



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

June 1, 2026

THE HONORABLE AMY KLOBUCHAR
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, And Forestry
425 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Ranking Member Klobuchar,

Thank you for your April 21, 2026, letter, cosigned by your colleagues, regarding the 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 passage of the *Inflation Reduction Act* led to historical hiring within the Forest Service, hiring that was unsustainable. The previous Administration lived so far beyond its means that Secretary Vilsack sought—and on January 17, 2025, was approved—to offer voluntary separation to 7,000 Forest Service employees. This was only after Secretary Vilsack openly contemplated the sale of Federal lands to offset his rogue spending.

The Trump Administration is reorganizing the Forest Service to align its workforce size with available resources, to bring USDA closer to its customers, to eliminate management layers, and to consolidate redundant support functions. This reorganization also recognizes 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 restore Agency flexibility to be responsive to the needs of the American people, all while operating within the financial bounds set by Congress.

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 the reorganization. However, the Agency expects fewer than 500 employees to be subject to relocation. Most personnel decisions and the timing of them are strongly influenced by Union negotiations. On completion of 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.

The reorganization also includes moving the Agency headquarters to Salt Lake City. This move places leadership at the heart of the forests and grasslands the Agency manages. Salt Lake City also has a strong existing Federal presence, proximity to western forests, and access to transportation and partner agencies.

In addition to those serving in the new Salt Lake City headquarters, relocated employees will be placed in State Offices, Operations Service Centers, and on existing national forests. This will bring staff from Regional Offices in Portland, Atlanta, and Milwaukee, and staff from the National Capital Region, closer to the local units and communities they serve. The number of employees to be located at each duty station has not been determined, but affected employees will be able to express preferences for relocation destinations and will be able to compete for promotional opportunities in many of these locations.

Operations Support Centers are new to the Forest Service structure. These Centers will deliver place-based, specialized services and surge capacity through geographically distributed service centers. They will prioritize work in coordination with local Supervisor's Offices, State Directors, and the Chief Field Operations Officer to help national forests complete high-priority, on-the-ground work. The specific workflows and relationships of the Operations Service Centers are under development with input from both local forest employees and current Regional and Headquarters employees. These discussions will ensure 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's budget cannot sustain the number of facilities it has, let alone their \$3 billion in deferred maintenance. We are taking a hard look at the cost of each facility, its use, and its deferred maintenance needs, all while supporting our people. These decisions are about facilities and upkeep, not jobs or research programs. We are still reviewing every research location and will adjust as necessary. Consolidating research locations while protecting the research itself makes such sense, a May 2024 memorandum reveals the previous Administration planned to do the same.

These are proposed closures; nothing is currently final. When research offices or facilities are identified for closure, the Agency's intent is to reassign displaced employees to other available facilities within their commuting area whenever possible. This includes national forest offices, partnering Federal agency offices, or university facilities.

The following research facilities are **not** proposed for closure:

- Arizona: Flagstaff
- California: Placerville; Riverside
- Colorado: Fort Collins
- Georgia: Athens
- Minnesota: St. Paul
- Montana: Missoula
- Nebraska: Lincoln
- New Hampshire: Durham
- North Carolina: Asheville; Durham

- Ohio: Delaware
- Oregon: Corvallis; La Grande
- Puerto Rico: San Juan
- Tennessee: Knoxville
- Washington: Olympia; and
- West Virginia: Morgantown.

Throughout the reorganization, Forest Service scientists will continue to conduct research across the country, including on our Experimental Forests and Ranges. The Forest Service's Experimental Forests and Ranges are critical to the quality and future of the Agency's research data. The facilities evaluations are about the choice to fund research over buildings. The change focuses on leadership structure, not the scientific work itself. Consolidating stations under a single research leadership structure enables us to coordinate priorities more effectively and ensure research supports the operational needs of our forests and grasslands.

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,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Stephen Alexander Vaden". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Stephen" being the most prominent.

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