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Accelerating Appraisals and Conservation Efforts (AACE) Act

Led by Reps. Susie Lee (D-NV) and Dave Joyce (R-OH)

Why do we need this bill?

The Department of the Interior (DOI) is America's principal land management agency, charged with administering roughly 420 million acres of federal lands, nearly 55 million acres of Tribal lands, more than 700 million acres of subsurface minerals, and about 2.5 billion acres of the outer continental shelf. Any time that DOI and its bureaus — including the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the National Park Service (NPS) — buy, sell, lease, trade, or conduct any type of land-related activities, these activities must be done at fair market value to protect the public trust.

As the number of desired DOI land-related activities continues to increase nationwide, so, too, are appraisal bottlenecks, slowing progress on key land transactions and threatening to undermine longstanding DOI projects and partnerships essential to achieving a range of conservation, economic, and housing goals. With the Land and Water Conservation Fund now permanently and fully funded — and with communities across the country actively seeking to collaborate with DOI on land transactions vital to progress and preservation alike — the demands on the Department grow greater by the day.

DOI completes over 4,000 appraisals, appraisal reviews, and valuation services each year in support of agency land transactions; the Department now faces an "expected surge" of requests in FY 2024, during a nationwide appraiser shortage that has depleted DOI's own appraisal workforce. "Staffing to meet current and anticipated increases in demand," the Department emphasizes, "remains a challenge."[i]

What would this bill do?

In 1992, recognizing that the United States has a compelling interest in facilitating appraisal work on behalf of the federal government across state lines, the Bush-Quayle Administration directed that federal employees who are appraisers only need to be licensed or certified in one state or territory to perform appraisal duties on behalf of the federal government in all states and territories.[ii] Today, however, for DOI to meet its fast-growing appraisal obligations, the Department must regularly contract with private appraisers throughout the country. This slows DOI's appraisal workflow, as private appraisers must currently be credentialed in each state where contracted by the Department.

The bipartisan *Accelerating Appraisals and Conservation Efforts (AACE) Act* addresses this inefficiency by allowing DOI to contract with private appraisers appropriately credentialed in any one state or territory to perform appraisal duties across all states and territories. It builds on the decades-old precedent established under President George H.W. Bush to maximize the efficiency of DOI's appraisal process with no additional appropriations and minimal changes to existing regulations. This bill is a commonsense, bipartisan fix to alleviate a government backlog that currently inhibits states, municipalities, and communities nationwide from accomplishing their conservation, economic, and housing goals.

Specifically, this bill would:

- Enable DOI to contract with private appraisers who are appropriately credentialed in one state or territory to perform appraisal and valuation services on DOI's behalf in any state or territory.
- Require DOI to continue to prioritize contracting with local appraisers to the maximum extent practicable, unlocking the enhanced flexibility provided by the bill only when no assignment-qualified or cost-competitive local appraisers are available to perform needed services.
- Direct DOI to report to Congress on the effectiveness of this enhanced flexibility as well as provide annual updates on the status of its appraisal workflow, workforce, and workload.

Endorsements:

- **American Battlefield Trust**
- **Appraisal Institute**
- **Conservation Lands Foundation**
- **Trout Unlimited**
- **U.S. Chamber of Commerce**
- **Nevada Conservation League**
- **Nevada Housing Coalition**
- **Nevada Land Trust**

"The work of preserving America's most hallowed battlegrounds — which often rank among the most endangered of our nation's historic resources — is always a race against time. The quicker that we are able to safeguard these storied sites, the better. The *AACE Act* will help empower the Department of the Interior to join with the preservation community to protect these treasured places at the speed that modern realities require."
David N. Duncan, President, American Battlefield Trust

"The *AACE Act* supports the preservation of appraisal independence in successfully balancing taxpayer, program, and stakeholder concerns at the Department of the Interior while helping improve appraiser accessibility throughout federal lands programs. As the largest professional association of real estate appraisers, the Appraisal Institute looks forward to working with the bill's bipartisan sponsors toward its passage."
Craig Steinley, President, Appraisal Institute (2023)

"The Department of the Interior and its bureaus, including the Bureau of Land Management, need adequate staffing to complete all of the critical work necessary for managing and conserving our public lands. Appraisals are a critical part of that work, and the *AACE Act* will help alleviate the appraisal backlog and provide flexibility for those who do this important work."
David Feinman, Government Affairs Director, Conservation Lands Foundation

"Trout Unlimited has worked together with the Department of the Interior in communities throughout the country to protect, reconnect, and restore fish and wildlife habitat for the benefit of Americans today as well as generations still to come. The *AACE Act* will provide public land management agencies with the kind of flexibility they need to be able to fully leverage programs like the Land and Water Conservation Fund to conserve lands and ensure access for outdoor enthusiasts. Working together we can heed Theodore Roosevelt's call to pass on our natural resources to the next generation increased and not impaired in value."
Corey Fisher, Public Lands Policy Director, Trout Unlimited

"The U.S. Chamber of Commerce applauds Reps. Lee and Joyce for working to fix one of the many friction points in getting projects crucial to economic growth moving. We're pleased this issue is getting the attention it deserves and there is bipartisan work to develop a common sense solution."
Marty Durbin, President, U.S. Chamber of Commerce Global Energy Institute

"From the Mojave Desert to Lake Tahoe, Nevada is home to some of the most iconic and ecologically significant landscapes in the country. Nevada takes pride in our long history of conserving our public lands and natural spaces, but it requires that our federal partners remain always able and ever ready to support our state's conservation community and public lands stakeholders. Rep. Susie Lee's *AACE Act* will help ensure the Department of the Interior is fully equipped and well-positioned to continue providing the responsive and responsible public lands management vital to Nevada and the nation."
Kristee Watson, Executive Director, Nevada Conservation League

"With more than 80 percent of Nevada lands in public hands, the federal government is a key partner in ongoing efforts to address the state's housing crisis — and ensure access to the places and spaces necessary to continue to provide housing for Nevadans that is both affordable and readily available. By allowing the Department of the Interior more flexibility in its appraisal process, the *AACE Act* represents the kind of specific streamlining that will help the Bureau of Land Management, our local governments and developer partners function more efficiently together."
Bill Brewer, Chairman of the Board, Nevada Housing Coalition

"Nevada Land Trust works to protect the special places and open spaces of Nevada for future generations. Working with the federal government — our state's biggest landholder — can impact our private landowner partners as well as our ability to protect important lands and water as we wait on a very lengthy and overburdened appraisal process. The *AACE Act* will help make sure that this process is as effective and as efficient as possible at a time of increasing demand on a decreasing workforce."
Alicia Reban, Executive Director, Nevada Land Trust

For more information or to cosponsor or endorse this bill, please contact Mark Coombs in Congresswoman Susie Lee's office at mark.coombs@mail.house.gov.

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[i] *Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Justifications and Performance Information*. U.S. Department of the Interior, https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/fy2024-os-dwp-greenbook.pdf-508.pdf.
[ii] *OMB Bulletin No. 92-06*. Office of Management and Budget, Executive Office of the President.