

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 2, 2025

The Honorable Tim Schultz  
Chief  
United States Forest Service  
1400 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Chief Schultz:

We write with significant concerns regarding the persistent wildland firefighter staffing shortages at the U.S. Forest Service, leading to a significant decline in planned wildfire prevention work in high-risk, fire-prone areas. We are asking you to provide clear answers regarding the Forest Service's efforts to ensure adequate staffing and reduce wildfire risk in the West during this challenging fire season.

You have continued to maintain that the Forest Service has adequate resources and staffing to manage wildfire preparedness and response on federal lands, and that, while the Forest Service is significantly behind on hazardous fuels reduction work overall, there have been more positive results in certain regions like the Pacific Northwest. You have also claimed that in certain Western states, the Forest Service has even exceeded annual hazardous fuels reduction goals. However, it appears that to make these claims, you are referencing all Fiscal Year 2025 data, which began under the Biden Administration and includes five months of work prior to the beginning of the Trump Administration and its mass staff firings, forced retirements, and unnecessary pauses on projects.

An analysis of publicly available data indicates that for calendar year 2025 the Forest Service is significantly behind in hazardous fuels reduction across National Forest System lands. When compared to the previous four calendar years, there has been a 38% reduction in wildfire risk reduction in 2025. Through September of calendar year 2025, only 1.7 million acres received hazardous fuels reduction treatment, a decline from the four-year average of 3.6 million acres. Additionally, as of this summer, as many as 27% of Forest Service wildland firefighting positions remained vacant.

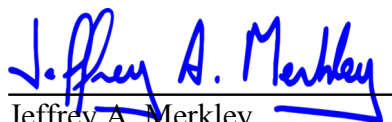
The steep decline in hazardous fuels reduction efforts on Forest Service lands poses a serious risk to public safety, public health, and the economy. It is imperative that the Forest Service works closely with Congress to address shortfalls in wildfire mitigation and ensure staffing and budgetary resources are sufficient to fulfill the agency's mission.

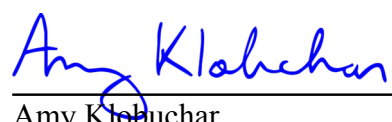
Please provide answers to the following questions as soon as possible, but not later than December 12, 2025:

1. How many full-time wildland firefighter and other hazardous fuel reduction personnel, including those with “red cards,” were employed at the beginning of FY 2025?
  - a. What are the current staffing levels for wildland firefighters and other hazardous fuels reduction personnel within the U.S. Forest Service?
  - b. Are those staffing levels sufficient to conduct the necessary amount of hazardous fuels reduction on National Forest System lands by the end of calendar year 2025?
2. What is the Forest Service plan to fill vacant wildland firefighting positions?
3. You have publicly stated that the agency has “the staffing-levels and resources necessary to adequately prepare for and respond to wildfires.” What evidence do you have (and can you provide) that your staffing levels are sufficient given the current wildfire risk environment?
4. What was the total number of acres treated by the Forest Service in FY 2025 for hazardous fuels reduction (mechanical thinning, prescribed burn, brush clearing) and how does that compare to the target set at the beginning of the year and to the average for FY 2021–2024?
5. What is the total number of acres treated by the Forest Service in calendar year (CY) 2025 to date for hazardous fuels reduction (mechanical thinning, prescribed burn, brush clearing) and how does that compare to the target set at the beginning of the year and to the average for CY 2021-2024?
6. What percentage of Forest Service hazardous fuels treatment projects in FY 2025 and in CY 2025 (to date) were delayed, cancelled, or reduced in scale relative to plan, and what were the primary reasons for such “operational challenges”?
7. How are treatment priorities set (i.e., certain forests, risk levels, proximity to communities) and how has that priority-setting changed (if at all) in recent years given increasing wildfire risk?
8. In the regions/states where treatment is < 30-40 % of the four-year average (e.g., Idaho, Montana, Oregon), what is being done differently (or will be done) to bring those areas back on track?
9. How has reduced staffing affected interagency coordination with state, local, and tribal firefighting partners?
  - a. Has reduced federal capacity affected collaborative fuel treatment projects (mechanical thinning and prescribed burning) with tribal, state, or local partners?


10. Will you commit to providing Congress a quarterly update detailing: authorized vs. filled crew positions, number of vacancies, acres treated (by region/state), funding expended, number of delayed/cancelled projects with reasons, contractor usage and costs?
11. Will you commit to providing Congress a quarterly update detailing hazardous fuels reduction efforts on National Forest System lands?

Sincerely,

  
Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

  
Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

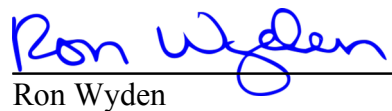
  
Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator


  
Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator

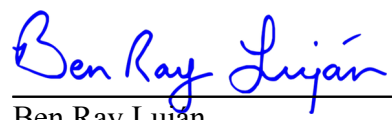
  
John Hickenlooper  
United States Senator


  
Ruben Gallego  
United States Senator

  
Mark Kelly  
United States Senator

  
Ron Wyden  
United States Senator


  
Alex Padilla  
United States Senator

  
Ben Ray Lujan  
United States Senator



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Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator



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Adam B. Schiff  
United States Senator