

NAFSR Employee Care Update

As of April 7, 2025

NAFSR is tracking news and guidance on actions impacting the workforce and will continue to provide updates, facts, and resources to assist employees with making personal career decisions. Most employee questions and concerns shared with NAFSR are related to:

1. Probationary employees who were fired in February, then should have been returned to work in March.
2. The Deferred Resignation Program (DRP) windows in January and April.
3. Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) and Voluntary Separation Incentive Pay (VSIP); and
4. Agency plans for a Reduction in Force (RIF) and reorganization at USDA Forest Service.

If you have questions on VERA, VSIP (not yet offered at Forest Service) and RIF rules, refer to the NAFSR facts sheets from March 2025 and the timeline provided below, including links to guidance from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

Agency reorganization plans are imminent and are expected to include elimination and consolidation of regional offices and reduction of Washington Office positions. This could include RIF of entire offices (potential with no bump/retreat job offers). It could also include relocation of jobs and staff across the country.

Here are some additional considerations coming up in employee questions:

- **Who's most at risk for RIF?** If you work in a region or WO position (including a remote national job), or if your job supports a program that is not a work priority in this Administration (such as DEI or some research jobs), then you may be at higher risk for RIF. Consider whether your family is willing to relocate if your job is moved outside your current commuting area.
- **DRP/VERA vs. RIF benefits:** If you do not accept a DRP offer and you later receive a RIF termination notice, you WILL still be entitled to severance pay or a discontinued service retirement, including early retirement, if eligible (see the March fact sheets for details).
- **AD fire assignments if you resign under DRP or VSIP:** If you resign or retire through DRP, you will not be able to work as an AD on a federal fire assignment while you are still on administrative leave as an employee. If VSIP is offered and you are paid an incentive, you will not be able to return to work in an AD fire assignment with the federal government within 5 years after leaving employment unless you repay the VSIP (although you *may* be able to work with a contract, local, or state fire organization).

Employee Resource: The Partnership for Public Service is offering live webinars, fact sheets, and other support for federal employees at <https://fedsupport.org/>.

2025 Timeline of Key Actions Impacting USDA Forest Service Employees

- Jan 20 Inauguration Day; DOGE Team on the ground in OPM; **President Trump orders federal civilian hiring freeze** to begin at 11:59 A.M ([OPM Hiring Freeze Guidance](#)). **OPM directs federal agencies to identify probationary employees** and provide report to OPM by Jan 24, 2025 ([OPM Probationary Employee Guidance](#)).
- Jan 22, Jan 27 **OPM issued “return to office” guidance** directing agencies to revise their telework and remote work policies and return workers to the office within 30 days or “as soon as practicable” ([OPM Return-to-In-Person Work Guidance](#)). Additional OPM guidance to agencies issued on Jan 27 ([OPM Guidance Return to Office Implementation Plans](#)).
- Jan 24 **OPM issued guidance on terminating agency Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Offices and positions** within 60 days ([OPM Guidance on DEI RIFs](#)). OPM issued further guidance on Feb 5 ([OPM Further Guidance on Ending DEI Programs](#)).
- Jan 27 **OPM issued guidance on implementing a new Schedule Policy/Career (“Schedule F”)**. This revives President Trump’s Executive Order 13957 on “Restoring Accountability To Policy-Influencing Positions Within the Federal Workforce” to shift Career Service federal positions to a new Excepted Service category with no adverse action protections. Agencies were given 90 days to prepare an initial list of recommended positions to be converted to the new schedule, followed by 120 days to implement the approved conversions ([OPM Guidance on Schedule Policy/Career](#)).
- Jan 28 – Feb 6 **Deferred Resignation Program (DRP) Offer #1**. OPM sends “Fork in the Road” email to most full-time federal employees offering a deferred resignation program (DRP) in which they would be placed on administrative leave and receive pay and benefits up to September 30, 2025. The email gave federal employees until February 6 to state they agreed to participate ([OPM Guidance on Deferred Resignation Program](#)). On Feb 4, OPM issued supplemental guidance on legality of the DRP ([OPM Memo on Legality of DRP](#)).
- Feb 13-16 **Probationary employees fired by USDA Forest Service**. Some terminations were later canceled due to administrative errors. On Mar 4, MSPB ordered all probationary employees to be returned to work,

followed by several similar federal court orders, although the agency did not immediately notify former employees and was slow in processing return actions. Some probationary employees chose not to return and face another dismissal action.

- Feb 22-24 **OPM government-wide “what did you do last week” email** requiring all employees to report by Feb 24 on what they accomplished in the last week ([OPM Guidance on What-Did-You-Do Email](#)).
- Feb 26 **Joint OMB/OPM guidance to agencies on developing RIF and reorganization plans (ARRPs), with phase 1 plans due by Mar 13 and phase 2 plans due by April 14** ([OPM Guidance on Agency RIF and Reorganization Plans](#)) for full implementation by Sept 30, 2025.
- March 10-25 USDA Forest Service announced a Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) application window from March 10-25 with VERA **retirements to be effective by May 31, 2025**. This window did NOT include any voluntary separation incentive payments (VSIP).
- Apr 2 - 8 **Deferred Resignation Program (DRP) Offer #2**. USDA opened a second DRP window for eligible employees to elect to *resign OR retire*. It's unclear if this offer includes a deferred date for voluntary early retirement authority (VERA). USDA reported that employees who accept the DRP will be placed on paid administrative leave between April 15 and April 30 and must be off the rolls by September 30.