



OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

July 23, 2026

THE HONORABLE MICHAEL F. BENNET
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Conservation, Forestry, Natural Resources, and Biotechnology
261 Russell Senate Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Ranking Member Bennet,

Thank you for your June 10, 2026, letter, cosigned by your colleagues, regarding the proposed reorganization of the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Forest Service. This is a long overdue opportunity to evaluate how the USDA's Forest Service can operate within its fiscal bounds, all while ensuring unimpeachable service to the American people and the shared landscapes we aim to protect. The Trump administration is delivering an agency capable of meeting its mission to the American people; operating within its fiscal means; and investing in the people, regions, and partners that will allow the Forest Service to be successful for years to come.

Most importantly, the Forest Service recognizes the need for employee retention throughout this reorganization. Every employee who wishes to remain with the Agency will have the ability to keep his or her current role or accept a new job with the same pay and benefits in the future organization. Of the nearly 30,000 Forest Service employees, we expect approximately 250 to have to relocate. Recognizing the important skills and experience these employees have, the Agency will provide full relocation benefits and, in some cases, pay a relocation incentive.

As part of the Department's process to implement its reorganization, USDA is committed to meeting its collective bargaining obligations. The Forest Service and the National Federation of Federal Employees – Forest Service Council (NFFE-FSC) signed their jointly negotiated agreement on June 12, 2026.

The Department is also right-sizing its real estate footprint to increase operational efficiencies and provide employees with modernized facilities for research and support functions. Not only have we expanded lease opportunities for the Forest Service's hub location in Salt Lake City, Utah, but we also continue to work with Forest Service leadership to expand and strengthen the Forest Service's footprint in Fort Collins, Colorado.

The Forest Service shares your concerns regarding the need for hazardous fuels reduction and the response to wildfires. The Agency is actively taking steps to reduce risks while maintaining strong response capabilities. Incident response remains our top priority.

To be clear, the reorganization announcement does not affect Fire and Aviation Management field-based operations. National Forests will continue to prioritize hazardous fuels treatments based on Congressional funding. Geographic Area Coordination Centers will continue operating as the backbone of our national incident response. Fire preparedness, readiness, and response activities will continue without interruption.

The ongoing reorganization efforts will not only maintain current important support functions for National Forests but will also improve their effectiveness because of more streamlined service delivery and greater consistency. Geographically distributed Operations Support Centers are new to the Forest Service structure. They will deliver place-based, specialized services and surge capacity in coordination with local Supervisor's Offices, State Directors, and the Chief Field Operations Officer to help National Forests complete high priority projects. The specific workflows and relationships of the Operations Service Centers are under development with input from teams made up of Forest, Regional, and Headquarter employees. The goals are to ensure Operations Service Centers provide support where needed and enable local units to provide maximum benefit to their communities and the lands they manage.

The Forest Service and Department are committed to serving the public. We will continue cooperating with the many communities, partners, and Tribal Governments interested in helping us manage public lands. A robust public comment period was offered in 2025, which helped inform the goals of the reorganization. The Department followed this period with a formal Tribal consultation on the reorganization in April 2026. We heard how important it is to retain support at local and regional levels. The new State Office organizations will continue and enhance the relationships formerly held by Regional Offices.

Thank you, again, for your letter. If you have additional questions, please have a member of your staff contact USDA's Office of Congressional Relations at (202) 720-7095 or ocr@usda.gov. A copy of this letter has been sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,



Stephen Alexander Vaden
Deputy Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture