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The Public is Losing Their National Forests

The character of America has been shaped by the richness of our forests and grasslands. Stewardship of this incredible legacy of public lands remains a fundamental measure of our nation's success in preserving both democracy and natural heritage.

As retired professionals who once worked to conserve the more than 193 million acres of our national forests and grasslands, we understand the importance of fiscal responsibility. We recognize the need for efficiency and cost reductions.

However, the recent cuts imposed by the Department of Government Efficiency fail to prioritize essential services. These indiscriminate reductions jeopardize the future of America's forests, the Forest Service and, ultimately, the American taxpayer.

U.S. Forest Service field staff work tirelessly – often for pennies on the dollar – to protect lives and communities from wildfires, safeguard clean drinking water, maintain campgrounds, clear trails, enhance forest health, conserve wildlife and fish habitats, manage ski areas, oversee livestock grazing and mining permits, and provide a vast array of other services. They are real people, dedicated to sound natural resource management that have faithfully delivered services to the American

people since the national forests were created under Theodore Roosevelt.

Did you know that 180 million people in more than 68,000 communities rely on national forests for their drinking water? Did you know that spending by visitors to national forests and grasslands contributes about \$10.3 billion annually to the U.S. economy and sustains more than 140,000 family wage jobs that are the foundation of many local communities? The Forest Service works closely with State Foresters in the delivery of state forestry programs. The agency

also leads the world in forestry research, improving lives in countless ways, including making homes safer from hurricanes, earthquakes and wildfires.

Yet all of this is at risk due to sweeping, indiscriminate staffing cuts that threaten the future of the Forest Service:

- Approximately 3,400 employees with less than one year of service were fired simply because they were easy targets. The low hanging fruit, so to speak. This amounts to roughly 10% of the agency's workforce.
- More than 75 percent of those dismissed employees had wildland firefighting qualifications—skills critical to supporting full-time firefighters.
- Many of those fired are military veterans, hired through special authorities as a recognition of their service to our country.
- Examples of cuts include some of the team working on hurricane recovery in NC, and 14 of the 15 employees assigned to the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center in Alaska.
- Additional program and personnel cuts are likely on the horizon.

What does this mean for you? It means communities will face greater wildfire risks as planned fuel reduction projects go uncompleted. It means campgrounds will close, visitor centers will reduce or eliminate services, trails will be obstructed by fallen trees, and businesses reliant on forest-related goods and services will suffer. Communities, especially rural ones will lose not just economic opportunities but also the dedicated public servants who live and work there. Do you want clean drinking water and wildfire-safe communities? Do you enjoy camping, hunting, fishing, skiing, mountain biking, or snowmobiling without encountering a "No Trespassing" sign? Perhaps you prefer horseback riding, birdwatching, rafting, or mountain climbing on public lands? This is now all at stake.

American's love and treasure their national forests and grasslands. America's public lands are the envy of the world. Dedicated public servants protect and conserve these lands for all. They deserve and need your support, because protecting and conserving these lands for current and future generations is something we know our country wants.

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National Association of Forest Service Retirees