# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 21, 2026

The Honorable Stephen Vaden
Deputy Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Deputy Secretary Vaden:

We write with strong concerns regarding the announced reorganization of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). While we have expressed support for improving the operations of the USFS, we believe the reorganization announced on March 31, 2026, may lead to additional capacity and workforce reductions throughout the agency, harming its ability to deliver on its mission.

The USFS is charged with managing the 193 million-acre National Forest System (NFS), performing world-class forestry research, and delivering forestry assistance to improve the management of the more than 800 million acres of public and private forestlands across the country, including over 141 million acres of urban forests in our cities and towns. After the deep cuts over the previous year, a 2025 survey by the Partnership for Public Service found that the USFS was significantly worse at fulfilling stakeholder needs and providing quality service than a year earlier. In addition, the sweeping changes being proposed – potentially impacting more than 6,500 employees – combined with the thousands of employees already lost through deferred resignation programs threatens to further erode the agency's ability to complete its mission.

Given changes to the USFS in the last year and its ongoing, critical work, it is unclear how the announced reorganization will improve the USFS's ability to deliver on its statutory responsibilities, including mitigating wildfire risk, executing forest and watershed restoration projects, and increasing trail maintenance. In addition, given the potential for an active and extreme wildfire season the USFS should prioritize preparing for such a wildfire season rather than hastily executing a reorganization that will impact large swaths of its agency. It is likely that this sort of disruption will have lasting impacts on forest management as a whole, and wildfire preparedness and response, specifically.

This reorganization also jeopardizes the world-class research the USFS produces to improve management of the NFS, assist public and private forest landowners with insect and disease outbreaks, and spur innovative approaches to managing wildfire. The hundreds of USFS Research & Development (R&D) scientists and experienced staff located at the 57 R&D facilities the administration plans to close need to be on the ground in geographically-based federal research facilities. For example, it is impossible to study loblolly pine, redwoods, and 'ohi'a lehua outside of their ecosystems. While the USFS indicated within the proposed reorganization that the NFS and R&D mission areas will be reconfigured but largely maintained, the President's Fiscal Year 2027 budget proposes eliminating funding for both these functions of

the USFS. For example, the reorganization plan proposes closing 57 R&D facilities while maintaining 20, yet the President's Fiscal Year 2027 budget proposes fully eliminating funding for USFS R&D altogether. These conflicting proposals only create confusion and underscore the chaos the reorganization could have on critical research across the country.

Given the importance of this issue, we request responses to each of the following questions no later than May 5, 2026.

1. Has the USDA analyzed how the announced USFS reorganization will improve the USFS's ability to plan and execute timber sales, issue special use permits, and engage in public-facing recreation activities like the issuance of recreation passes?

2. What is the USDA timeline for implementing the multiple prongs of the USFS reorganization announced on March 31? Please provide a detailed description of the various steps and required notices when all the changes are expected to occur.

3. Please describe the notification USFS afforded unions representing USFS employees subject to reorganization and relocation and how the USFS is considering collective bargaining agreements in planning and executing the USFS reorganization.

4. What data-based criteria did the USDA use to analyze the selection of a new USFS Headquarters in Salt Lake City?

5. Will staff in Washington Office positions that already report to a different duty station be required to physically relocate to Salt Lake City?

6. Of the Washington Office and Regional Office (RO) staff subject to reorganization, how many will be reorganized under State Offices, the Operations Service Centers, and individual forest units? Please provide numbers for each.
    1. Under the reorganization plan, the Region 6 (Portland, OR), Region 8 (Atlanta, GA), and Region 9 (Milwaukee, WI) offices will not be converted to Operations Service Centers or State Offices. How will staff assigned to these ROs be relocated?
    2. What will be the function of the new State Offices and Operations Service Centers? Does the USFS have a plan to communicate the functions of these offices to avoid confusion among USFS staff and nonfederal partners regarding these new offices?

7. The March 31 announcement indicates the USFS will keep 20 R&D facilities open, close 57 R&D facilities, and the USFS is further evaluating whether to keep open or close the remaining R&D facilities not on either list.
    1. What criteria is the USFS using to determine whether these remaining R&D facilities should be open or closed?
    2. Please provide a list of the remaining R&D facilities that are not subject to closure as part of the March 31 announcement.

