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**Committee:** Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee  
**Event:** [Full Committee Hearing to Examine the President's Budget Request for the United States Forest Service for Fiscal Year 2027](#)  
**Date:** May 13, 2026

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**Executive Summary:** On May 13, 2026, the Senate Energy & Natural Resource Committee held a hearing to discuss President **Donald Trump's** Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) budget request for the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). Republicans and Democrats sharply diverged on the budget request and the agency's recent reorganization while also agreeing on the need to improve wildfire management.

**Member Toplines:**

**Chairman Mike Lee (R-UT)<sup>1</sup>:** Lee strongly praised the decision to relocate the USFS headquarters to Salt Lake City, arguing it moves decisionmaking closer to the communities actually impacted by forest policy. He blamed "preservation for its own sake" philosophies for overgrown forests, mounting maintenance backlogs, and catastrophic wildfires. Lee praised USFS for increasing timber targets, expanding state partnerships, reviewing the 2001 Roadless Rule, and returning to active management practices like thinning and grazing.

**Ranking Member Martin Heinrich (D-NM):** Heinrich condemned the FY27 budget proposal as "disappointing and irresponsible." He firmly opposed moving the wildland fire program out of USFS, arguing that fire management and land management must be conducted holistically. Heinrich said the reorganization and budget cuts together will undermine wildfire preparation and response.

**Witness Toplines:**

**Tom Schultz, Chief, USFS, U.S. Department of Agriculture:** Schultz stated that his focus is a "return to fundamentals." He announced the agency has hired ~10,500 firefighters, an 11 percent increase from last year. Schultz praised the President's budget request for emphasizing energy and critical mineral development. He defended shifting USFS wildland firefighting to the Department of the Interior (DOI)'s new Wildland Fire Service to allow the USFS to focus on its core land and resource management responsibilities.

**Major Takeaways:**

Wildfire Management & Mitigation

- Chairman Lee asked Schultz to discuss USFS's reorganization. Schultz responded the reorganization will remove the policymaking function of regional offices and move USFS to a state-based model.
  - He added that the reorganization will not adversely impact on wildfire operations this season. Schultz also spoke on the importance of active management to reduce wildfire risk.

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<sup>1</sup> Chairman Lee's opening statement was not available at the time of this memo's distribution.

- Sen. **John Barrasso** (R-WY) advocated for his RANCH Act ([S. 211](#)) which would expedite ranchers' access to vacant grazing allotments during extreme wildfires and droughts. Schultz supported this, noting the USFS successfully moved impacted cattle to vacant allotments following the Monroe Mountain Fire in Utah.
  - Barrasso also asked how USFS is engaging state, local, and private partners to combat wildfires. Schultz highlighted cost-share agreements and routine outreach to states.
- Sen. **Ron Wyden** (D-OR) criticized the Trump administration for setting up Western states to fail amid prolonged drought. He asked Schultz how USFS is preparing now for the upcoming fire season. Schultz pointed to prescribed burns as one of the most effective tools and discussed the agency's increased hiring of firefighters and other related personnel.
  - Wyden also warned that the bipartisan program to prevent "fire borrowing" is soon to expire. Schultz said the program saved the agency \$12 billion that previously would have been diverted from non-fire programs to fund fire suppression.
  - Sen. **Steve Daines** (R-MT) also warned that prolonged Western drought could increase the severity of wildfire season.
- Sens. **Catherine Cortez Masto** (D-NV) and **Alex Padilla** (D-CA) questioned the proposal to move USFS wildland fire management activities to DOI. Schultz noted that a third-party study is being commissioned via an upcoming Request for Proposals to evaluate the specifics of unifying various DOI firefighting capabilities under one office, the new Wildland Fire Service.
  - Padilla specifically highlighted the elimination of state and volunteer fire assistance programs.
- Cortez Masto also discussed retention of firefighters, pointing to pay and housing issues. Schultz said addressing those issues is a priority for USFS and he would welcome additional congressional action to help.
- Daines stressed the importance of a legislative fix, such as the Fix Our Forests Act ([S. 1462](#)) for the Cottonwood decision to improve wildfire mitigation and forest restoration.
- Sen. **Maria Cantwell** (D-WA) raised alarms that \$49 million in critical funding, including community wildfire defense grants, is being withheld from her state due to new federal grant terms and conditions. Schultz said USFS is actively working with states to resolve grant disputes but that those issues should not impact firefighting capacity.
- Sen. **Ruben Gallego** (D-AZ) warned that repeal of the Roadless Rule will raise wildfire risk by increasing human activity, which is the primary cause of wildfire ignitions. He asked if USFS is considering this in its evaluation of the repeal. Heinrich echoed those concerns. Schultz stressed that the rule has not yet been repealed and that USFS is still considering alternatives.

### Land Use

- Ranking Member Heinrich criticized the cancellation of the Upper Pecos Watershed's withdrawal application for going against the wishes of a community that has previously experienced negative impacts from mining operations. Schultz said there were no current plans for mining operations in that area but that USFS wants to make sure lands are available for multiple use.