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May 31, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue, Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We have greatly appreciated the opportunity we have had to work with you over the past few years in doing all we can to sustain the heritage and effectively and efficiently manage the USDA Forest Service. In our meetings with you we have been impressed with your commitment, involvement, and support of the agency mission. We represent many thousands of retired Forest Service people and as we have indicated to you previously, we care greatly about the agency and its importance to the Department of Agriculture in the "long run" and look forward to continuing to work with you. Many within our ranks have spent a good part of their careers working to make the Job Corps Conservation Centers successful through their leadership and commitment to the program.

Your recent decision to close or transfer all the USDA Forest Service Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers is viewed overwhelmingly by us as a very disappointing action. The Forest Service leadership and involvement in carrying out the Job Corps program as a partner of the Department of Labor has been a cornerstone of the program's success and accomplishment over the last five decades and is a classic example of the vision espoused in the objective of "shared stewardship or leadership" which the Department and Forest Service have embraced.

The Civilian Conservation Centers have provided a unique and special opportunity that connects with the public lands of our great nation. The long-standing success of the Forest Service in carrying out the intent of the Job Corps program from its beginnings is especially important because of the focus on "conservation". The importance of these "centers" is based on their special rural locations and communities and the ability to connect students with the outdoors and involve them in conservation work and training, including silviculture and fire management activities. This success and the confidence thereof were the reason the Department of Interior very recently transferred eight Centers over to the USDA Forest Service responsibility.

The negative impact of your decision to many of the rural communities where these Centers are located is of a deep concern not only because of the economic losses from employment and community stability, but also because of the loss of an alternative training opportunity for at risk youth in these areas. This seems to us to be counter to the Administration's emphasis and desire to strengthen rural communities. The far-reaching impact of the closing on USDA employees who will likely lose their jobs or be displaced is also of great concern.

There are many questions and most certainly there would be unintended consequences from this decision regarding administrative facilities, property, personnel, budget, and investments that have been developed over the last fifty plus years. All these impacts, relocation, losses, displacement, and community reaction will be a distraction and have a negative influence on all agency and Department program areas either directly or indirectly.

Lastly, the manner in which this decision was made and the lack of transparency and inclusion of those impacted by the decision is also of concern to us. As a supportive partner of the Department we would have appreciated being involved in some manner so that we might have been able to provide input before a decision was made.

For all these reasons, we respectfully ask that this decision be reconsidered.

Sincerely,

James L. Caswell

James L. Caswell, Chair
National Association of Forest Service Retirees

cc:

Campbell Shuford
Jim Hubbard
Vicki Christiansen
National Association of Forest Service Retirees