposed by Thomas Jefferson and enacted into law by the Land Ordinance of 1785, cadastral surveys provide the public and public land managers with the essential information needed to correctly determine ownership rights and privileges and facilitate good land management decisions.

As our nation grew, Congress created the General Land Office in 1812 to handle the rapidly increasing number of surveys, public land sales, patents, and land entries. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) assumed responsibility for cadastral surveys in 1946, when the merger of the General Land Office and the Grazing Service created the BLM. Today, the BLM's Cadastral Survey Program maintains the official records of more than 200 years' worth of title and cadastral survey records, 12 million of which have been scanned, indexed, and published online by the BLM for use by the public and Federal land managers since 1992.

In 1994, an executive order established the interagency Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC), which provides managerial and advisory direction for geospatial initiatives across the Federal government. The FGDC is tasked with promoting the coordination and dissemination of geospatial data nationwide and was codified under the Geospatial Data Act of 2018. The Secretary of the Interior serves as the Chair of the FGDC and the BLM leads the FGDC Cadastral Subcommittee, which coordinates cadastral data-related activities among Federal, state, Tribal, and local governments, and the private sector. The BLM publishes two key datasets through the FGDC: 1) the Public Land Survey System, which is a coordinated dataset based on cadastral survey information used for parcel level mapping; and 2) the Surface Management Agency dataset, which captures the best available Federal ownership information. Both of these datasets support large scale depiction of Federal ownership information. The

FGDC was also tasked to develop and manage the National Spatial Data Infrastructure, which is comprised of the technology, policies, and resources necessary to improve utilization of geospatial data.

As part of these efforts, the BLM is responsible for the surveying of Federal lands and maintaining the associated land title records. In total, the Federal government manages approximately 640 million surface acres of the nearly 2.3 billion acres of land that constitute the United States. In addition to these surface lands, the Federal government also manages subsurface estate and hundreds of thousands of buildings, structures, and other properties. Of all the Federal agencies, the BLM administers the largest portfolio of land and interests, with 245 million surface acres and approximately 700 million acres of onshore Federal mineral estate.

### ***Modernizing Record Systems***

The Department is committed to the continued development of geospatial data and technology as critical investments for our nation and is involved in many efforts to modernize cadastral and geographic data to better serve a variety of users. In 2019, the BLM initiated an effort to consolidate and modernize its land status records systems through the development of the Mineral and Land Records System (MLRS). The MLRS will replace the current systems used by the BLM, including the Legacy Rehost 2000 case management system, the Alaska Land Information System, and the older status records, such as master title plats, historical indexes, and tract books. The MLRS will be a customer-centric, geospatially-enabled land information system that employs standardized business practices. The new system will help ensure the quality and accuracy of land and mineral records, while securely making them available to the public and land managers.

### **H.R. 5522, the Federal Land Asset Inventory Reform Act**

H.R. 5522 directs the Department to develop and maintain a multipurpose cadastre of all Federal real property, including land, buildings, crops, forests, and other resources, as well as information about the use, assets, and infrastructure of all parcels. Under the bill, the cadastre must be made publicly available on the internet in a graphically geo-enabled and searchable format.

The Department notes that the scope of the cadastre in H.R. 5522 – which would span across every Federal landholding agency – extends beyond the current resources of the Department, and would require extensive new resources to fulfil the bill’s objectives.

### ***Development of Cadastre***

The Department supports the goal of modernizing inventory and cadastre systems and is currently in the process of developing a new records system with capabilities that align with some of the requirements of the bill. The Department welcomes the opportunity to work with the sponsors of H.R. 5522 to determine the necessary authority and capacity to consolidate Federal real property inventories of cadastre data across all landholding agencies, consistent with applicable laws. Although the Department oversees roughly 420 million acres of Federal lands, many agencies manage hundreds of thousands of acres of real property assets which are outside of the Department’s jurisdiction. While there may be some advantages in designating the Department as the lead under the bill, we would like to work with the sponsors to adequately

address the extensive interagency coordination, and assignment of roles and responsibilities, necessary to develop and maintain the cadastre.

We would also like to work with the sponsors to refine a number of the bill's definitions, including those for real property and assets, as well as to clarify the role of the Department and the BLM in engaging with other agencies to ensure alignment with the requirements of the Geospatial Data Act and compatibility with their respective FGDC responsibilities. Finally, we would like to work with the sponsors to ensure requirements for contracting services for the development of the cadastre, as directed in the bill, are consistent with the Department of the Interior's procurement and contracting practices and include opportunities for small and disadvantaged business communities.

