

May 26, 2026

The Honorable Mike Lee
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Energy & Natural
Resources
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Martin Heinrich
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Energy & Natural
Resources
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Lee and Ranking Member Heinrich:

Our organizations represent over 150,000 ecological and biological researchers across a range of scientific disciplines. We write to express concern regarding the proposed closures, consolidations, and reorganization of multiple federal research facilities operated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and particularly, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). (*facilities list attached.*)

We appreciate the administration's stated goal of improving efficiency across the National Forest System and USFS operations. However, as currently described, these actions risk degrading and damaging the Forest Service's scientific capacity and its ability to collect and deliver critical information that supports ecological systems, forest pest management, local communities, and effective land management decisions.

Congress has explicitly restricted the use of FY2026 appropriated funds to conduct agency reorganizations, including provisions stating that funds may not be used to "eliminate programs or projects, relocate an office or employees, or reorganize offices, programs, or activities" without prior approval from the Committee on Appropriations. The proposed changes to USFS reflect a large-scale restructuring that potentially violates appropriations law and warrants close congressional oversight to ensure no legal limits are crossed.

As a result, we respectfully request that Congress:

- **Conduct robust oversight** of the proposed USFS reorganization, including holding hearings to examine its impacts on research capacity, workforce retention, and mission delivery.
- **Require USDA and USFS to provide detailed justification** and implementation plans before proceeding with closures and relocations, including impacts on ongoing research, datasets, and partnerships.

- **Ensure appropriated funds for USFS Research & Development (R&D)** are used consistently with congressional intent and prohibit the use of funds for large-scale facility closures or relocations unless explicitly authorized following review of provided justifications.
- **Protect and sustain the USFS R&D** workforce and infrastructure necessary to meet statutory responsibilities related to forest management, wildfire, water resources, and ecosystem health.

Impacts on the Federal Conservation Workforce

The closure and consolidations of USFS research facilities will have lasting impacts on ecological professionals in the federal workforce. The USFS's mission, to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations, depends on experienced local staff whose expertise cannot be easily replicated or readily replaced.

Forced relocation or attrition will result in disruptions to agency-provided services, lower morale, and negative impacts on families and surrounding communities. They will also accelerate the collapse of ongoing experiments, even when data analysis nominally continues. USFS R&D scientists are place-based stewards of public trust resources, critical management partners, and sources of technical expertise. Relocating these individuals will jeopardize the integrity of the Forest Service nationwide.

Support for Science-Based Decision Making

Forest Service science provides the foundation for policies and decision-making concerning forest and grassland systems across the nation and beyond. Our organizations are concerned about how these actions may undermine the quality of management decisions developed, implemented, and guided by the USFS, other federal agencies, and partners.

The research conducted across USFS research facilities has directly informed major national priorities, including Clean Air Act implementation, wildfire and forest management strategies, drought risk modeling, water resource protection, crop breeding, and food security. These outdoor laboratories have also resulted in long-standing partnerships with cooperating universities, management agencies, local communities, and Tribes. In recent years, the USFS Research and Development (R&D) program has had over 2,000 agreements valued at over \$47 million with partner organizations. Therefore, closure represents the loss not only of facilities, but of decades of federal investment in science-based decision making.

There is currently a lack of clarity regarding the closing and/or relocating of the Forest Service headquarters away from Washington, D.C., but if it were to come to fruition, this may also

reduce the direct flow of scientific information to Congress and federal partners, further weakening science-informed policymaking.

Need for Continued Congressional Oversight

We are grateful to appropriators for highlighting the concerning lack of detail in proposed changes to USFS budget and organization during recent budget hearings. We are encouraged to see so many Members of Congress speaking to the importance of USFS science and supporting continued, meaningful consultation between Congress and the USFS as these proposed changes proceed.

As Congress continues to exercise its oversight and appropriations responsibilities, **we request consideration of the following key questions:**

- How will proposed organization changes and facility closures affect USFS program delivery, particularly for conservation and ecosystems management functions on public lands?
- Which experiments will permanently end because of these closures?
- How will ongoing experiments and long-term datasets be maintained, and what safeguards exist to ensure continuity?
- How will relocation of headquarters affect communication and information flow between USFS leadership, Congress, and federal partners?
- What transition or data stewardship plans exist to protect public investment?
- Have projected short-term cost savings been rigorously evaluated against the long-term impacts on science, management effectiveness, and risk mitigation?

Sustaining Necessary Infrastructure for Long-term Resilience

In closing, these proposed actions go well beyond routine facilities management. They undermine congressional intent, and the resulting loss of scientific capacity across the USFS scientific workforce would significantly weaken the nation's ability to manage its natural resources. It would also represent an unprecedented erosion of institutional knowledge that is essential to the Forest Service's ability to fulfill its mission.

We are at risk of losing irreplaceable national research assets that support the restoration and maintenance of healthy, productive forests, reduce wildfire risk, protect water quality and availability, strengthen environmental protection and natural disaster preparedness, bolster agricultural resilience, and sustain rural economies.

Any short-term efficiencies achieved through consolidation must be carefully weighed against these far greater long-term national costs and the resulting degradation of the Forest Service's

mission. Thank you for your attention to this issue. Our societies would welcome the opportunity to provide additional information or technical information in detail to support your review.

Sincerely,

Ecological Society of America
American Institute of Biological Sciences
Entomological Society of America
The Wildlife Society
Animal Behavior Society
American Bird Conservancy
American Ornithological Society
American Phytopathological Society
American Society of Agronomy
American Society of Ichthyologists and
Herpetologists
American Society of Naturalists
American Society of Plant Biologists
Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies
Crop Science Society of America
Geological Society of America

Herpetologists' League
Mycological Society of America
Natural Resource Ecology Laboratory
Organization of Biological Field Stations
San Diego Natural History Museum
Society for Conservation Biology North
America
Society for the Study of Amphibians and
Reptiles
Society of Environmental Toxicology and
Chemistry of North America
Society of Herbarium Curators
Society of Nematologists
Society of Vertebrate Paleontology
Soil Science Society of America
Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation

Attachment

Forest Service Selected Facilities Identified for Closure or Consolidation

Facilities publicly identified as slated for closure or consolidation include the following representative examples:

- **New Hampshire:** Bartlett Experimental Forest, with nearly 90 years of forest management, wildlife, and vegetation change research.
- **Minnesota:** Marcell Experimental Forest / Grand Rapids Research Office, home to the SPRUCE whole-ecosystem experiment, and the Ely Research Station, supporting boreal forest productivity and Tribal co-management research.
- **Louisiana:** Southern Research Station facility in Pineville, conducting longleaf pine restoration, fire ecology, and invasive species studies.
- **Arkansas:** Southern Pine Ecology and Management Research Work Unit, based in Monticello, develops the ecological and silvicultural knowledge needed to restore and maintain southern pine-dominated forests that support timber production, wildlife habitat, and water resources across the Southeast.
- **Texas:** Nacogdoches Research Station has served as the center of USFS science in East Texas, with long-term datasets illuminating forest change across decades and major training and collaboration partnerships with local universities and state agencies.
- **Maryland:** Baltimore Field Station, a nationally significant research center for advancing urban forestry and research integrating ecology, infrastructure, and public health.
- **Nationwide:** A broader consolidation affecting **57 of 77 USFS research facilities across 31 states**, including watershed hydrology, forest health, fire behavior, and climate adaptation studies.