

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 25, 2026

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Dr. Neil Jacobs
Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

The Honorable Tom Schultz
Chief
U.S. Forest Service
201 14th St SW
Washington, D.C. 2227

Dear Secretary Burgum, Chief Schultz, and Administrator Jacobs,

We write to draw your attention to historically low snowfall in the Pacific Northwest this winter and urge you to take every precaution to mitigate and prepare for a potentially devastating wildfire season ahead.

Oregon, Washington, and Idaho have all seen uncharacteristically warm weather since November, leading to a lack of snowfall and drought conditions which will limit our region's water supply for the year to come. Oregon's snowpack is currently at its lowest ever recorded level, nearly 30% lower than the previous record low. The entire Pacific Northwest is facing similarly stark drought conditions, with Washington experiencing its third lowest snowpack on record and far below average conditions in Idaho.

We are deeply concerned about the impact these conditions may have on wildfire risk in our states later this year. Drought conditions this winter are likely to lengthen the upcoming wildfire season and stretch federal, state, local, and tribal resources. Low snowfall now may combine with hot and dry summer conditions to "lead to decreased streamflow, dry soils, and dry vegetation, significantly increasing potential for extreme wildfires that spread rapidly, burn with more severity, and are costly to suppress."¹

We are particularly concerned how these conditions may combine with changes at your agencies that have limited the federal government's capacity to adequately prepare for, monitor, and mitigate wildfire risk. For example, in December many of us wrote to Fire Service Chief Schultz to raise concern about the agency's poor performance for hazardous fuels reduction last year which resulted in about 50% less work completed compared to fiscal year 2024.² Meanwhile, this Administration has implemented significant staff reductions at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) including in the National Weather Service³ and proposed major programmatic changes affecting the agency's capabilities to monitor weather, map lightning, and track oceanic and atmospheric conditions. The Department of Interior has announced efforts to consolidate wildfire suppression activities under a unified agency without adequate preparation, collaboration, or congressional authorization.⁴

¹ <https://www.drought.gov/sectors/wildfire-management>

² <https://salinas.house.gov/media/press-releases/reps-salinas-huffman-lead-18-colleagues-demanding-answers-forest-service>

³ <https://www.eenews.net/articles/red-tape-staff-cuts-threaten-noaa-operations/>

⁴ <https://www.energy.senate.gov/services/files/35369807-9C83-4DD7-9928-8AC7CE7186D4>

We worry how reduced capacity and ongoing changes at your agencies may combine with winter drought in our region to exacerbate wildfire risk in our communities. We recognize that the Administration has signaled intentions to increase timber harvests on federal lands. However, commercial harvest is not a comprehensive wildfire strategy and does not address the acute need to prepare for a potentially severe fire season exacerbated by winter drought.

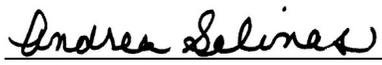
We ask that you respond to the following questions regarding wildfire preparedness.

- How are your agencies coordinating with each other to monitor drought in the Pacific Northwest this winter and its implications for wildfire risk later this year?
- How are you communicating with state, local, and Tribal partners about wildfire risk in advance of fire season?
- Are you proactively sharing information with state, local, and Tribal partners about any limitations to federal fire mitigation or response capacity this year to allow them to fill gaps?
- In light of reduced staffing at your agencies, what is your plan to ensure that adequate resources are deployed to the Pacific Northwest later this year to monitor and respond to wildfires?
- How do you plan to ensure sufficient hazardous fuels reduction activities over the next several months, and how will you prioritize such activities to maximize the benefits for wildfire risk reduction?

We respectfully ask that you pay careful attention to this year's winter drought conditions in the Pacific Northwest. While we still might receive much needed precipitation, we strongly encourage you to take every precaution to ensure that you are prepared for what could be a particularly dangerous wildfire season ahead.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



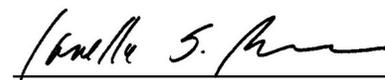
Andrea Salinas
Member of Congress



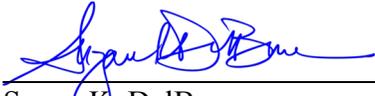
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