

National Association of Forest Service Retirees Employee Care Update

As of May 31, 2025

Latest Employee Care News

The NAFSR Employee Care Team continues to monitor the latest agency news and communications affecting the Forest Service workforce. You can read the latest updates from the Chief's Office in the online newsletter, [Inside the Forest Service](#).

5/21/25: [2025 Joint USDA-DOI Memo on Wildfire Preparedness](#)

5/21/25: [Chief's Wildfire Letter of Intent 2025](#)

5/20/25: [Associate Chief's Update on Interim Operational Planning](#)

5/16/25: [Chief's Message on Leading through Change](#)

5/06/25: [Next Steps During Workforce Reshaping](#)

5/01/25: [Employee Support Resources Available](#)

When will USDA announce reorganization and reduction in force (RIF) plans?

USDA Forest Service reorganization plans were expected to be announced by the end of May. However, a U.S. District Court order issued on May 22 prohibits the Office of Management and Budget, the Office of Personnel Management, the U.S. DOGE Service and 19 departments and agencies, including the Department of Agriculture, from implementing large-scale reorganization and reduction in force (RIF) plans.

[Federal News Network article](#)

While appeals have been filed by the Administration, these ongoing court actions will likely continue to delay agency reorganization announcements. Meanwhile, this pause may allow the agency time needed to assess and take actions to close some of the critical staffing and leadership gaps left by the thousands of Forest Service employees who left so far this year due to probationary terminations, DRP 1.0 and 2.0, and VERA.

So here we are at the start of summer field and fire season...without any seasonal employees onboard and a greatly reduced cadre of red-carded employees available to support wildfire assignments.

Concerned about gaps in workforce resources needed to steward and protect our public lands? Use the NAFSR web resources under [What can I do?](#) to raise your concerns and make your voice heard!

Latest Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Find additional FAQs in the NAFSR workforce care updates in March and April provided specifics on the federal rules for reduction in force (RIF), voluntary early retirement authority (VERA), and the voluntary separation incentive program (VSIP).

What are the rules for conducting federal reductions-in-force (RIF)?

Federal workforce reductions in force are covered by federal law in title 5 of the United States Code, section 3502. Specific regulatory requirements for most federal jobs are found in the Code of Federal Regulations ([5 CFR Part 351 Reduction in Force](#)).

OPM updated their [RIF Guides](#) in March 2025, including the [Employee Guide to Career Transition](#) that explains reemployment priority programs.

What actions are covered by the RIF regulations?

An agency must use the RIF regulations before separating or demoting an employee because of an organizational reason such as *reorganization*, including lack of work, shortage of funds, insufficient personnel ceiling, or the exercise of certain reemployment or restoration rights. Most RIF actions are a result of an agency reorganization.

What are some of the key RIF terms I should know?

The agency reorganization plan will determine which positions will be abolished or transferred, and if a reduction in force is needed to carry out the reorganization. The RIF plan applies the RIF regulations to establish **competitive areas**, **competitive levels**, and **employee retention registers** in order to determine which employees are affected by a RIF action.

- **Competitive area:** Defines the limits, or boundaries, within which employees compete for retention within the organizational unit(s) and geographical location (e.g., local commuting area). In a RIF, employees compete for retention only with other employees in the same competitive area.
 - There is no minimum or maximum number of employees in a competitive area.
 - The minimum competitive area is an organizational unit within the local commuting area (50-mile radius).
 - There is no maximum competitive area. Organization could be defined as agency-wide and geographical location could be defined as nationwide.Agencies must keep records when establishing or changing competitive areas and publish descriptions or make them readily available for review by employees.
- **Competitive level:** Within each competitive area, the agency groups interchangeable positions into competitive levels.
 - Each competitive level includes positions with the same grade, classification series, and official tour of duty (e.g., full-time, part-time, seasonal, or intermittent). For example, otherwise identical full-time and seasonal positions are placed in separate competitive levels even when the agency conducts a RIF while the seasonal employee happens to be working a full-time tour of duty.

- All positions in a competitive level have interchangeable qualifications, duties, and responsibilities.
 - A competitive level is based on employees' official position descriptions, not on the employees' personal qualifications.
 - Separate competitive levels are established for positions filled:
 - as part of a formally designated trainee or developmental program.
 - on competitive service appointments (e.g., career, career conditional).
 - on excepted service appointments (e.g., VRA, Schedule A, SES).
 - Similar positions (e.g., same grade, classification series, work schedule, etc.) may be placed in the same competitive level when the position descriptions for the positions show that an employee in either one of the positions needs no more than 90 days to be able to perform the key tasks of the other position.
- **Retention register:** Employees are assigned to a RIF retention register based on four retention factors:
 - Tenure of employment (i.e., type of appointment);
 - Veterans' preference;
 - Total creditable Federal civilian and uniformed service; and
 - Performance ratings.

What is a transfer of function (TOF)?

A [transfer of function](#) occurs when a reorganization involves either (a) moving an entire organizational function or (b) moving an entire competitive area to a different commuting area, even without any organizational change, if that organizational function is not currently being done in the new location.

