

United States Senate

May 21, 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 to address your recent response to the letter we sent on February 11, 2025, regarding the disbursement of funds for forest management and restoration projects and the universal hiring freeze under the Department of Agriculture. Our letter outlined ten specific questions, of which only two were addressed in your April 10 response.

Your incomplete response left significant questions unanswered concerning which projects, grants, agreements, and staff have been affected by the Trump Administration's recent actions. Although the Forest Service has lost approximately 5,000 employees through resignation and early retirement since February, we understand that additional reduction-in-force actions are still planned. Questions remain about the Department's plan to carry out Congressional directives and, most importantly, protect American communities in danger as they face a daunting fire season.

We again request that the Department provide comprehensive responses to the questions previously posed, as well as responses to additional questions that have arisen since February, no later than June 6, 2025. If obligations and disbursements resume for any office or program before your response, please answer the question as it applied to the time period in which funding and hiring were withheld:

1. Please provide a full list of Forest Service programs for which disbursements were or currently are paused, including any paused under Executive Order 14154 or the now-rescinded memorandum from the Office of Management and Budget.
2. Please provide a full list of individual projects, including the location and total award amount, for which funds were obligated but disbursements are now paused. Please include projects carried out by Departmental personnel as well as those carried out through grants, contracts, or agreements. If obligated funds have been paused, what is the legal basis for pausing the disbursement of already obligated funds?
3. Did the agency inform non-federal partners affected by the pause before halting their payments? Has the agency communicated with those same partners concerning the status of the affected projects since the pause was initiated? If so, please provide examples of any communications notifying applicants or current participants of the affected programs.

4. What is the status of agency personnel that were hired under funds appropriated by the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* (IIJA) and *Inflation Reduction Act* (IRA)? Are those personnel still being paid their salaries? How many of these personnel, if any, have been terminated, furloughed, put on administrative leave, or otherwise notified of future administrative leave?
5. How many Forest Service employees have been terminated, furloughed, put on administrative leave, or otherwise notified of future administrative leave since January 20, 2025? Please provide the job titles and duty stations for each category described above.
6. How many Forest Service employees accepted the deferred resignation offer being offered to federal employees by the Office of Personnel Management? Please provide data broken down by position, grade, and duty station.
7. Does the Department plan to reimburse contractors whose payments are paused but are continuing to act under the terms of their contract with the Department? What is the status of Departmental reviews of these paused projects?
8. Please provide the minimum amount of time the pause on funding could last.

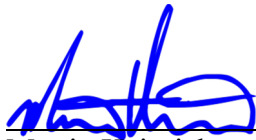
Additionally, we request detailed answers to the following new questions in your response:

9. The spending plan provided by the Forest Service for Fiscal Year 2025 contains no information on agency activity beyond what Congress provided to each mission area. Please provide a thorough spending plan that details the expected changes to each program area for this fiscal year, at least at the level of detail provided in the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Justification's "Detail Tables."
10. Please provide the years-to-date number of acres treated nationwide for hazardous fuels using funds provided through annual appropriations, IIJA, or IRA compared with the 10-year average.
11. Pursuant to existing law, a reduction-in-force plan must avoid undue interruption to the agency's work. What is the Forest Service's statutory authority for pursuing a reduction-in-force despite the loss of more than 15 percent of its total employees that has already resulted a significant decrease in the agency's work?
12. The President's Fiscal Year 2026 budget recommends moving Wildland Fire Management programs out of the Forest Service. Has the Administration conducted an analysis of how this proposal would impact the Forest Service's management of National Forest System (NFS) lands, particularly the Forest Service's efforts to reduce wildfire risk on NFS lands? For this proposal, did the Administration consult States, Tribes, private sector, and the Forest Service employees' union?
13. If the President's Fiscal Year 2026 budget, which proposes to cut NFS management funding, were enacted, how many Forest Service recreation sites, ranger stations, facilities, or services would be closed or limited in availability? Has the Forest Service analyzed how the current and additional proposed workforce reductions will impact its ability to maintain safe, sanitary recreation sites?
14. How many Forest Service employees who have left the Forest Service since January 20, 2025 were certified to respond to wildfires? How many Forest Service employees being considered in workforce reduction plans are certified to respond to wildfires?

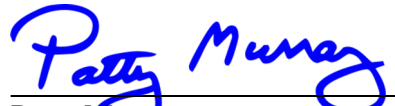
The Forest Service provides a critical support function for communities across the country, from supporting the nation's wood products sector to mitigating the threat of catastrophic wildfire. Continuing to carry out this work as Congress prescribed is not only required under the law but essential for our nation's security.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this important matter. We look forward to receiving your comprehensive response to these questions.

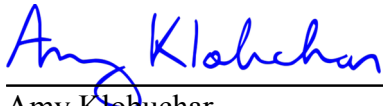
Sincerely,



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee
on Energy and Natural
Resources



Patty Murray
United States Senator
Vice Chair, Senate Committee
on Appropriations



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee
on Agriculture, Nutrition, and
Forestry



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator