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## Geothermal Energy Optimization Act

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Geothermal energy is an untapped resource for clean, reliable power. As the electric grid in the United States comes under increasing pressure to provide energy, geothermal technologies offer a potential source of baseload power. Geothermal power plants have a high capacity factor, capable of producing energy 90 percent of the time, unlike other renewables such as wind and solar. Technological advancements are expanding the areas where geothermal power can be extracted beyond hot regions, and next-generation power plants can be scaled to meet demand, from modular units to large-scale facilities.

Congress authorized the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to use categorical exclusions to streamline the environmental review and permitting process for certain oil and gas exploration projects in 2005, but did not include geothermal exploration. Despite having vast potential, geothermal energy projects still face extensive, unnecessary permitting hurdles that add an average of seven to ten years to a project.<sup>1</sup> The extensive timeline and burdensome permitting process for geothermal exploration discourage investment and innovation in a promising energy resource.

Senator Lee introduced the bipartisan Geothermal Energy Optimization Act with Senators Heinrich (D-NM), Risch (R-ID), and Cortez Masto (D-NV) to extend categorical exclusions to geothermal energy exploration and development. This bill makes geothermal power a realistic energy source by removing unnecessary burdens to entry. Utah is already a leader in geothermal innovation, but cannot tap into the full potential of geothermal resources due to the status quo regulatory framework. This bill makes further exploration and production possible in Utah and other regions seeking a reliable source of clean energy.

### Bill Specifics

- Amends the Geothermal Steam Act of 1970 to create Geothermal Observation Test Projects for leaseholders to conduct exploratory drilling on federal lands
- Creates a categorical exclusion for exploration drilling and well-field development under Section 390 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005
- Requires competitive geothermal lease sales once every year for land in a state that has nominations pending
- Establishes a Geothermal Ombudsman within the Bureau of Land Management to act as a liaison between field offices to improve coordination, identify necessary regulatory changes, and streamline permitting and leasing processes
- Creates a Geothermal Strike Team within the Bureau of Land Management to provide technical assistance to permit and lease applicants, and advise the Ombudsman on implementing best practices

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<sup>1</sup> <https://gdr.openei.org/files/1258/Geothermal%20Permitting%20and%20NEPA%20Timeline%20Analysis%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

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*For more information concerning this bill or to be added as a cosponsor, please contact Sam Crofts (sam\_crofts@lee.senate.gov) in Senator Lee's office.*