

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 7, 2025

The Honorable Brooke Rollins  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Chief Tom Schultz  
U.S. Forest Service  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Rollins and Chief Schultz,

As Members of the congressional delegation of Washington State, we write to you with great concern regarding the recent decision to indiscriminately terminate hundreds of United States Forest Service (USFS) employees, integral to Washington state's economy, public safety, and way of life. With five National Forests spanning roughly one-quarter of all land in the state, the ability of the USFS to carry out its responsibilities effectively and efficiently has an outsized impact on our constituents.

For many communities in our districts, USFS firefighters and support personnel serve as their primary protection in the wildland urban interface. USFS also plays a critical role in reducing fire risk to nearby communities and smoke exposure to the entire region by implementing forest management, reducing fuel loads, conducting prescribed burns, and partnering with localities, states, nonprofit organizations and companies for these purposes.

Recreational activities managed by the USFS play a crucial role in enhancing the well-being of local communities in Washington State, driving economic growth and fostering a deeper connection to the natural environment. Outdoor recreation is the largest single use of National Forest lands, and USFS in Washington State maintains nearly 12,000 miles of trails and field over 7 million visits per year<sup>1</sup>. Nearly \$1 billion is spent annually in communities around the National Forests in Washington, benefiting local businesses as an economic driver of the region. Trails also double as a network for firefighters to fight fires and quickly evacuate if needed.

That's why cuts to nearly 10% of the nation's USFS workforce are devastating, and some offices in Washington State are facing even higher proportions of cuts. In the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, 46 employees from all ranger districts were terminated, including those in recreation, timber, and other administrative roles. The Wenatchee River Ranger District which manages the Enchantment Area, one of Washington State's most treasured hikes, lost 10 of its 13 recreation staff. In Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, more than 30% of staff were terminated. At least 15 employees were also terminated at the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. All in all, roughly 260 employees of the USFS were terminated in Region 6, and we understand that further reductions in force are planned. These reductions, along with the deferred resignations and the USFS hiring freeze from last year, are having significant impacts on our state.

Amidst increasingly common extreme weather in the region, now is not the time to gut a workforce charged with wildland firefighting and mitigation for a quarter of the state's lands. While public safety roles were supposedly exempted, we're gravely concerned about reports that USFS staff who support wildfire response or mitigation, as well as staff with firefighting certifications that serve in roles with dual purposes, were terminated. Wildfire support staff directly impact the ability to quickly respond to emergencies, protect the public, and ensure the safety of firefighters by providing necessary support functions like communication, logistics, and scene management. Without dedicated support staff, USFS risks losing critical functions like

<sup>1</sup> The Outdoor Economy. USDA. (n.d.). [https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/fseprd1019126.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd1019126.pdf)

coordinating resources, managing incident command, and providing medical assistance. This compromises both the safety of those on the frontlines and their ability to defend nearby communities.

The cuts to recreation staff have already been felt across the state with trail closures including the Denny Creek Trailhead, which sees over 1,000 visitors daily over the weekend. Remaining USFS staff are stretched thin, unable to tend to the overwhelming backlog of deferred maintenance of critical facilities and infrastructure. USFS staff will be unable to continue their partnerships and coordinate the thousands of volunteers that provide invaluable manpower for operations and maintenance. Search and rescue operations will be hampered without adequate numbers of wilderness rangers to assist hikers and climbers in distress. Recreation staff, many of whom are certified to fight wildland fires, also play a critical role in fire mitigation by enforcing burn bans and answer the call for help during extreme wildfire events. Those included in the firings were recreation employees at Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest who had just recently returned from supporting firefighting efforts in Southern California.

We request information regarding terminated USFS employees, including their job titles, position descriptions, justification for termination, and occupational categories as determined by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM). In addition, we request the number of terminated employees that hold an Incident Qualification Card, commonly referred to as a Red Card, for wildland firefighting. Lastly, we request the USFS share its plan to handle the influx of visitors expected over the rapidly approaching peak summer season with a depleted workforce.

In closing, the United States Forest Service maintains some of our most pristine public lands and safeguard our communities from wildfire and smoke. We request that you recognize the countless ways in which previous and future USFS cuts indelibly harm the Evergreen state's way of life. According to the recently updated OPM memorandum titled Guidance on Probationary Periods, Administrative Leave and Details<sup>2</sup>, "Agencies have ultimate decision-making authority over, and responsibility for, such personnel actions." We request that you immediately reinstate terminated employees and refrain from further staff reductions such that USFS can carry out all wildland fire mitigation efforts designated by Congress, operate and maintain recreation services through the peak summer months, and have enough staff to support wildfire response during peak times.

Thank you for your attention to this pressing matter.

Sincerely,



Kim Schrier, M.D.  
Member of Congress



Rick Larsen  
Member of Congress



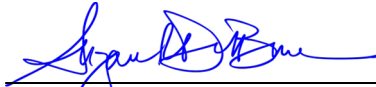
Marie Gluesenkamp Perez  
Member of Congress

<sup>2</sup> Guidance on probationary periods, administrative leave ... (n.d.). <https://chcoc.gov/sites/default/files/Guidance on Probationary Periods, Administrative Leave and Details 1-20-2025 FINAL.pdf>



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Marilyn Strickland  
Member of Congress



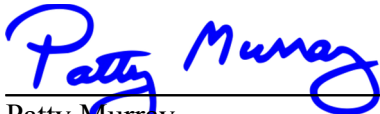
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Suzan K. DelBene  
Member of Congress



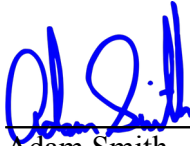
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Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress



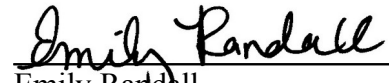
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Patty Murray  
United States Senator



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Adam Smith  
Member of Congress



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Emily Randall  
Member of Congress



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Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator

<sup>2</sup> Guidance on probationary periods, administrative leave ... (n.d.). [https://chcoc.gov/sites/default/files/Guidance on Probationary Periods, Administrative Leave and Details 1-20-2025 FINAL.pdf](https://chcoc.gov/sites/default/files/Guidance%20on%20Probationary%20Periods,%20Administrative%20Leave%20and%20Details%201-20-2025%20FINAL.pdf)