

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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<https://oversight.house.gov>

May 14, 2026

The Honorable Tom Schultz
Chief of the U.S. Forest Service
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Chief Schultz:

We write in opposition to the planned reorganization of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) announced on March 31, 2026. The proposed reorganization would move the USFS headquarters from the National Capital Region (NCR) to Salt Lake City, Utah, close research and development facilities across 31 states, and shutter or repurpose all nine USFS regional offices.¹ The proposed reorganization is likely to undermine the Forest Service's ability to steward our forests and grasslands and fight wildfires, while forcing hundreds of dedicated civil servants out of their jobs. We demand that USFS explain how it concluded this sweeping reorganization would improve the management of America's forests and public lands and serve taxpayers' interests.

Government studies of prior agency relocations indicate that moving the USFS's headquarters out of the NCR has the potential to harm the agency's ability to perform essential services, including protecting American communities from forest fires, conducting important research on forest health, maintaining wildlife diversity and watersheds, and managing the 193 million acres of land under the agency's purview.² At a time when communities across the country are facing increasingly severe wildfire seasons, weakening the Forest Service's operational capacity is especially dangerous. This move is troubling following the initiation of a wider reorganization of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), in which more than half of its workforce will be forced to relocate or otherwise resign their positions.³

¹ Department of Agriculture, *USDA Prioritizing Common Sense Forest Management, Moves Forest Service Headquarters to Salt Lake City* (Mar. 31, 2026) (online at <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2026/03/31/usda-prioritizing-common-sense-forest-management-moves-forest-service-headquarters-salt-lake-city>).

² Department of Agriculture, *Forest Service – Forests and Grasslands* (online at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/national-forests-grasslands>).

³ *USDA to Sell part of Headquarters Complex Amid Broader Plan to Relocate DC-Based Employees*, Federal News Network (Feb. 25, 2026) (online at <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/reorganization/2026/02/usda-to-sell-part-of-headquarters-complex-amid-broader-plan-to-relocate-dc-based-employees/>).

For example, a Government Accountability Office (GAO) study of the 2019 relocation of two USDA offices and the 2020 relocation of the Bureau of Land Management out of Washington, D.C. found that these moves significantly reduced agency productivity, staffing levels, and the average years of experience among staff.⁴ The Administration's plans to relocate USFS's headquarters would directly affect 260 employees, forcing them to choose between leaving their jobs or uprooting their families and lives to move across the country.⁵ Prior relocations indicate that many employees will likely resign rather than move, resulting in a significant loss of expertise and harming the Forest Service's ability to do its job.

We are also alarmed by the planned closure of 57 of the USFS's 77 research facilities.⁶ This proposal would result in significant reductions of facilities performing vital research on issues such as wildfire prevention and response, logging techniques, the conservation of endangered species and effective responses to climate change. Disrupting this critical work, especially as the nation continues to experience record temperatures, droughts, and increased wildfire risk, is highly irresponsible.⁷

Finally, we are concerned by the plan to close all existing USFS regional offices and replace them with a "state-based organizational model" run by 15 new state directors.⁸ This change will result in major disruptions that will undermine the effective provision of services. Having already forced out more than 9,000 USDA workers, this Administration appears intent on crippling the USFS through further workforce reductions.⁹

Given the critical role the USFS plays in protecting our forests and public lands, it is essential that any planned relocation or reorganization fully consider and address potential impacts on agency capacity, effective service delivery, and value for the American taxpayer. To assist the Committee in its investigation, please provide responses to the following no later than May 28, 2026:

⁴ Government Accountability Office, *Agency Relocations: Following Leading Practices Will Better Position USDA to Mitigate the Ongoing Impacts on Its Workforce* (Dec. 14, 2022) (online at <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-104709>).

⁵ *Forest Service Plans to Carry Out Major Reorganization with or Without Approval from Congress*, Federal News Network (Apr. 16, 2026) (online at <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/reorganization/2026/04/forest-service-plans-to-carry-out-major-reorganization-with-or-without-approval-from-congress/>).

⁶ *Forest Service will Close Research Stations That Study Wildfire Risk*, The New York Times (Apr. 3, 2026) (online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/03/climate/forest-service-research-stations.html>).

⁷ See *Extreme Wildfire Risk Has Doubled in the Past 20 years, New Study Shows, as Climate Change Accelerates*, CBS News (Jun. 24, 2024) (online at <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/extreme-wildfire-risk-climate-change/study>).

⁸ Department of Agriculture, *Forest Service – Organizational Realignment* (Mar. 2026) (online at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/organizational-realignment-factsheet.pdf>).

⁹ Office of Personnel Management, *Workforce Changes* (Feb. 2026) (online at <https://data.opm.gov/explore-data/analytics/workforce-changes>).

1. Why did the USFS decide to move forward with this plan, despite historical precedent clearly showing the harmful effects of agency relocation on efficiency and operations?
2. What efforts will the USFS make to retain employees who would need to move to a different city or state under the reorganization plan?
3. How is the USFS planning to ensure that the agency retains the necessary skilled and experienced workforce to carry out their mission?
4. What steps is the USFS taking to ensure continuity of operations during this change?
 - a. Please provide documentation outlining current USFS operations, functions, or projects that would cease under this plan, as well as written justification for why they are being interrupted.
5. What are the expected costs to the taxpayer of this reorganization plan?
 - a. Were any cost benefit analyses done in the process of formulating the reorganization? If so, please provide such analyses and the associated underlying documentation.

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Committee staff at (202) 225-5051.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Robert Garcia
Ranking Member



Suhas Subramanyam
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Chairman