3. For staff in the 57 R&D facilities subject to closure, how will the USFS determine where they will be transferred? Will R&D facilities slated for closure be reassessed for remaining open if suitable space cannot be found in appropriate geographic areas for the research activities?
4. What specific steps are being taken to ensure that R&D work is not interrupted because of these closures?

The USFS serves a key role in supporting local economies, stewarding natural resources, and performing world-class research. The workforce reductions over the last year have already diminished the USFS's ability to deliver its mission and the recently announced USFS reorganization could further exacerbate those losses. We look forward to your timely response on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

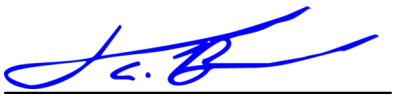
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

Jeffrey A. Merkley
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Committee on Appropriations

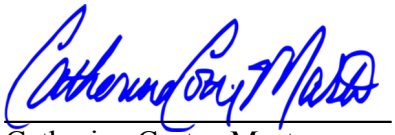
Angela D. Alsobrooks
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

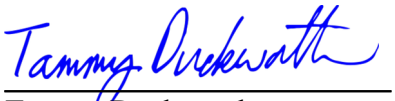
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

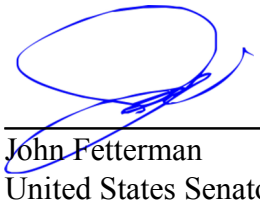


Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

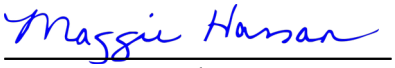
Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



John Fetterman
United States Senator

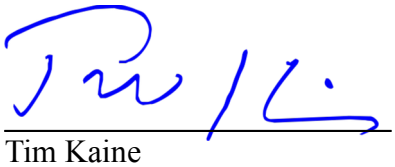
Ruben Gallego
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

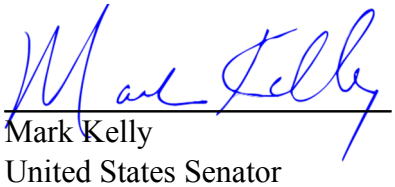


Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator

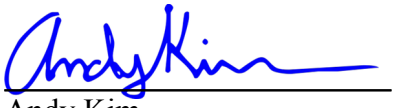
Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator

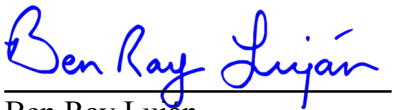


Mark Kelly
United States Senator

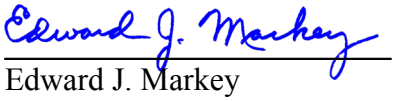


Andy Kim
United States Senator

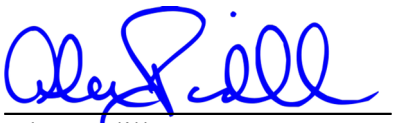
Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Ben Ray Luján
United States Senator



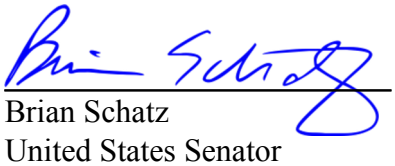
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator

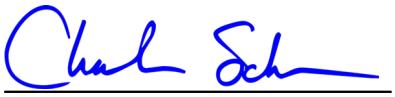
Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

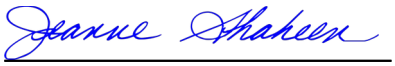


Brian Schatz
United States Senator

Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator

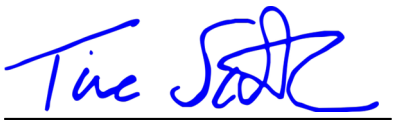


Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator



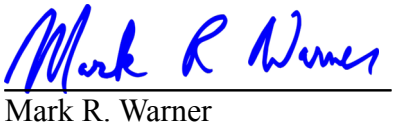
Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

Elissa Slotkin
United States Senator

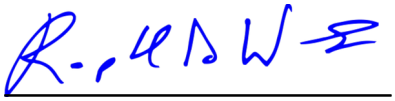


Tina Smith
United States Senator

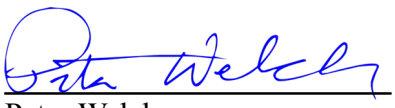
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



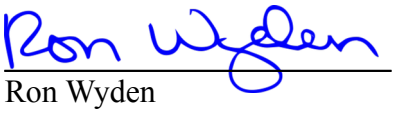
Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Raphael Warnock
United States Senator



Peter Welch
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator