

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 22, 2025

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump,

As we move deeper into wildfire season, we write to express our grave concern regarding your administration's sustained attacks on the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). Widespread staff reductions, irresponsible budget proposals, and harmful organizational changes undermine the agency's ability to effectively manage public lands, mitigate the risk of extreme wildfire, and protect the safety of communities across the country.

In early 2025, USFS undertook large-scale staffing reductions. More than 3,400 probationary employees were terminated, and thousands more departed under early retirement and separation incentives. The agency lost qualified wildfire response staff, as well as personnel specializing in fuels and forest management. These staff also conducted essential forest restoration work in the wake of wildfires to help critical ecosystems recover quickly and effectively. The loss of this expertise directly impairs the agency's ability to reduce wildfire risk and respond effectively when fires occur moving forward. Despite what DOGE may claim, these employees were not part of some imagined bureaucratic fraud, they were dedicated public servants working to protect our public lands and our communities.

In recent months your administration has advanced plans to shift many wildland fire responsibilities away from USFS and into a new entity housed within the Department of the Interior. This proposal has raised serious concerns among experts in fire response and forest management who warn it would create unnecessary disruption, fragment coordination, and delay urgently needed fuels reduction treatments during a time of escalating wildfire threats. For instance, the National Association of Forest Service Retirees has raised concerns that such an entity would take billions of dollars and many years to establish, even if done in an effective manner that preserves federal firefighting capabilities and minimizes chaos. There is also concern that such a new entity would ignore the critical role rank-and-file USFS workers play in fire preparedness and response and the inherent connection between wildfire and ongoing forest health and management. Moreover, as we move away from having a definable fire season and towards year-round risk of severe fire behavior, it is hard to imagine reorganizing our nation's federal wildland firefighting responsibilities without creating unnecessary confusion and stress while attempting to protect vulnerable communities.

Unfortunately, based on your administration's track record, these concerns are well founded. From the chaotic mass firings of USFS personnel and the disruption caused by DOGE's unfounded allegations of "waste, fraud, and abuse," to the implementation of ill-conceived funding freezes and issuance of repetitive and vague Executive Orders, your Administration has

repeatedly demonstrated an inability to execute complex plans efficiently or in good faith. It should come as no surprise, then, that your budget request included no funding to assist with any reorganization effort – nor did it request funds to replace the loss of personnel critical to the USFS’s wildfire preparedness and response capabilities.

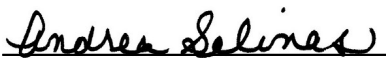
We would be remiss not to also mention our concern with the USFS budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2026. Slashing support for state, tribal, and private forestry programs that provide technical and financial assistance to landowners and resource managers to help sustain the nation’s forests and grasslands, protect communities from wildland fire, and restore forest ecosystems is downright dangerous. For example, eliminating funding for the Forest Service’s Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration program, one of the agency’s most popular and effective programs, will actively hinder our ability to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire and support economic revitalization in rural communities.

The USFS is also currently withholding funding from critical state, tribal, and private forestry programs, which are essential to preparing for and responding to wildfire on non-federal lands. We are deeply concerned by reports that program funding is being redirected to pay for the unauthorized and ill-conceived Deferred Resignation Program (DRP). Reallocating funding from its congressionally authorized purpose in order to pay employees to not work is an absurd, illegal, and irresponsible use of taxpayer dollars. If additional resources are desired to pursue DRP or other reorganization efforts, USFS should formally request and justify the need for these resources.

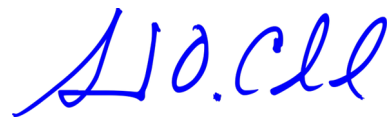
Moving forward, we urge you to direct USFS to rectify the harm it has already done to wildfire preparedness and response. That means re-hiring or replacing terminated employees and resuming the distribution of state, tribal, and private forestry grants. It also means dropping ill-conceived reorganization plans until meaningful planning has occurred and required funds have been secured.

The wildfire crisis is not going away. We should work together to reverse the dangerous course USFS is on, and bolster our wildfire preparedness and response capacity through collaborative, interagency efforts with a proven track record of success. Failure to do so will have catastrophic consequences.


Sincerely,




Andrea Salinas
Member of Congress



Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress



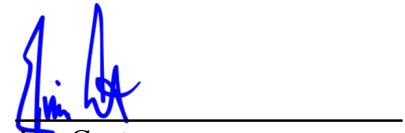
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