

117TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# S. 2824

To amend the Geothermal Steam Act of 1970 to promote timely exploration for geothermal resources under geothermal leases, and for other purposes.

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IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

SEPTEMBER 23, 2021

Mr. RISCH introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Environment and Public Works

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## A BILL

To amend the Geothermal Steam Act of 1970 to promote timely exploration for geothermal resources under geothermal leases, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Enhancing Geothermal  
5 Production on Federal Lands Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. GEOTHERMAL PRODUCTION ON FEDERAL LANDS.**

7 The Geothermal Steam Act of 1970 (30 U.S.C. 1001  
8 et seq.) is amended by adding at the end the following:

1 **“SEC. 30. GEOTHERMAL EXPLORATION TEST PROJECTS.**

2       “(a) DEFINITION OF GEOTHERMAL EXPLORATION  
3 TEST PROJECT.—In this section, the term ‘geothermal ex-  
4 ploration test project’ means the drilling of a well to test  
5 or explore for geothermal resources on lands for which the  
6 Secretary has issued a lease under this Act, that—

7           “(1) is carried out by the holder of the lease;

8           “(2) causes—

9               “(A) less than 5 acres of soil or vegetation  
10 disruption at the location of each geothermal  
11 exploration well; and

12               “(B) not more than an additional 5 acres  
13 of soil or vegetation disruption during access or  
14 egress to the test site;

15           “(3) is developed—

16               “(A) less than 12 inches in diameter;

17               “(B) in a manner that does not require  
18 off-road motorized access other than to and  
19 from the well site along an identified off-road  
20 route;

21               “(C) without construction of new roads  
22 other than upgrading of existing drainage cross-  
23 ings for safety purposes;

24               “(D) with the use of rubber-tired digging  
25 or drilling equipment vehicles; and

1           “(E) without the use of high-pressure well  
2           stimulation;

3           “(4) is completed in less than 90 days, includ-  
4           ing the removal of any surface infrastructure from  
5           the site; and

6           “(5) requires the restoration of the project site  
7           within 3 years of the date of first exploration drilling  
8           to approximately the condition that existed at the  
9           time the project began, unless the site is subse-  
10          quently used as part of energy development under  
11          the lease.

12          “(b) CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION.—

13           “(1) IN GENERAL.—Unless extraordinary cir-  
14           cumstances exist, a project that the Secretary deter-  
15           mines under subsection (c) is a geothermal explo-  
16           ration test project shall be categorically excluded  
17           from the requirements for an environmental assess-  
18           ment or an environmental impact statement under  
19           the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42  
20           U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) or section 1501.4 of title 40,  
21           Code of Federal Regulations (or a successor regula-  
22           tion).

23           “(2) EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES DEFINI-  
24           TION.—In this subsection, the term ‘extraordinary  
25           circumstances’ has the same meaning given such

1 term in the Department of the Interior Depart-  
2 mental Manual, 516 DM 2.3A(3) and 516 DM 2,  
3 Appendix 2 (or successor provisions).

4 “(c) PROCESS.—

5 “(1) REQUIREMENT TO PROVIDE NOTICE.—A  
6 leaseholder shall provide notice to the Secretary of  
7 the leaseholder’s intent to carry out a geothermal ex-  
8 ploration test project at least 30 days before the  
9 start of drilling under the project.

10 “(2) REVIEW AND DETERMINATION.—Not later  
11 than 10 days after receipt of a notice of intent  
12 under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall, with re-  
13 spect to the project described in the notice of in-  
14 tent—

15 “(A) determine if the project qualifies for  
16 a categorical exclusion under subsection (b);  
17 and

18 “(B) notify the leaseholder of such deter-  
19 mination.

20 “(3) OPPORTUNITY TO REMEDY.—If the Sec-  
21 retary determines under paragraph (2)(A) that the  
22 project does not qualify for a categorical exclusion  
23 under subsection (b), the Secretary shall—

1           “(A) include in such notice clear and de-  
 2           tailed findings on any deficiencies in the project  
 3           that resulted in such determination; and

4           “(B) allow the leaseholder to remedy any  
 5           such deficiencies and resubmit the notice of in-  
 6           tent under paragraph (1).”.

