

Judge Blocks FS Reorganization – October 20, 2026

A federal judge has issued a preliminary ruling blocking the Trump administration from moving the U.S. Forest Service's headquarters from Washington, D.C. to Salt Lake City while the rest of the lawsuit over the relocation plays out in court.

U.S. District Judge Vince Chhabria, in California's northern district, granted a stay on the move, writing in the order that Congress has put restrictions on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's "ability to reorganize without congressional buy-in."

The USDA — which oversees the Forest Service — "has almost certainly been violating those restrictions," the judge wrote, adding that "preliminary relief is necessary to protect the congressional prerogative, prevent irreparable harm to federal employees, and vindicate the public interest."

In March, when the USDA announced in a news release it would be moving its headquarters to Utah as part of a "sweeping restructuring" of the Forest Service, Secretary Brook Rollins called it a "common sense" way to position the agency "closer to the landscapes we manage and the people who depend on them."

The restructuring would also close and consolidate nearly two dozen research facilities and open new, smaller state-based offices. Affected employees were told they may have to move, find another position, or resign.

Last month, a group of nonprofits, local governments and labor union organizations filed a lawsuit to block the plan as unlawful, calling it an "unprecedented reorganization" that would close offices across the country and force thousands of USDA employees to "choose between their families, communities, churches, and lives they have built, and their careers."

In response to the lawsuit, USDA officials said they estimated about 250 employees would be relocated, not thousands. However, the judge determined that regardless of that number, the proposed reorganization would "certainly affect more than 10 staff members and therefore fall within the definition of reprogramming" that would require congressional approval.

In the lawsuit, the groups said USDA leaders — after they first announced the reorganization plan in July of last year — failed to get congressional approval for the plan. Congress not only rejected it, the plaintiffs wrote in the lawsuit, but it "went beyond rejecting the Administration's budget proposal that reflected the reorganized and downsized USDA and expressly prohibited the reorganization of the agency without further congressional approval."

In the ruling issued October 13, the federal district court judge agreed.

“Congress did not contemplate USDA using its appropriated funds to shut down offices or relocate employees,” Chhabria wrote. “To the contrary, Congress was actively working to restrict the agency’s ability to do so.”

While the rest of the lawsuit plays out in court, the order blocks Rollins and other USDA leaders from closing offices or reassigning employees to new locations outside of their areas. The judge noted the order doesn’t prevent the department from relocating or reassigning employees from within the National Capital Region in Washington, D.C., but it does prevent moving positions outside of the area.

However, the judge also noted in his ruling that the “temporal scope of this relief could end up being quite short.”

“The relevant appropriations statutes are set to expire in less than two months. If the agency wishes to move forward with its plans to close offices and relocate employees, it will soon have the opportunity to convince Congress of the merits of those plans,” the order says. “Congress, if it agrees, can choose not to extend the restrictions at issue in this case.”

“But until then,” the judge wrote, “USDA is preliminarily enjoined from spending appropriated funds on the challenged office closures and employee relocations.”

Click on this link to access the FS Website on the Reorganization - [Forest Service Reorganization | US Forest Service](#)

Under the "Updates" there are two links to the "Administrative Stay Order". The first link is 40 pages long and very technical. The second link is for current employees and is 3 pages long.

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