



Committee: Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment & Related Agencies
Event: [A Review of the President's Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Request for the U.S. Forest Service](#)
Date: April 30, 2026

Executive Summary:

On April 30, 2026 the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment & Related Agencies held a hearing on the Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) budget for the U.S. Forest Service (USFS).

- Members of both parties expressed concern over worsening wildfire conditions, the proposed USFS reorganization, and the agency's ability to sustain core land management functions amid proposed staffing and funding reductions.
- Republicans emphasized the need to streamline permitting on USFS lands and reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies.
- Democrats argued that proposed budget cuts could weaken USFS research capacity, state and tribal partnerships, and wildfire coordination efforts.

Member Toplines:¹

Subcommittee Chair Lisa Murkowski (R-AK): Murkowski warned that overgrown forests and worsening drought conditions are increasing wildfire risks across the country. She argued for a comprehensive response that pairs strong wildfire suppression funding with robust forest management and prevention activities. Murkowski also raised concerns with the proposed USFS reorganization, including the creation of a new wildland fire service and the consolidation of agency assets and facilities. While she expressed openness to reforms, she cautioned against rushed or overly aggressive restructuring that could weaken the agency's operational capacity.

Subcommittee Chair Jeff Merkley (D-OR): Merkley criticized the FY27 budget proposal and USFS reorganization plan for cutting research and science programs, scaling back state and tribal partnerships, and cutting the non-fire workforce. Merkley questioned proposals to shift wildfire management responsibilities to the Department of the Interior (DOI). He warned that separating wildfire management from broader forest management could be counterproductive given how closely related the two are.

Witness Toplines:

[Tom Schultz, Chief, U.S. Forest Service:](#) Schultz emphasized that national forests serve as "working lands" that support U.S. energy security, critical mineral development, and economic resilience. He argued that the FY27 budget proposal prioritizes active forest management,

¹ Opening statements were not available online at the time of this memo's distribution.

including expanded support for energy development and resource production on USFS lands. Schultz also defended the administration's proposed wildfire reorganization. He argued that consolidating federal wildfire suppression efforts into a new U.S. Wildland Fire Service would create a more unified and efficient fire response system.

Major Takeaways:

Forest Service Reorganization:

- Chair Murkowski and Ranking Member Merkley, along with Full Committee Chair **Susan Collins** (R-ME) and Sens. **Tammy Baldwin** (D-WI) and **Chris Van Hollen** (D-MD) raised concerns with the USFS reorganization and questioned its potential impact on existing research facilities and employees.
- Murkowski raised concerns from USFS employees regarding uncertainty with their future assignments and potential relocation.
- Baldwin requested additional information on how staff relocations and restructuring would affect consultation and co-management with local stakeholders and communities.
 - Chief Schultz responded that the reforms are intended to push decision-making authority and resources closer to field personnel and to reduce bureaucracy.

Firefighting Capacity:

- Merkley warned that the expiration of the "fire fix" could force the USFS to divert funding from other agency priorities to cover wildfire suppression costs.
- Baldwin criticized the administration's proposal to eliminate funding for State Fire Assistance and Volunteer Fire Capacity grants. She argued that rural and volunteer fire departments rely heavily on these programs to respond to wildfires and protect local communities.
- Merkley questioned the administration's proposal to shift wildfire management responsibilities to DOI. He argued that reorganizing wildfire operations could weaken coordination between forest management and fire response activities.

Forest Research and State Partnerships:

- Sens. **Jon Husted** (R-OH), Merkley, Baldwin, and Van Hollen criticized the administration's proposal to eliminate funding for USFS research, State and Private Forestry programs, and cooperative forestry grants.
- Merkley argued that forest research is essential given the diversity of U.S. forest ecosystems and differing wildfire risks.
- Van Hollen emphasized the national and regional importance of USFS-supported research programs, particularly work conducted through the Baltimore Urban Field Station.
- Husted questioned how eliminating cooperative forestry funding would affect joint management partnerships between the USFS and adjacent state forests and parks.
- Baldwin warned that eliminating state and tribal forestry programs would strain local fire departments and weaken federal-state wildfire coordination.

Recreation and Deferred Maintenance:

- Merkley highlighted reports warning that hiring freezes and staffing reductions are weakening the USFS' ability to maintain trails and recreation infrastructure.
- Merkley pointed to delayed restoration work along the Pacific Crest Trail following staffing reductions as evidence of existing maintenance challenges.
- Murkowski emphasized that the USFS faces roughly \$3 billion in deferred maintenance liabilities.

Forest Health and Past Management:

- Collins highlighted the importance of rapid deployment of funding to combat spruce budworm infestations in Maine's forests.
- She contrasted successful U.S. forest management efforts with significant forest damage observed across the Canadian border where spraying was not conducted as effectively.

Permitting on Forest Service Lands:

- Sen. **John Hoeven** (R-ND) emphasized the need to streamline energy permitting on USFS lands, particularly where surface management responsibilities fall under the USFS.
- Hoeven argued that overlapping jurisdiction between the USFS and Bureau of Land Management creates unnecessary delays and complicates approvals for energy production and mineral development projects.