



December 26, 2024

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U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington D.C. 20250  
Attention: USDA Transition Team, Brian Klippenstein and Carly Miller

Dear Mr. Klippenstein and Ms. Miller:

The National Association of Forest Service Retirees (NAFSR) congratulates President-elect Trump on his successful election. We look forward to working with the incoming administration in developing policies to actively manage our nation's forests and grasslands to improve their health, resilience and ability to contribute to the country's economic and ecological well-being.

NAFSR is a non-profit organization whose membership collectively represents thousands of years of experience managing the nation's forest and grasslands. We care deeply about the management, use and enjoyment of natural resources which help make our nation strong. Our membership spans the entire spectrum of natural resource professionals, and our decades of experience uniquely positions us to provide advice and counsel to the political and policy leadership of our nation.

America's National Forests are an invaluable natural resource which face an array of threats to their enormous potential. At the same time, there are tremendous opportunities for investments to manage these resources, provide jobs, and increase the benefits that these forests provide to communities. We stand ready to assist your administration in addressing these threats and opportunities.

In the attached white paper, we provide more specific thoughts to help guide a solutions-oriented

agenda for your administration in the following areas:

- *Maintain the skilled workforce of career professionals, including a career Chief.*
- *Actively manage our forests and grasslands to help reduce wildfire risks, provide economic and public benefits, and maintain healthy, resilient landscapes and long-term sustainability.*
- *Support practicable actions to alter our current path of continuing wildfire disasters.*
- *Provide for the increasing public outdoor recreational demand on National Forest lands, acknowledging its importance as an economic driver for many communities.*
- *Maintain partnerships with State, Private and Tribal landowners.*
- *Be mindful of the importance of Forest Service research and its linkage to rural economies and community protection.*

Thank you for your consideration of our views. We look forward to working with you to help maintain and improve the world class resources that are America's forests and grasslands

Sincerely,

*Steve Ellis, Chair*

Steve Ellis, Chair  
National Association of Forest Service Retirees

# NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FOREST SERVICE RETIREES

## **2025 Trump Administration Transition White Paper** December 26, 2024

### **1. MAINTAIN THE SKILLED WORKFORCE OF CAREER PROFESSIONALS, INCLUDING A CAREER CHIEF**

The career Forest Service workforce at every level of the agency, from leadership to on-the-ground field personnel and research station scientists, carry out the mission of the agency in a highly effective, efficient and professional manner. Many Forest Service offices are in rural communities throughout the nation. Over the years the employees have established professional relationships with ranchers, loggers, the recreating public, hunting guides, and other users of the national forests. Many of our partners and local landowners depend on their expertise to help with resource management.

Forest Service employees respond to wildfires and other emergencies when called upon, and are contributing in numerous ways to the communities they live in. They and their families participate as members of volunteer fire departments, serve as ambulance EMTs, assist with local school sporting activities, and much more. Their payroll circulates in and helps sustain community infrastructure.

Our experience has been that the public is best served by having a seasoned career professional run the Forest Service, one that has had years of practical, hands-on experience, and understands the science and the tools of land management. As we've seen with the BLM, a political appointee at the helm has, at times, tried to move the agency to political extremes, only to have the next administration's appointee overturn the previous administration's policies and positions. This can waste a tremendous amount of time and money, time and money that could be spent on needed work, on the ground.

We understand and agree that federal agencies serve the Administration. The Forest Service has always worked with each administration to implement shifts in priorities. While the Forest Service has struggled at times to achieve its mission, it still maintains a strong ethic of service to the land and the people. That dedication starts at the top. Maintaining a career Chief and other agency leadership will help the agency to continue that commitment of service.

Retirements and other factors have led to workforce capacity issues and challenges for the agency. Maintaining expertise is essential for the successful implementation of Congressional and Administration intent and meeting public expectations and needs. We recommend that the Administration involves agency leadership and employees in efforts to streamline processes, and fund and fill the necessary employee gaps that hinder the agency's ability to provide all-

important on-the-ground services that the Congress, the Administration, and the public expect from them.

NAFSR also recommends keeping field decisions as close to the ground (regional and forest level) as possible. Functions in Washington, DC headquarters should appropriately be associated with budget development, establishing policy, coordinating with Congress, the Department, other agencies, and public lands interest groups and organizations.

## **2. ACTIVELY MANAGE OUR FORESTS AND GRASSLANDS TO HELP REDUCE WILDFIRE RISKS, PROVIDE ECONOMIC AND PUBLIC BENEFITS, AND MAINTAIN HEALTHY, RESILIENT LANDSCAPES AND LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY.**

As we examine the impacts and effects of recent catastrophic wildfires, the path forward is understood across most of the nation. The current situation stems primarily from overly dense forests with massive amounts of accumulated biomass, extensive development of homes in the wildland urban interface (WUI) and changing weather patterns. Continuing to emphasize fire suppression efforts without front-end investment in treatments across large, forested landscapes will not address the problem. The prescription for success should include more forest thinning and other mechanical treatments to help build forest resilience. It should also include the application of lower intensity fires to key landscapes.

