

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 2, 2025

The Honorable Brooke Rollins  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Rollins,

We write to express concern regarding your July 24 memorandum outlining a proposed restructuring of the U.S. Forest Service that includes the closure of the current regional offices and research stations that are predominantly based on ecological and geographical boundaries. This includes both the Pacific Northwest Region 6 Headquarters in Portland, the Pacific Northwest Research Station in Portland and Corvallis, and possibly other Forest Service facilities in Oregon that were not identified in the Secretary Memorandum. Eliminating these offices will result in the loss of essential regional coordination, geographic expertise, and will disrupt ongoing scientific research and wildfire mitigation efforts in the Pacific Northwest.

The Region 6 office plays a critical role in coordinating federal response, land management, and collaboration across national forests, tribal lands, and interagency partners throughout Oregon. Moving these operations to distant “hub” locations would sever regional ties, reduce place-based expertise, and complicate in-person engagement with local stakeholders. This shift would diminish the Forest Service’s ability to effectively manage resources and respond to issues specific to the Pacific Northwest.

Forests cover over half of Oregon. Over 15.6 million acres are managed by the Forest Service. Forests remain Oregon’s most abundant natural resource and support over 62,300 forest sector jobs with higher-than-average wages. These forest-related jobs account for 3% of Oregon’s workforce, with over 30% of those jobs located in rural areas.

The proposed closure of the Region 6 office comes at a time when the Forest Service is already facing severe staffing shortages, with the Pacific Northwest well into fire season. Reports indicate that the Forest Service has lost at least 1,800 fire-qualified employees, and vacancy rates are particularly high in our region, with nearly 40% of positions unfilled. This shortage of personnel means that critical wildfire response efforts are increasingly strained. The proposed reorganization, including the closure of regional offices, will likely exacerbate this situation, reducing the Forest Service's ability to manage wildfires effectively and coordinate resources across the region.

The Pacific Northwest Research Station in Portland is over 100 years old and has long been a hub for wildfire prevention, scientific research, forestland management, and conservation across the region. Approximately 246 permanent, full-time employees and scientists are currently based at this station, many of whom are engaged in long-term, ecosystem-specific research critical to our region. In order to respond to the needs of foresters, private land owners, and the general

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public, we need expert Forest Service research staff on the ground, studying the flora and fauna unique to Oregon and presenting solutions to new pests, diseases, and other changes that arise. It remains unclear what will happen to these employees or their work, or the experimental research forests in Oregon, should the facility be closed and these employees are required to relocate out of state. Any reorganization plan must account for the essential contributions of these public servants and the continuity of their work.

The impact on ongoing scientific research would be particularly severe. Relocating scientists would interrupt place-based research, hinder partnerships with Oregon universities, and undermine monitoring programs, student training, and ecosystem-specific research. This work, tied directly to the landscapes it studies, cannot be replicated from afar.

Given the far-reaching implications of this proposed reorganization, we request responses to the following questions:

1. How will the Department ensure meaningful and accessible engagement with stakeholders, tribes, and local governments in Oregon following these closures?
2. How does the Department plan to address the growing wildfire management challenges in the Pacific Northwest, especially given the current staffing shortages?
3. How will the Department ensure continuity of long-term research projects specific to the ecosystems of the Pacific Northwest, including the experimental forests?
4. What is the plan to maintain existing research partnerships with Oregon's academic institutions?
5. What are the Department's plans for the approximately 246 full-time employees currently stationed at the Pacific Northwest Research Station in Portland?
6. How do the consolidated regional and state offices bring employees closer to the customer and community that they serve, particularly when there are specific geographic specialties among staff?
7. What analysis was done to identify the new hubs?
8. What is the Department's timeline for implementing this reorganization?

As we have noted, shuttering any Oregon-based regional office undercuts locally rooted coordination, science, and management aligned with the unique ecological and social conditions of the Pacific Northwest in a forest economy state. The Department must provide additional details and empirical rationale before the public and Congress consider any of the proposed changes.

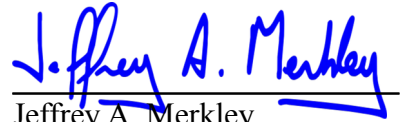
Sincerely,

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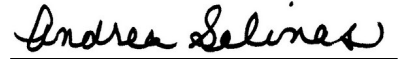
Maxine Dexter  
Member of Congress



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



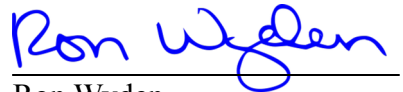
Janelle S. Bynum  
Member of Congress



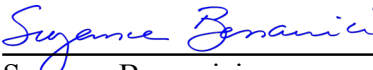
Andrea Salinas  
Member of Congress



Val Hoyle  
Member of Congress



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Suzanne Bonamici  
Member of Congress