



**Office of the Under Secretary**

Natural Resources and Environment  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250-0108

April 10, 2025

THE HONORABLE MARTIN HEINRICH  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
United States Senate  
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Ranking Member Heinrich:

Thank you for your letter of February 11, 2025, cosigned by your colleagues, to Acting Secretary of Agriculture Gary Washington regarding Forest Service hiring and spending to meet the Nation's wildfire response and mitigation needs. I am responding on behalf of the Department.

In regard to the hiring freeze, exemptions exist for critical health and safety positions. More than 8,000 U.S. Forest Service firefighter positions were approved already, and more are currently under review. Protecting the people and communities we serve, as well as the infrastructure, businesses, and resources they depend on to grow and thrive, remains a top priority for the USDA and the Forest Service. We are incredibly proud of our firefighters, and we will ensure they have the training, tools, and resources they need to work alongside our State and local partners, as well as private landowners, to continue the work to protect lives and livelihoods.

While working with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the agency pushed some entry dates for wildland firefighters at the outset. However, now that processes have been established, delays have been minimized. Wildland firefighting positions remain exempt from the hiring freeze, and operational readiness is not impacted. The Forest Service, along with our other Federal, State, Tribal, and local partners, continues to prepare for and respond to wildfire incidents as needed.

Since her confirmation on February 13, 2025, Secretary Rollins has been reviewing the programs of the Department. She understands that loggers, farmers and ranchers have made decisions based on these funding opportunities, and that some have been waiting on payments during that review. Secretary Rollins continues to make determinations as quickly as possible and looks forward to sharing more information soon.

THE HONORABLE MARTIN HEINRICH  
Page 2

If you have additional questions, please contact the Department's Office of Congressional Relations at (202) 720-7095 or [ocr@usda.gov](mailto:ocr@usda.gov). We sent an identical letter to your colleagues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kristin A. Sleeper', with a stylized, flowing script.

KRISTIN A. SLEEPER  
Deputy Under Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture