

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 10, 2026

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Rollins:

We write to request information about the reorganization of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) that the agency announced on March 31, 2026. USFS manages 16 million acres in Colorado, including White River National Forest, the nation's most visited national forest. These lands provide drinking water to four major river systems and 18 other states while supporting recreation, grazing, timber harvests, and multiple other uses. Given the significance of USFS land management to our state and the country, we would like to better understand how the proposed USFS reorganization will affect staffing, safe and effective public lands management, and the agency's multiple-use mission.

We stand ready to work with you to ensure that any USFS reorganization is carefully and thoughtfully executed. We also appreciate your choice of Fort Collins, a city already central to agriculture and forestry research and education, as a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) hub. However, several Colorado communities have expressed concerns that the USFS reorganization may reduce staff retention, delay critical hazardous fuels reduction work, and disrupt critical permitting, contracts, and agreements for ski resorts, guides and outfitters, and other businesses. We share the questions and concerns raised by Coloradans regarding the timing of the proposed reorganization as we enter what is likely to be a severe fire season. Additionally, we believe that any major reorganization of an agency should include public participation and substantive Tribal consultation, which we encourage you to initiate as soon as possible.

Therefore, we would appreciate your response to the following questions within 10 business days:

- For more than a century, USFS has relied on experienced staff to make critical land management and wildfire response decisions affecting millions of Americans and hundreds of millions of acres of public land. Given the extensive USFS layoffs and reductions in force in 2025, including nearly 350 reported cuts in Colorado alone, we are deeply concerned by USDA's June 2025 statement that its reorganization is "another step" in reducing its workforce.¹ Furthermore, the President's Budget proposes to eliminate key USFS programs such as Research & Development and State, Tribal, and Private Forestry.
 - How will USDA ensure that USFS retains the institutional knowledge and expert staffing necessary to effectively manage the nation's public lands?
 - Will USFS staff currently located in Colorado be retained in Colorado?

¹ <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2025/07/24/secretary-rollins-announces-usda-reorganization-restoring-departments-core-mission-supporting>

- How will you support staff required to relocate from the Lakewood Office to the new Fort Collins facility, roughly 70 miles away?
- This winter marked Colorado’s worst snowpack in recorded history,² making it more important than ever for USFS to be proactive in addressing hazardous fuels reduction, and ready to respond to fires.
 - What assurances can you provide that FY26 funding for hazardous fuels reduction will be deployed during the agency’s reorganization?
 - What is the rationale for moving ahead on this reorganization now, rather than waiting until the end of the summer fire season?
- In 2025, USFS targeted only 3.6 million acres for hazardous fuels reduction, a 600,000-acre decline from its 2024 target of 4.2 million acres.^{3,4} Of its 3.6 million acre target, USFS treated only 3.3 million acres in 2025, a decrease of nearly 1 million acres from the 4.29 million treated in 2024.⁵ In short, hazardous fuels projects dropped by 23% year-over-year and prescribed burns saw a similar decline. This decline comes despite the administration's repeated actions to limit its environmental review procedures, which the administration intended to expedite timber production and wildfire mitigation project planning and implementation.
 - How will the reorganization assist USFS in returning to previous – ideally even higher – levels of fuels reduction? What is your timeline for offsetting the 23% decrease in USFS hazardous fuels reduction projects in 2025?
 - In correspondence with Congress, USFS Chief Schultz referenced staff-driven “operational challenges” at the agency being partially responsible for decline in hazardous fuels reduction work. What are the “operational challenges” referenced by Chief Schultz and how will the reorganization rectify these issues?⁶
 - A provision of the President’s reconciliation bill (P.L. 119-21 § 10201(1)) rescinded \$100 million provided to USFS to fund environmental reviews. How did the elimination of this critical funding, combined with USFS’s reduced staffing numbers, contribute to the decline in hazardous fuels treatments?
 - The proposed Wildland Fire Service consolidation includes plans to move wildfire mitigation from the Forest Service to the Department of the Interior. Many USFS land management professionals who work on wildfire resilience help meet other essential agency functions. If such a move were to occur, will USFS have sufficient staff to process special use permits, range improvement projects, and oversee wildlife habitat improvement?

² <https://coloradosun.com/2026/04/03/colorado-snowpack-drought-record-lows/>

³ <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2024/11/15/fact-sheet-celebrating-three-years-bipartisan-infrastr>

⁴ According to the analysis of Grassroots Wildland Firefighters, 3.6 million acres of fuels reduction was accomplished, on average, in the first nine months of 2021-2025.

⁵ <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs-fy26-congressional-budget-justification.pdf>

⁶ <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2025/10/03/shrinking-forest-service-falls-behind-on-wildfire-prevention-00592982>

- Regional offices provide critical support services and often take on projects that are more complicated than a single Forest or Ranger District can handle alone, including permitting for ski resorts, forest planning, realty, permit appeals, and other specialized needs. Disrupting these services could jeopardize Colorado’s \$18 billion outdoor recreation economy, grazing permittees across the state, and thousands of small businesses.
 - What analysis was used to decide on a shift away from the regional model? What metrics will you monitor during the reorganization to demonstrate that you are meeting the objectives you originally set to achieve through this restructuring?
 - What steps will the agency take to communicate with, and minimize disruptions to recreation groups, youth corps, mineral developers, grazers and livestock producers, ski resorts, and others that rely on and help support our National Forest System lands?
 - How will USFS ensure that decisions and work typically accomplished at the regional level do not stall during the transition?
 - Currently, there are explicit references in federal law and regulation to specific USFS Regions and responsibilities of Regions, Regional Foresters, and regional programs that will be eliminated. How do you intend to address statutory and regulatory references to such regions, if they are eliminated?

- What – if any – metrics are being used to determine ideal staffing targets at USDA and USFS? Please provide any economic analysis, government/Tribal/community consultation, and an analysis of workload relative to size of workforce used to measure workforce reduction viability.

- State, local, and Tribal governments, scientists, and communities are central to the Forest Service’s work to expand recreation, support jobs, and protect homes and businesses from wildfire across the 193 million acres it manages, including lands that provide drinking water to 80 million Americans. Any reorganization of USFS must involve close collaboration with states, sovereign Tribal nations, and local communities, while recognizing the diverse needs of different regions of the country.
 - How does USFS plan to solicit public comment as the agency implements its reorganization, and how will the agency continue engaging with the public?
 - How does the USFS plan to incorporate a robust Tribal consultation period as the agency implements its reorganization, and how will the agency continue engaging with Tribes?

As the USDA and USFS reorganizations progress, we appreciate your continued engagement to ensure that the reorganization effort improves service delivery to the American public, increases coordination between Federal, state, local, and Tribal partners, and wisely uses USDA’s limited resources. Like you, we see Colorado as the obvious choice to support agriculture and forestry across the nation and look forward to partnering in the future to ensure the success of farmers, forests, and rural communities across the country.

Sincerely,




Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator
Ranking Member,
Subcommittee on
Conservation, Forestry,
Natural Resources, and
Biotechnology



John Hickenlooper
United States Senator



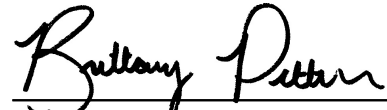
Jason Crow
Member of Congress



Diana DeGette
Member of Congress



Joe Neguse
Member of Congress
Ranking Member,
Subcommittee on Federal
Lands



Brittany Pettersen
Member of Congress

cc: Hon. Tom Schultz, Chief, U.S. Forest Service