### ***Implementation Timeframe***

Section 2 provides 18 months to develop interagency standards to ensure compatibility among all Federal databases relating to Federal real property. Additionally, Section 2 requires the development of the cadastre to be completed in less than 2 years. We would also like to work with the sponsors to develop more achievable deadlines.

### ***Report to Congress***

The bill also requires the Department to submit a report to Congress, within 180 days of enactment, that describes the existing Federal real property inventory and cadastre and recommends whether these existing inventories should be eliminated or consolidated into the new multipurpose cadastre required under H.R. 5522. The bill specifies that the report should include all real property owned or maintained by the entire Federal government, including land; resources such as crops or forests associated with the land; buildings or structures; and any interest or rights in these properties. Furthermore, under the bill, the Department must include the anticipated cost savings that will be achieved as part of the creation of the new multipurpose cadastre, as well as a plan for the implementation of the new multipurpose cadastre. Finally, as part of the requirements of the report, the Department would need to provide legislative recommendations to increase the cost savings and enhance the effectiveness of consolidating Federal real property inventories into one multipurpose cadastre.

The Department is cognizant of its duty to be responsive and accountable to Congress. Given the magnitude of real Federal property and records that must be identified in the report required by H.R. 5522, which includes real Federal property maintained by Federal agencies outside of the Interior Department, the Department would like to work with the sponsors to narrow the scope of the report to DOI jurisdiction to help ensure successful completion.

### **Conclusion**

The Department and the BLM are proud of its involvement with the nation's cadastre and appreciates the Committee's interest in this important topic. The Department looks forward to working further with the sponsors of H.R. 5522 to achieve the bill's objectives.

**Statement of  
Michael Nedd  
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**House Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources  
H.R. 5805, Buffalo Tract Protection Act**

**July 19, 2022**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.R. 5805, the Buffalo Tract Protection Act. The bill would withdraw about 4,200 acres contained in four parcels of public land managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) near Placitas, New Mexico, from location, entry, and patent under the mining laws; and disposition under all laws pertaining to mineral and geothermal leasing or mineral materials. H.R. 5805 aligns with the Administration's conservation goals, and the BLM supports the bill.

**Background**

The lands proposed for withdrawal are located in close proximity to Placitas, New Mexico, which is an unincorporated area of Sandoval County, just north of Albuquerque. The population of the region has grown significantly in recent years, raising community concerns about the potential impacts of additional gravel mining in the area. The area is used for a variety of recreation activities.

H.R. 5805 identifies the four parcels for withdrawal as tracts A (3,127 acres), B (903 acres), C (201 acres), and D (57 acres). Tract A is referred to as the "Buffalo Tract" and is used for hiking, off-highway vehicles (OHVs), and recreational shooting. The Buffalo Tract contains sand and gravel ridges and arroyos with juniper trees, shrubs, and grasses. Approximately 25 percent of tract A has been mined and reclaimed to date. Tract B is known as the "Crest of Montezuma" and is characterized by moderately steep slopes with pinyon and juniper trees intermixed with shrubs and sparse grasses. Tract C, which does not have a specific name, is similar in topography to the Buffalo Tract and is a common hiking area for local community members. Tract D, referred to as "San Francisco," is named after the arroyo that runs through it, and has terrain similar to that of the Buffalo Tract.

**H.R. 5805, Buffalo Tract Protection Act**

H.R. 5805, the Buffalo Tract Protection Act, would, subject to valid existing rights, withdraw four tracts totaling approximately 4,200 acres of Federal mineral estate near Placitas, New Mexico, from all forms of mineral development under all laws pertaining to locatable minerals, mineral leasing, or mineral materials. The bill specifies that nothing in the act would prevent future conveyance of the surface of the withdrawn lands, although the mineral estate would be retained by the Federal government.

The BLM recognizes the importance of locally crafted recreation and conservation areas on public lands and waters and believes they can yield immense economic benefits. The BLM believes the most effective and enduring conservation strategies are those reflecting the priorities, needs, and perspectives of the families and communities that know, live, work, and care for the lands and waters. The BLM is aware that local communities, including a Pueblo and residents from Placitas and unincorporated Sandoval County, support protection of these tracts from future mineral development. The BLM is in the process of updating the Rio Puerco Proposed Resource Management Plan that has jurisdiction over these covered lands, and is committed to ensuring Native American and Hispanic community voices are represented in the process.

**Conclusion**

The BLM appreciates the efforts of the sponsor and the Subcommittee in advancing this important conservation initiative. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H.R. 5805.