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May 14, 2026

THE HONORABLE JARED HUFFMAN
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources
United States House of Representatives
2330 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Ranking Member Huffman,

Thank you for your April 28, 2026, letter to Secretary Rollins and me, cosigned by your colleagues, regarding the reorganization of the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Forest Service. I am responding on behalf of the Department.

This is an exciting opportunity to re-evaluate how the USDA's Forest Service works, the services and opportunities that it provides, and how we serve the American people and steward our shared landscapes. Reorganization will align workforce size with available resources, bring USDA closer to its customers, eliminate management layers, and consolidate redundant support functions. The Forest Service has operated under long-standing budget constraints, increasing demands on our workforce. There is a growing need to shift resources and authority closer to where our work happens: on the ground, alongside States, Tribes, partners, and neighboring communities. Implementing this reorganization will more effectively utilize limited budgets and restore Agency flexibility to be responsive to the needs of the American people.

The Forest Service shares your concerns about the wildfire season. We are taking active steps to ensure the Agency's ability to respond and manage wildfire is unchanged. Our incident response remains our priority. Importantly, the Forest Service reorganization announcement will not impact our wildfire readiness and response efforts – they will continue without interruption. Our Geographic Area Coordination Centers remain in place as the backbone of our national incident response.

It is also important that I address a misunderstanding in your letter regarding the Agency's Research and Development functions. The reorganization does not eliminate scientific positions, cancel research programs, or reduce our national research footprint. In many locations, "evaluated for closure" refers only to individual buildings. Staff and research programs will continue their work, relocated into fewer facilities while maintaining a research presence across the country.

This is a significant moment for the Forest Service. It reflects both the challenges the Agency faces and the opportunity to strengthen the mission for the long term. The overall timeline for reorganization aims to have all personnel decisions and employee relocations completed by the



end of the calendar year. Approximately 6,500 employees received prenotification letters alerting them that they are potentially affected by reorganization. However, the Agency expects less than 500 employees will need to relocate.

The current timeline is strongly influenced by union negotiations. Employee relocation notifications will be provided in late Spring or early Summer to ensure affected employees have ample time to plan their moves. Full implementation of the Agency reorganization, including policy updates and establishment of streamlined workflows, will be ongoing for the next several years. The Forest Service budget cannot sustain the number of facilities the Agency has, let alone the \$3 billion in deferred maintenance. The Agency is taking a hard look at the cost of each facility, its utilization, and its deferred maintenance needs, while supporting our people.

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. We sent a copy of this letter to your colleagues.

Sincerely,

Thomas M. Schultz, Jr.
Chief