



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

June 5, 2026

THE HONORABLE ROBERT GARCIA
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
United States House of Representatives
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Ranking Member Garcia,

Thank you for your May 14, 2026, letter, cosigned by Representative Suhas Subramanyam, 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 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.

You may have seen my response to Ranking Member Amy Klobuchar's letter on this same topic.¹ I noted Secretary Vilsack was approved – on January 17, 2025 – to voluntarily separate 7,000 Forest Service employees. This move came after the Biden Administration used temporary *Inflation Reduction Act* funding to hire Forest Service employees beyond the Agency's annual appropriated funding levels. The excessive hiring was unsustainable. Secretary Vilsack also 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 while operating within the financial bounds set by Congress.

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

¹ Deputy Secretary Stephen Vaden, X Post (Jun 1, 2026), available at: <https://x.com/DepSecVaden/status/2061542811925889282>.

transportation and partner agencies. This allows leadership to be closer to the operational challenges the Forest Service faces.

In addition to those serving in the new Salt Lake City headquarters, relocated employees will be placed in both State Offices and 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.

The reality is, the Forest Service budget cannot sustain the number of facilities it has, let alone their \$3 billion in deferred maintenance. The Agency is taking a hard look at the cost of each facility, its use, and its deferred maintenance needs, while supporting our people. These decisions are about facilities and maintenance, not jobs or research programs. To reduce the possibility of losing vital specialized experience, the Forest Service intends, where possible, to relocate displaced employees within their current commuting areas in existing available federal office space.

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 research across the country. Consolidating stations under a single research leadership structure enables us to coordinate priorities more effectively and ensure research supports the operational needs of forests and grasslands. It makes such sense, a May 2024 memorandum from the previous Administration reveals they planned to do the same.

Again, thank you for writing and for your interest in the Nation's forests and grasslands. If you or your staff have additional questions, please contact USDA's Office of Congressional Relations at (202) 720-7095 or ocr@usda.gov. We sent a copy of this letter to Representative Subramanyam.

Sincerely,



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