



July 29, 2025

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*This letter was sent to Senator Boozman, Chair, and Amy Klobuchar, Ranking Member, of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry*

We are extremely concerned about the recent reorganization announcement by the Secretary of Agriculture that would, among other things, eliminate all nine regional Forest Service offices and consolidate Research leadership at a single location. We are not opposed to reorganization that is carefully planned to actually improve efficiency and deliver sound resource management and services to the public and our partners.

We are the National Association of Forest Service Retirees (NAFSR) and represent many hundreds of former Forest Service employees in every state. As a group, NAFSR offers many decades of experience in natural resource management as well as organizational change. As a highly active advocacy organization we have achieved many positive results over the years. We are a credible voice with many in Congress, and with several other organizations that have profound interest in natural resource issues.

Over time, the Forest Service has considered consolidating Regional Offices. During earlier transformation efforts, the work going on at regional offices, including roles, responsibilities and workflows, was carefully analyzed. The analysis found that Regional Offices have at least three different roles: expertise support to forests; budget responsibilities; and external relationships. Some of this work might be consolidated (an alternative with three regions was considered), or redefined and reorganized, but not simply omitted.

Four recent mergers of research stations damaged external relationships because station program leaders faced demands to meet with a larger portfolio of partners and constituents, and constrained travel budgets limited trips to more distant parts of the new station's larger territory. Consequently, leaders attended fewer regional scientific and professional meetings and met with key state and university partners less frequently than previous station leaders who were responsible for smaller geographic areas.

The reduced visibility of and access to Forest Service research leaders damaged partnerships and cramped science delivery tailored to local forest conditions. In addition, the proposed Hubs do not include a location in the East (specifically northeastern and mid-Atlantic regions) that are uniquely different from the South.

We urge the Committee to focus on some key questions related to how any new structures compare to the current in terms of the agency's ability to deliver the mission with its local partners and how such changes will affect constituents who rely on those services.

The first question is "what is a better and more efficient way of organizing the work and delivering results constituents need —whether the work is managing national forests or conducting research?"

The second is "what is a way to transition to a new organization with a minimum of impact on ongoing work, budgetary expenditures, relationships with externals, and morale?"

Ever since the Forest Service budget crisis of last Fall, employees have been suffering increased workloads. Coupled with firings, threats of future layoffs, and the loss of employees due to VERA and other retirement options, employees are stretched to their limits. We hear their voices saying, "Enough! Allow us to focus on our work!"

NAFSR believes that this is not the time for massive dislocation. This is the time for assessing the changes that have already occurred and mitigating the gaps that are keeping employees from doing the important work funded by Congress.

There is no doubt that some reorganization may be beneficial but learning from previous efforts and taking the time to get it right, and to carefully plan for a transition, will ultimately pay off in an organization that is more efficient, effective and with better public service. Indeed, relationships with States, Tribes and other partners are crucial to getting the work done, and we believe that they should provide input into any reorganization.

The Forest Service has been an evolving agency from day one, driven by changes in the country's needs, communications and technology, and yes, direction from the Administration *with* agreement and funding from Congress. There will always be a need for ongoing organizational improvement, but it needs to be done in a way that considers the work that needs to be done and provides for our employees' workload and well-being.

We do not see anything in the proposal that would improve services or efficiency. Rather, it appears to simply cut staffing and funding without describing how the work will continue to get done. It provides the classic direction to do more with less.

Given NAFSR's extensive experience with the work of the Forest Service and with previous reorganization efforts, we remain willing to contribute our vast knowledge and provide input for any thoughtful workforce realignment process.

Sincerely,

*Steve Ellis*

Steve Ellis, Chair  
National Association of Forest Service Retirees