

U.S. Forest Service Restructuring

Key Talking Points for NAFSR

1. Employee Support & Transparency are Essential

- Restructures of this scale inevitably disrupt employees and reduce agency productivity. Leadership must fully acknowledge this reality. The statement that “frontline mission work will continue uninterrupted” strains credibility.
- Forest Service and USDA leadership should provide timely, direct, and ongoing communication to all employees throughout the transition.
- Leadership must stop promoting the message that the agency can 'do more with less.' Productivity losses during restructure, especially following last year's DOGE workforce reductions, must be openly recognized.

2. Wildland Fire Cannot Be Separated from Land Management

- We are deeply concerned by the continued push to transfer the highly effective fire and fuels program out of the Forest Service and into a consolidated USDOJ Wildland Fire Service.
- Wildland fire management is not just suppression — it is inseparable from land stewardship. It encompasses prescribed burning, fuels treatment, and coordination with timber management and land-use planning.
- Separating fire from land management agencies will erode forest resilience and undermine active stewardship strategies that reduce or prevent catastrophic wildfire.
- Full integration of wildland fire management with land management and research is not optional — it is critical to addressing the root causes of the wildfire crisis.

3. Moving Headquarters to Salt Lake City Raises Serious Questions

- Relocating the Washington Office, including the Chief of the Forest Service, out of Washington, D.C. effectively removes the agency from the day-to-day activities in the Capital.
- The Washington Office's core function is to maintain relationships with Congress and national stakeholders to secure resources for on-the-ground work, while providing national leadership on policy and program management. That is the point of a Capital City. That role requires proximity to the Congress, other executive branch offices, and partner organizations.
- While any potential benefit from such a move is unclear in this plan, a similar relocation of the BLM headquarters to Colorado resulted in 90% attrition of Washington DC employees (and their historical knowledge and experience) with no demonstrable improvement in its operations.

4. Research & Development Must Not Be Marginalized

- FS R&D is the preeminent forestry research organization in the world.
- The restructuring significantly diminishes the role of Forest Service Research & Development, closing 57 of 77 research sites—with little explanation of how the research network will function under the new structure.
- FS Research continues to develop essential information, used by forest managers and firefighters, related to wildfire and effective fuels treatment, pests, post-fire restoration and more. The scale of disruption across R&D sites could cause a significant brain drain and push scientific discovery back at a time when it is most critical.

- Many of the R&D units are located around the country so FS scientists are working in proximity to other researchers, such as at universities and other government facilities, or near the ecosystems that their research concerns. Ironically, the stated goal of this restructuring is to move FS employees closer to the people and resources they work with, but for R&D this current situation would be reversed.
- Consolidating facilities and relocating R&D personnel risks damaging longstanding, productive partnerships with universities and research institutions that benefit the entire agency mission.

5. Ranger District and National Forest Staffing Must Be Restored

- The most important point of service delivery to the American public is at the National Forest and Ranger District level, where people access and enjoy their public lands, and where forest management decisions are made on a daily basis.
- District and Forest level staffing has already been reduced significantly.
- While this restructuring does not appear to further reduce National Forest or Ranger District staffing beyond last year's reductions, the work currently provided at headquarters and regional offices will have to flow somewhere and cannot simply be absorbed at the local level.
- The combination of last year's downsizing and the expected attrition from this restructuring plan could represent a loss of more than 9,000 FS employees (30%) over 3 years. The proposal does not address how this loss of expertise and institutional knowledge would be mitigated or how ongoing support to Forests and Districts would be maintained. Without mitigation, this loss could significantly reduce the effectiveness of the agency for decades.
- The plan does not clearly explain how additional capacity or resources will flow to National Forests and Ranger Districts. That detail is essential, especially in light of the Administration's Budget proposal for FY2027 which calls for a 44% reduction in FS salaries and administrative expenses and a 24% reduction in National Forest System program funding.
- A reduction in accomplishments and services must also be described, with a clear articulation of what work will not be done, so that the public knows what to expect of the agency and its employees.

6. Critical Restructuring Details Remain Unclear

- This restructuring plan is of an historic magnitude yet lacks a clear connection to defined goals, objectives, or measurable outcomes. Although cost reduction is a stated goal, we have no cost analysis data available to ensure that goal is being met. Without explicitly stating what the reorganization is intended to achieve, or how success will be evaluated, it is not possible to assess its effectiveness or justify the significant structural changes.
- The restructuring assigns the new State Offices responsibility for all program delivery, including Research & Development and State, Private & Tribal Forestry, but provides insufficient detail on how this will work in practice.
- Similarly, the role, reporting structure, and accountability of the new Operations Service Centers is unclear, as well as how they will prioritize and meet Forest Supervisors' needs. The agency's centralized administrative services are cited as an example of structure that is not effective. The agency now plans to set up much broader centralized operations, with a lack of clarity as to how it will improve those services.
- In its current form, the proposal introduces significant risks, unclear benefits, and internal inconsistencies with its stated objectives. A clearer articulation of goals, along with a more practical and cost-aligned implementation strategy, is needed before moving forward.