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February 14, 2025

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Rollins,

I write to express my extreme dismay and concern at reports¹ of the United States Forest Service (FS) terminating 3,400 employees. This reduction in the FS workforce will significantly hinder the agency's ability to carry out its mission to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of both present and future generations.

As you may know, prior to the indiscriminate firing of FS employees, the agency was making record progress in fighting wildfires. According to January 2025 Wildfire Crisis Strategy Update, the agency reduced wildfire risk to \$700 billion worth of housing and critical infrastructure, supported a nearly 12 percent reduction in wildfire risk to watersheds that supply drinking water, and avoided nearly \$40 million in residential property losses in fiscal year 2023 alone. This comes at a time when wildfire risk continues to increase, exacerbated by the impacts of climate change. There are 70,000 communities in the United States vulnerable to wildfire and one in three homes in the United States is in the Wildland-Urban Interface.

The decision to fire thousands of FS employees will undoubtedly impact the agency's ability to fight wildfires. The western United States alone saw a 246 percent increase in structures lost to

¹ <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/daily-labor-report/us-forest-service-to-terminate-3-400-workers-union-leader-says>

wildfire in the last decade. While reports suggest that public safety employees were not part of the mass firing, positions that support forest management were included. You have expressed a commitment to forest management, wildfire mitigation, and supporting forest markets. However, firing 3,400 FS employees is in direct conflict with these supposed values.

Terminating these employees will have a chilling effect on the agency's remaining workforce, creating an environment of fear, and undermining the agency's ability to meet its mission.

As the Ranking Member and former Chair of the subcommittee responsible for funding the Forest Service, I have a deep understanding of the resources necessary to support the agency's work. Employees are the Forest Service's most critical resource; without them, it is impossible to ensure our nation's forests remain healthy and properly managed.

Sincerely,



Chellie Pingree
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations

CC:
Chief Randy Moore
United States Forest Service
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250