

the EXPLORE Act, and the Forest Service's management experience. The Forest Service also considered retaining the approach reflected in the 2023 proposal, including requiring a case-specific minimum requirements determination for placement, replacement, or retention of fixed anchors in wilderness, but concluded that the approach proposed here better balances wilderness stewardship, climber safety, administrative practicality, and the direction provided in section 122 of the EXPLORE Act while preserving consistency with the Wilderness Act.

Section 122 of the EXPLORE Act directs the Secretary to recognize that recreational climbing, including the use, placement, and maintenance of fixed anchors, may be an appropriate use within wilderness when undertaken in accordance with the Wilderness Act. The Wilderness Act requires that wilderness areas be administered so as to preserve wilderness character, including their undeveloped condition and outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation, while providing for public recreational use in a manner that leaves the areas unimpaired for future use and enjoyment. The proposed directive implements section 122 of the EXPLORE Act in a manner that preserves this statutory balance. It recognizes recreational climbing as a legitimate wilderness use, while reserving decision space at the local level to evaluate site-specific conditions, long-term impacts, and management needs consistent with preservation of wilderness character and other applicable law.

Specifically, this proposed directive reflects the Forest Service's interpretation that certain fixed anchors, when limited in scope and function and placed consistent with this direction, are distinguishable from other forms of fixed equipment or constructed features for purposes of administering section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act. In administering wilderness areas, the Forest Service generally does not require a minimum requirements analysis for certain limited use of fixed anchors, provided their placement and maintenance are consistent with applicable law, wilderness stewardship principles, and an approved climbing management plan where required. This interpretation is informed by the Agency's management experience and the direction provided in section 122 of the EXPLORE Act.

Nothing in this proposed direction alters the applicability of section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act or the requirement

to conduct a minimum requirements analysis where otherwise required by law. Further, nothing in this proposed directive limits the Forest Service's authority to evaluate site-specific circumstances or to determine that particular fixed anchors or related recreational climbing features warrant additional analysis or management action under the Wilderness Act or other applicable law.

To allow for enforcement of restrictions and prohibitions in climbing management plans as needed, the Forest Service will be proposing revisions via a separate **Federal Register** notice to its regulations at 36 CFR part 261, subpart A General Prohibitions.

On March 23, 2026, the Forest Service distributed a notification of the opportunity to consult, along with a summary of the proposed changes, to all federally recognized Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, and local Tribal contacts. Formal consultation sessions have not yet occurred; however, early written feedback has highlighted concerns regarding protection of cultural resources and sacred sites, the need to evaluate cumulative effects, the importance of thoughtful climbing management plans, and interest in how route development will be addressed.

All Tribal feedback, both early input and consultation comments, will be incorporated into the Tribal Summary Impact section of the directive. This engagement will continue to guide refinements to the proposed directive to ensure it aligns with Tribal interests, protects cultural resources, and supports the Forest Service's trust responsibilities.

After the comment period closes, the Forest Service will consider timely comments that are within the scope of the proposed directive in the development of the final directive. A notice of the final directive, including a response to comments, will be posted on the Forest Service's web page at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/about-agency/regulations-policies>.

Gordon Blum,

Senior Executive, Recreation, Heritage, Volunteer Resources.

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Business-Cooperative Service

[RBS-26-BUSINESS-0397]

Notice of Funding Opportunity for the Intermediary Relending Program for Fiscal Year 2026

AGENCY: Rural Business Cooperative Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of funding opportunity (NOFO).

SUMMARY: The Rural Business-Cooperative Service (RBCS or the Agency), a Rural Development (RD) agency of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is issuing a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) to announce acceptance of loan applications under the Intermediary Relending Program (IRP). In future years, this funding opportunity will only be announced on the Agency website without a **Federal Register** notice. Therefore, in future years, neither the funding opportunity nor reference to the funding opportunity will appear in the **Federal Register**. Please make note of this change in location of the funding announcement in your records.

DATES: June 18, 2026.

ADDRESSES: The full IRP funding notice is available on the RBCS website. Program guidance may be obtained at <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-programs/intermediary-relending-program>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Lori Pittman, Program Management Division, Business Programs, Rural Business-Cooperative Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, MS 3226, Room 5160-S, Washington, DC 20250-3226, phone: (202) 720-9815, email: lori.pittman1@usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The full text of the Notice is available on the Agency website at <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-programs/intermediary-relending-program>.

(Authority: 7 U.S.C. 1989)

Victoria Collin,

Acting Administrator, Rural Business Cooperative Service.

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