



SCBNA Statement Opposing the Proposed Restructuring of the U.S. Forest Service

The **Society for Conservation Biology North America (SCBNA)** opposes the proposed restructuring of the U.S. Forest Service. The Trump administration's sweeping reorganization plan, which includes moving its headquarters from Washington, D.C., to Salt Lake City, Utah, replacing nine regional offices with 15 state-based offices, and shuttering research and development facilities in more than 30 states, raises serious concerns that warrant careful public scrutiny.

The most immediate risk is the **irreversible loss of institutional knowledge**. Tribal representatives have warned that mass staff relocations would "destroy irreplaceable knowledge about Treaty rights, forest conditions, and working relationships built over decades," and that new staff unfamiliar with the land will make mistakes.¹ Similar concerns are raised by Forest Service union employees, who warn that the reorganization will push experienced staff to relocate or resign, effectively pushing decades of expertise "out the door." We have seen this before: a near-identical BLM headquarters relocation under the first Trump administration cost taxpayers \$28 million and resulted in widespread staff attrition, and the Biden administration was ultimately forced to reverse many of the changes.^{2,3} Similarly, USDA reorganization has been associated with **workforce disruption and brain drain**.⁴ Experts warn the Forest Service could suffer the same fate, with even more dire results for the public.¹

The closure of 57 research stations is particularly alarming since it risks losing the scientific foundation necessary for lawful and effective forest management.⁵ Forest Service research labs produce **foundational work** on wildfire behavior, region-wise targeted species and ecosystem recovery, timber harvest, watershed health, and climate adaptation - science that informs management decisions across hundreds of millions of acres. This science promotes public-private partnerships, strengthens local economies that rely on timber and non-timber forest products and recreation, and saves lives and property by mitigating flooding and fire. Consolidating and eliminating these stations risks **degrading crucial resources and information** at precisely the moment when forests and the economies and people that depend on them face unprecedented stress from drought, beetle infestations, and accelerating fire seasons.

The public made its views clear: more than 80% of the 14,000 public comments submitted were negative, with concerns that the restructuring "could compromise ecological management, public access, and employee morale."¹ **That signal should not be dismissed.**

That said, there are legitimate arguments for reform. The agency faces \$3 billion in deferred maintenance and declining congressional appropriations, meaning the status quo is also not sustainable.⁶ **A thoughtfully executed consolidation, with genuine investment in continuity planning and staff retention, could yield real efficiencies for future agency work.**

The problem is not necessarily the goal, but its execution. An abrupt reorganization, imposed without stable timelines and public, private, or tribal partner consultation, sacrifices long-term stewardship capacity for short-term bureaucratic optics. **Our forests, and those who care for them, deserve better planning rooted in science and a clear vision for the future.**

References:

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4. U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2025, December 8). *USDA reorganization: Summary and analysis of feedback*. <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/usda-reorg-comments-analysis-12082025.pdf>
5. Niiler, E. (2026, April 3). Forest Service will close research stations that study wildfire risk. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/03/climate/forest-service-research-stations.html>
6. U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2026, March 31). *USDA prioritizing common sense forest management, moves Forest Service headquarters to Salt Lake City* [Press release]. <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2026/03/31/usda-prioritizing-common-sense-forest-management-moves-forest-service-headquarters-salt-lake-city>