

# United States Senate

March 10, 2025

Kristin Sleeper  
Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Deputy Under Secretary Sleeper:

We write with strong concerns regarding reports that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) may terminate an additional 7,000 Forest Service personnel, nearly a quarter of the agency. These workers are critical in the management of the 193 million-acre National Forest System and are responsible for wildfire prevention, timber production, and watershed restoration. As extreme weather events—particularly wildfires—grow more frequent and severe, the Forest Service’s work is more important than ever. Such a drastic reduction in staff will harm the Forest Service’s ability to respond to wildfire and make Americans less safe.

Last month, the USDA reportedly terminated more than 3,000 Forest Service employees. Last week’s Merit Systems Protection Board decision was an important, but temporary, step to rectify the terminations, but USDA has not confirmed that these employees have been reinstated, and great concern remains about the long-term status of these and other Forest Service employees. Because of these men and women, the Forest Service carried out wildfire prevention activities on a record-breaking 4.28 million acres last year and more than 11 million acres in the last three years. The administration’s reported actions threaten this lifesaving work and raise significant questions about the impact on the Forest Service’s ability to keep towns and critical infrastructure safe from wildfires.

Given the importance of this issue, we request additional information, provided no later than March 13, 2025.

1. Are Forest Service wildland firefighters included in the USDA’s Forest Service workforce reduction plans?
2. How many Forest Service employees being considered in workforce reduction plans are certified to respond to wildfires?
3. Has USDA conducted an analysis on how the significant reduction in the size of the Forest Service will impact its ability to prevent and respond to wildfires?
4. Has USDA conducted an analysis on how the significant reduction in the size of the Forest Service will impact hazardous fuels reduction work?

Forest Service staff are critical to preventing and stopping wildfires. Earlier this year, they were pivotal in combating the wildfires that raged across Los Angeles and are currently working to protect the wildfire-threatened homes and communities in Georgia and the Carolinas. The Forest Service must remain able to quickly respond to wildfires and other disasters, as well as conduct

critical wildfire prevention work. We look forward to your timely response on this important matter.

Sincerely,



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Amy Klobuchar  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Agriculture,  
Nutrition, and Forestry



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Martin Heinrich  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy &  
Natural Resources