



SPENCER J. COX
GOVERNOR

Sept. 16, 2026

The Honorable Brooke L. Rollins
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Subject: Support for the U.S. Forest Service Headquarters Relocation to Salt Lake City, Utah

Dear Secretary Rollins:

I am writing to express my strong support for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) recent decision to relocate the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) headquarters from Washington, D.C., to Salt Lake City, Utah, and to transition the agency to a state-based leadership model. This structural reset is an approach to federal land management that will greatly benefit our country's public lands, local economies, and the various federal and state agencies tasked with the stewardship of federal lands.

There are numerous benefits of relocating the Forest Service headquarters to Salt Lake City that will make a substantial impact. The USFS is responsible for 193 million acres of public lands across the nation. However, nearly 90% of these lands are located west of the Mississippi River. Placing the agency's top leadership closer to the landscapes they manage — and the communities that depend on them — will inherently improve mission delivery and ensure employees have a better understanding of on-the-ground conditions and needs.

The proposed state-focused management approach simplifies the chain of command, strengthens federalism, and empowers field leaders to make more calculated decisions regarding forest health, wildfire suppression, livestock grazing, and growing recreation demands specific to the management areas. Additionally, states are likely to see a significant reduction in bureaucratic delays.

Salt Lake City offers modernized work facilities with less costly building and maintenance expenses, proximity to an international airport that is one of the most convenient and efficient in the world, a family-focused way of life, and a reasonable cost of living. Relocating to Utah gives nearly 250 federal employees the chance to benefit from the Utah way of life and enjoy the vast landscapes they manage. Most Utahns are within a 20-30 minute drive from a National Forest experience. For states like Utah — which boasts a \$9.7 billion outdoor recreation economy supporting roughly 75,000 jobs — bringing agency leadership westward provides faster engagement for businesses dependent on access to national forests for recreation, grazing, and timber.

Conversely, should this relocation and reorganization fail to occur, the potential losses and negative impacts to various agencies and the country would be profound.

The agency would lose a critical opportunity to modernize and streamline its own operations and the ability to locally explore essential hands-on opportunities with Utah's land grant institution, Utah State University. The USFS would remain in a distant Washington, D.C.-centric bureaucracy, disconnected from the western communities facing the most severe wildfire and forest health challenges. The agency would also forfeit anticipated taxpayer cost savings on facility maintenance and miss out on the potential recruitment benefits and talent offered by a more affordable western headquarters.

State agencies stand to lose unprecedented opportunities for synergy and localized collaboration. For example, in January 2026, the state of Utah finalized a 20-year cooperative agreement with the USFS to increase state involvement in managing logging, livestock grazing, recreation, and forest restoration. Western-centralized headquarters allows for these state and federal level partners to effectively engage and execute such agreements at a landscape scale level with on-the-ground assessments.

Maintaining the current organizational structure continues to marginalize western stakeholders, leaving local and county governments to navigate a distant federal apparatus. But more importantly, the country as a whole is harmed when a federal agency is disconnected from the issues and people most impacted by its work and decisions. This disconnect stalls proactive forest management and suppresses rural economic opportunities tied to timber producers, agricultural needs, and proactive land management, including wildfire suppression and forest health.

In conclusion, relocating the Forest Service headquarters to Salt Lake City is a well thought out approach to modern land management. Moving the agency's top decision-makers into the vast acres of the landscapes they manage creates a better understanding and a sense of pride and ownership for the work they do. This also leads to greater efficiencies and collaboration for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Spencer J. Cox", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Spencer J. Cox
Governor
State of Utah