

Statement for the Record
U.S. Department of the Interior
before the
House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands
on
H.R. 1820, the Federal Lands Amplified Security for the Homeland (FLASH) Act

March 11, 2025

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and Members of the Subcommittee, this statement provides the Department of the Interior's (Department) views on H.R.1820, the Federal Lands Amplified Security for the Homeland (FLASH) Act, a multi-title bill that addresses the public safety issues and environmental destruction currently impacting Federal lands along the southern border.

On January 20, 2025, President Trump declared a national emergency at the southern border of the United States. The situation at the southern border is a long-standing humanitarian crisis that threatens American sovereignty, core security interests of the United States, and public health and safety. Unlawful border crossings have caused a widespread proliferation of drug trafficking, human trafficking and other criminal activity harming and imposing costs on American citizens in states and local communities along the border and across the country. Such large-scale illegal activity is also an environmental crisis ravaging our treasured landscapes and resources. Along the southern border, cultural resources, Tribal lands, wilderness areas, national parks, wildlife refuges and the species they protect are adversely impacted by land degradation and destruction from trail cutting, trash accumulation, invasive species introductions, fires, property destruction and other illicit activities.

The President has made clear, a nation without borders is not a nation, and the Federal government must act with urgency and strength to end the threats posed by an unsecured border. In carrying out our mission as steward of the Nation's public lands and resources on behalf of the American people, the Department is fully committed to delivering on the President's vision.

The Department manages lands that cover 40 percent of the southern border, including national parks, wildlife refuges, historic sites, public lands, and wilderness areas as well as infrastructure including water delivery structures. The impacts of this crisis on the health, security and productivity of America's lands are evident.

The FLASH Act directs the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture (Secretaries), in consultation with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), to install navigable roads of at least 584 miles in length along portions of the southern border that abut covered Federal lands to gain operational control of the southern border and deter border crossings. It further directs the Secretaries to enter into cooperative agreements to allow DHS to deploy fencing, surveillance, and related technology along the roads installed under the bill, allows states to place temporary

barriers on Federal border lands and authorizes the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to conduct various activities to ensure border security in wilderness areas.

The bill also includes provisions directing the Secretaries to promulgate rules and implement policies to address environmental destruction on public lands including initiatives to reduce trash accumulation, wildfire risk, and cultivation of cannabis on Federal lands. Among these provisions, the bill directs the Secretary of the Interior to establish a “Southern Border Fuels Management Initiative” to carry out vegetation management activities along the southern border within one year of enactment. The Department notes this provision codifies the Department’s Southern Border Fuels Initiative. This program, launched in 2018, has not only helped to reduce the risk of wildfire, but has also helped protect natural and cultural resources on Federal and Tribal lands, while supporting national security operations carried out by DHS by clearing areas for enhanced border patrol visibility and protecting DHS infrastructure.

Finally, the FLASH Act prohibits the use of Federal funds to provide housing, including temporary housing, to specified aliens on any land under the administrative jurisdiction of the National Park Service (NPS), Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or U.S. Forest Service and revokes and prohibits any lease between the NPS and the City of New York for portions of Floyd Bennet Field in Gateway National Recreation Area.

While the President has taken bold, immediate executive action that has already significantly addressed the crisis at our border, the FLASH Act would complement the President’s actions to secure the border and keep Americans safe, while allowing the Department to effectively maintain the character of the lands and resources Congress entrusted it to protect. The Department strongly supports these efforts. The Department has a longstanding, cooperative working relationship with CBP, and will continue to work collaboratively to carry out the Administration’s priorities. We defer to the Department of Agriculture and DHS for their views on the elements of this draft related to their areas of responsibility.

The Department looks forward to working with the subcommittee on this important legislation to advance the critical goal of securing the southern border.