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Groups ready for battle ahead of land bills hearing

By **Scott Streater** | 03/20/2024 06:33 AM EDT

The Natural Resources subcommittee hearing will feature top administration officials.



Legislation from Rep. Lauren Boebert (R-Colo.) is among the contentious bills up for a hearing Wednesday. J. Scott Applewhite/AP

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E&E DAILY | Conservation groups and the oil and gas industry are publicly sparring over a slate of public lands bills set for debate at a House hearing on Wednesday.

A coalition of nearly 70 conservation groups is pushing the House Natural Resources Committee to reject legislation before the Subcommittee on Federal Lands that would limit the president's ability to designate national monuments.

The groups [are delivering a letter](#) to Natural Resources Chair Bruce Westerman (R-Ark.) and Arizona Rep. Raul Grijalva, the committee's top Democrat, expressing "strong opposition" to [H.R. 5499](#), which would amend the Antiquities Act of 1906 to require congressional approval of presidential monument designations.

"H.R. 5499 represents a direct assault on the Antiquities Act," the groups write of the bill, sponsored by Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks (R-Iowa).

"As organizations committed to conservation, environmental stewardship, and the preservation of our nation's heritage, we urge you to oppose H.R. 5499 and to uphold the Antiquities Act as a critical tool for protecting America's natural and cultural treasures," said the letter signed by a wide array of groups, including the Wilderness Society, Sierra Club, Conservation Lands Foundation and Earthjustice.

Accountable.US, a watchdog group that also signed the letter, on Tuesday issued a press memo from its research manager for energy and environment, Chris Marshall, blasting the Miller-Meeks' bill as a "MAGA-led" measure designed to "eviscerate" the Antiquities Act.

On the other side of the issue, Denver-based Western Energy Alliance, in a press statement on Tuesday, issued support for the Miller-Meeks' bill and two other bills at the hearing that would block the Bureau of Land Management from finalizing conservation-focused land-use plan updates covering millions of acres in Wyoming and Colorado.

[H.R. 6085](#), sponsored by Rep. Harriet Hageman (R-Wyo.), would forbid Interior Secretary Deb Haaland from allowing BLM to "finalize, implement, administer, or enforce" a proposed resource management plan update for the Rock Springs Field Office that would establish restrictive conservation designations on 1.6 million acres in southwest Wyoming.

And [H.R. 6547](#), from Rep. Lauren Boebert (R-Colo.), would prevent Haaland from allowing BLM to implement a proposed BLM land-use plan update banning new oil and gas drilling on about 1.6 million acres in the Colorado River Valley and the Grand Junction field offices in her home state.

Kathleen Sgamma, president of the oil and gas trade group, said in a statement Tuesday that both bills blocking the BLM proposals are important to an industry that she said is under attack by Biden administration policies emphasizing conservation over other uses.

Sgamma, who is scheduled to testify at Wednesday's hearing, said the Biden administration's BLM is "using the public land use planning process to preclude leasing on vast swathes of land across the West."

Sgamma's statement is aligned with language in a formal [hearing memo](#) from Natural Resources Committee Republicans.

In the GOP memo, Republicans accuse the Biden administration of "conducting an orchestrated attack on public lands using a variety of tools, including the Antiquities Act," as well as "restrictive" land-use plan updates, "to limit access, hurt local economies, and remove uses of public lands that benefit Americans."

Nada Culver, BLM's principal deputy director, and Chris French, the Forest Service's deputy chief, are also scheduled to testify at Wednesday's hearing.