Examples:

- (a) A transfer of function takes place *when a work function* ceases in one competitive area and moves to one or more other competitive areas that do not perform the function at the time of transfer. For example, if the engineering function in the FS regional office in Vallejo, CA was moved to a new office in Boise, ID where there is no existing FS engineering function.
- (b) A transfer of function can also occur *when the entire competitive area* moves to a different local commuting area without any additional organizational change. For example, if the entire FS regional office in Denver was moved to Boise where there is currently no FS regional office.

What is a Transfer of Function canvass letter?

According to OPM, when a transfer of function will result in employees moving to a different local commuting area, the losing competitive area may use a "Transfer of Function Canvass Letter" to determine which employees wish to be considered for positions in a different local commuting area. A transfer of function canvass letter does not guarantee an employee a position at the new location but simply asks the employee to state an interest in transferring with

the function. However, the canvass letter may be used as the basis to separate an employee who declines to transfer with the function to a different local commuting area.

Can work be transferred to another location without a TOF action?

Yes. When work functions or positions are realigned from one organization to another *existing organization where the same function or type of work is already being performed*, this is commonly referred to as a “transfer of work.”

According to [OPM's workforce restructuring guidelines](#):

“An employee has no right to transfer with a function if, at the time of transfer, the *gaining competitive area performs the same type of work as the function that is transferring from the losing competitive area*. Also, an employee has no right to transfer if the function does not cease in the losing competitive area at the time of transfer. In these situations, the employee has a right to compete in a reduction in force in the losing competitive area if the agency does not offer the employee another position at the same grade.

Example: A transfer of work could occur if two or more FS regional offices in *different competitive areas* are consolidated and relocated at one of the *existing* FS regional office locations. For example, if current regional offices in Pacific Southwest and Alaska were identified to close and those regional functions were then combined in the existing Pacific Northwest Regional office in Portland, OR. In this scenario, regional work functions already exist in the PNW regional office, so this would be a transfer of *work* rather than a transfer of *function*.

Will the Forest Service reorganization and RIF involve transfers of function (TOF) or transfers of work?

We won't know for sure until the USDA reorganization plans are released, but it is likely that the Forest Service reorganization plan could involve both transfer of function and transfer of work scenarios such as:

- ***Closure of some offices/organizations and the function/organization is no longer performed*** (not transferred to another organization/location). Employees in this scenario would be subject to RIF procedures at the closing location, but they could be offered other jobs available at other Forest Service offices.
- ***Consolidating some functions and organizations with existing ones in other existing office locations***, such as consolidating multiple regions in one existing regional office location). This would be a transfer of work involving RIF for employees in the losing office locations. If jobs are relocated with the work, then employees in those jobs should be offered the opportunity to relocate with their jobs.

- ***Moving or consolidating functions and organizations in new geographic locations***, such as moving some Washington Office functions to new field locations or consolidating regions in a new geographic location where there is no existing regional office. This would be a transfer of function in which jobs would be moved to the new organizational location and employees would be entitled to relocate with their jobs if they choose to. If employees elect not to relocate, then RIF procedures would apply (see NAFRS FAQs on RIF).

Doesn't a major reorganization require Congressional approval?

Yes, normally Congress must review and approve major reorganizations involving office closures and movement of jobs and employees between geographic areas to ensure the agencies are still able to carry out the work that Congress established and funded them to do. This is one of the reasons cited for the [preliminary injunction](#) issued on May 22, 2025 by District Court Judge Susan Illston that bars implementation of agency reorganizations directed by the Trump Administration.

The Administration has appealed, so we'll have to wait for the appeals court to rule or Congress to engage ([another reason to contact your Congressional representatives!](#)).

Are transfers of function and transfers of work covered by the RIF regulations?

If a reorganization involves a *transfer of function to another organization or location*, the RIF regulations require that employees *have the right to move with their job to another organization* within the agency if the alternative is separation or downgrading by reduction in force. Transfers of function (TOF) are specifically covered in subpart C, part 351 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations.

Transfers of work also involve RIF procedures but don't entitle employees to move with their job, although employees may be offered the opportunity to relocate to vacant jobs in the gaining organization. If work is transferred to a "gaining organization" but current jobs at the "losing organization" are abolished rather than relocated, then a RIF is conducted in the losing organization.

Can a TOF be done between different federal agencies?

Yes, but an *interagency transfer of a function* and/or personnel requires specific statutory authorization. Without a specific legislative basis, an agency has no authority to permanently transfer a function and/or personnel to another agency.

For example, the Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management function can only be transferred to a new or different agency if Congress passes legislation that authorizes such a move.

Will USDA pay relocation expenses if my job is relocated under RIF procedures?

Yes, the USDA Relocation Allowance Regulation 2300-002 provides for payment of relocation expenses according to the Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) allowances *if an employee is required to move to another location under a RIF* including transfer of function or transfer of work.

If you are offered a job under RIF procedures in duty location outside your current commuting area (50-mile radius), then you will be entitled to relocation expenses. Alternatively, it's possible that the agency could offer a relocation bonus (lump sum payment).

[USDA Relocation Allowance Regulation | Home](#)
[eCFR :: 41 CFR Subtitle F -- Federal Travel Regulation System \(FMR Subtitle F\)](#)