7 **SEC. 3. GEOTHERMAL LEASING PRIORITY AREAS.**

8           The Geothermal Steam Act of 1970 (30 U.S.C. 1001  
 9 et seq.) is further amended by adding at the end the fol-  
 10 lowing:

11 **“SEC. 31. GEOTHERMAL LEASING PRIORITY AREAS.**

12           “(a) DEFINITION OF COVERED LAND.—In this sec-  
 13 tion, the term ‘covered land’ means land that is—

14           “(1) Federal land; and

15           “(2) not excluded from the development of geo-  
 16 thermal energy under—

17           “(A) a land use plan established under the  
 18 Federal Land Policy and Management Act of  
 19 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.); or

20           “(B) any other Federal law.

21           “(b) DESIGNATION OF GEOTHERMAL LEASING PRI-  
 22 ORITY AREAS.—The Secretary, in consultation with the  
 23 Secretary of Energy, shall designate portions of covered  
 24 land as geothermal leasing priority areas as soon as prac-

1 ticable, but not later than 5 years, after the date of the  
2 enactment of this section.

3 “(c) CRITERIA FOR SELECTION.—In determining  
4 which covered lands to designate as geothermal leasing  
5 priority areas under subsection (b), the Secretary, in con-  
6 sultation with the Secretary of Energy, shall consider if—

7 “(1) the covered land is preferable for geo-  
8 thermal leasing;

9 “(2) production of geothermal energy on such  
10 land is economically viable, including if such land  
11 has access to methods of energy transmission; and

12 “(3) the designation would be in compliance  
13 with section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and  
14 Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1712), includ-  
15 ing subsection (c)(9) of that section.

16 “(d) REVIEW AND MODIFICATION.—Not less fre-  
17 quently than once every 10 years, the Secretary shall—

18 “(1) review covered land and, if appropriate,  
19 make additional designations of geothermal leasing  
20 priority areas; and

21 “(2) review each area designated as a geo-  
22 thermal leasing priority area under this section, and,  
23 if appropriate, remove such designation.

24 “(e) PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT  
25 STATEMENT.—

1           “(1) INITIAL DESIGNATIONS.—No later than  
2 one year after the initial designation of a geothermal  
3 leasing priority area, the Secretary shall prepare a  
4 supplement to any final programmatic environmental  
5 impact statement for geothermal leasing that is the  
6 most recently finalized such statement with respect  
7 to covered land designated as a geothermal leasing  
8 priority area under subsection (b).

9           “(2) SUBSEQUENT DESIGNATIONS.—Each des-  
10 igation of a geothermal leasing priority area under  
11 subsection (d) shall be included in a programmatic  
12 environmental impact statement for geothermal leas-  
13 ing or in a supplement to such a statement.

14           “(3) CONSULTATIONS.—In developing any pro-  
15 grammatic environmental impact statement for geo-  
16 thermal leasing or supplement to such a statement  
17 under this section, the Secretary shall consult, on an  
18 ongoing basis, with appropriate State, Tribal, and  
19 local governments, transmission infrastructure own-  
20 ers and operators, developers, and other appropriate  
21 entities.

22           “(4) PROCEDURE.—The Secretary may not  
23 delay issuing a permit or holding a lease sale under  
24 this Act because the supplement required under

1 paragraph (1) has not been finalized by the Sec-  
2 retary.

3 “(f) COMPLIANCE WITH NEPA.—If the Secretary  
4 determines that the designation of a geothermal leasing  
5 priority area has been sufficiently analyzed by a pro-  
6 grammatic environmental impact statement, the Secretary  
7 shall not prepare any additional analysis under the Na-  
8 tional Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321  
9 et seq.) with respect to geothermal lease sales for such  
10 geothermal leasing priority area.”.

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