Active management is needed to ensure we have forests in a variety of successional stages to assure forest health, quality wildlife habitat, and long-term sustainability. This work will require career Forest Service professionals working with states, local communities, Tribes and other partners using a wide variety of management tools. Keeping forests productive and working is critical to the economic stability of local communities and our nation, contributing to millions of jobs, especially in the West and Southeast.

## **3. SUPPORT PRACTICABLE ACTIONS TO ALTER OUR CURRENT PATH OF CONTINUING WILDFIRE DISASTERS**

The complexity of managing wildland fire on Federal, Tribal, state and private lands has increased in the last 25 years due to a variety of factors, including prolonged drought, increased fuel loading, and an expansion of homes in the wildland-urban interface. This change is demonstrated not only by the mega-fires in the West, but also the recent fires in the Northeast. Thus, what was once deemed the fire season is now the fire year.

NAFSR encourages the administration to maintain the state-of-the-art Incident Command System and many of the practices that have been developed, tested and proven over time to successfully manage wildfires. This includes supporting a wildland fire policy that allows for fire management strategies that balance wildfire risk, resource objectives, firefighter safety, and suppression costs. The *National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy* has been a highly effective approach for addressing wildfire problems on all lands.

There is broad acceptance of the need to accelerate the pace and scale of hazardous fuels treatments and restoration of fire-adapted landscapes. The management of forest resources and

wildland firefighting are closely/tightly inter-related. Indeed, many employees participate in all facets of this work, especially those in the field. For this reason, it is vital to maintain a close linkage between these programs within the Forest Service. All Forest Service employees contribute to these programs and respond to the disasters, regardless of their specific positions. The versatility and broad expertise of Forest Service employees is essential to success in addressing the wildfire crisis on all lands.

#### **4. PROVIDE FOR THE INCREASING PUBLIC OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL DEMAND ON NATIONAL FOREST LANDS, ACKNOWLEDGING ITS IMPORTANCE AS AN ECONOMIC DRIVER FOR MANY COMMUNITIES**

National Forests and Grasslands offer a wide array of opportunities for outdoor recreation, including camping, hiking, hunting, fishing, horseback riding, skiing, and much more. These activities attract over 150 million visits to National Forests annually, and support the health, well-being, and economic vitality of local communities and the recreation industry, contributing more than \$13 Billion and over 150,000 jobs to the economy, and the Forest Service can boost that figure with added investments.

As demand for recreational opportunities has grown, the Forest Service has struggled to generate an adequate budget to provide the facilities, oversight and management needed to develop and maintain the infrastructure and protect the resources to the degree expected by the visiting public. This has led to a reduction in services and closure of some areas just when the public want more. We would like to work with our many partners and the new administration to enhance the agency's ability to contribute to the outdoor recreation economy.

#### **5. MAINTAIN PARTNERSHIPS WITH STATE, PRIVATE AND TRIBAL LANDOWNERS**

The many threats to forest health are not limited to Federal lands. Wildfires, pests and diseases, and shifting weather patterns occur across wide landscapes, regardless of land ownership patterns. The Forest Service relies heavily on programs and authorities that allow partnering with other land managers to achieve and maintain healthy and resilient forested landscapes. Good Neighbor Authority, Forest Stewardship and Forest Legacy, and the Tribal Forest Protection Act, as well as many others, are essential tools that allow the agency to work with partners across the landscape to address forest health needs and opportunities.

These programs allow the Forest Service and partners to expand public-private partnerships to accomplish work, creating thousands of private sector jobs. NAFSR supports these partnership authorities and programs and recommends the administration work with the Forest Service and its partners to enhance and fully fund these programs and the essential work they support.

#### **6. BE MINDFUL OF THE IMPORTANCE OF FOREST SERVICE RESEARCH AND ITS LINKAGE TO RURAL ECONOMIES AND COMMUNITY PROTECTION**

The Research and Development (R&D) arm of the Forest Service makes valuable contributions to managing not only the national forests but all forests nationwide. Widely supported by the forest industry, investors and private forest landowners, R&D develops new products, information, and applied science solutions that are beyond the capacity of universities alone. R&D has over 75 percent of the nation's forest and forest products applied research capacity which is the ability to transform basic science findings into usable on-the-ground management practices, and forest product innovations.

Forest Service R&D has built a strong reputation for providing reliable and useful information for private forest landowners. R&D has also pioneered engineered wood products that are widely used by businesses in the construction of mid-rise buildings. Rural, forest dependent communities have also benefited from the Forest Service research program.

In recent years, curtailed funding has slowed innovation and applied scientific research at agency, university and industry levels, jeopardizing both community forest stewardship and the U.S. forest sector's global competitiveness as other nations invest more heavily in forestry R&D. NAFSR supports efforts that would help reverse this trend and enhance the capacity and pace of valuable Forest Service research.