

STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS, SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND
RELATED AGENCIES

REGARDING:
PRESIDENT'S FISCAL YEAR 2027 PROPOSED BUDGET
FOR THE USDA FOREST SERVICE
APRIL 30, 2026

Chair Murkowski, Ranking Member Merkley, and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me here today to testify on the President's fiscal year (FY) 2027 Budget request for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service.

The FY 2027 President's Budget for the USDA Forest Service requests \$2.1 billion in discretionary appropriations for critical investments in base programs. This Budget is designed to maximize efficiency and strategically align resources around the highest priorities for our National Forest System lands. To achieve this, the Budget proposes streamlining and realigning certain programs to better allocate federal resources and address the federal deficit while delivering on our core mission to sustain the health and productivity of our nation's forests and grasslands. These critical changes will put the agency on a fiscally sustainable path while ensuring our National Forests and Grasslands provide the goods and services expected by the American people. Investments made by the agency will support local economies through providing jobs and promoting timber production, energy and critical minerals development, livestock grazing, and making outdoor recreation available and accessible.

Production of wood products from Federal lands is vital for the country's well-being. Executive Order (E.O.) 14225, *Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production*, and P.L. 119-21, *Working Families Tax Cut Act*, emphasize the importance of timber production and active forest management to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire and protect American lives and communities. The FY 2027 Budget is centered around advancing these priorities to include an increase of \$136 million in the forest products program.

The FY 2027 Budget continues to support the Forest Service Minerals and Geology Management program, ensuring domestic production of critical minerals and contributing to a stable supply of energy for current and future generations. The Forest Service works together with the Department of the Interior's (DOI) Bureau of Land Management to strategically manage leasable minerals on National Forest System lands.

Livestock grazing on federal lands is crucial for ranchers across the United States, especially in the West. This practice has been part of land management for generations, providing food for the American public, preserving working landscapes, conserving natural resources for the communities that depend on them. The FY 2027 Budget supports the USDA-DOI Grazing Action Plan which positions grazing as a central element of federal land management. The plan

expands access, reduces barriers, modernizes processes, and elevates producer voices. The FY 2027 Budget proposes to increase the amount retained by the Agency from ranchers and permittees' grazing fees to provide a direct reinvestment on the National Forest System lands they steward, ensuring that livestock grazing continues to meet the Forest Service's multiple-use mission. Additionally, it supports the economic and natural value of these lands through an interagency Rangeland Health Initiative to harness competition and drive coordinated solutions to rangeland health challenges.

The FY 2027 Budget supports a focus on high-use recreation sites and work with communities and public-private partnerships to sustain and grow efficient, collaborative approaches to offering recreation opportunities on National Forest System (NFS) lands. Spending from recreational visitors to NFS lands supports over 155,100 jobs in local forest communities and contributes over \$15.8 billion to the Nation's Gross Domestic Product. Additionally, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) projects included in the 2027 Budget place a strong emphasis on increasing recreational access to existing public lands creating the connectivity that is critical for hunting, fishing, and other outfitter and guide businesses.

The FY 2027 Budget also reforms the Federal approach to Wildland Fire Management by unifying Federal wildland fire responsibilities, including those within the Forest Service, into a single U.S. Wildland Fire Service at the DOI. Unification will improve efficiency, increase effectiveness, and streamline coordination in Federal wildland fire response. The U.S. Wildland Fire Service will combine logistical and support functions such as dispatching, training, information technology, reporting, financial management, and contracting. The combined fire organization will provide initial attack, large fire response, and facilitate hazardous fuels mitigation operations for all federal land management agencies. The unified organization will enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the Federal wildfire response capacity and will allow the Forest Service to focus on its core mission of delivering critical outputs and services from NFS lands.

The President's FY 2027 Budget Request for Specific Priorities

The following investments advance Administration priorities:

- **Forest Service Operations:** The requested amount reflects the ongoing optimization and streamlining of administrative and general management support staff as well as the Forest Service's efforts to terminate leases and dispose of facilities to right-size the Forest Service facility footprint for FY 2027. DOI has requested \$145 million in former Forest Service Operations funding to meet business support requirements associated with the unified U.S. Wildland Fire Service within DOI.
- **Forest and Rangeland Research:** The account is eliminated, except for Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) which was moved to the National Forest System account and the Joint Fire Science program, which has been requested by DOI as part of the U.S. Wildland Fire Service. The shift of the FIA program will ensure that it aligns with the practical needs of forest management for timber production, continuing to sustain its longstanding census of forest resources and conditions to the National Forest System.

The remaining account elimination supports fiscal responsibility and a return to the Forest Service's core mission.

- **State, Private, and Tribal Forestry:** The FY 2027 Budget eliminates this account's discretionary funding to ensure fiscal responsibility with American taxpayer dollars and to better balance the appropriate roles of federal and state governments. To restore federalism, we encourage States to increase their authority to fund the management of State and privately-owned forests, community preparedness, and public risk mitigation activities. The mandatory LWCF Forest Legacy program will continue.
- **National Forest System:** The FY 2027 Budget proposes \$1.42 billion to fund the National Forest System focusing support on frontline operations, which are essential for meeting high-priority Administration objectives. The Forest Service will prioritize activities related to timber sales, critical minerals permitting, grazing allotment management, and law enforcement. This prioritization will ensure public safety on National Forest System (NFS) lands, the management and restoration of NFS lands through timber production and range improvement activities critical for rural economic development and increased domestic production of critical minerals to support national defense and electrification needs. Funding previously within the NFS account for hazardous fuels mitigation has been requested by DOI in support of the U.S. Wildland Fire Service to conduct both mechanical and prescribed fire operations on NFS lands.
- **Capital Improvement and Maintenance:** The FY 2027 Budget reflects the need to right-size Forest Service facilities (both administrative and recreation) and trails. The 2027 Budget also ensures essential support for the transportation infrastructure critical for timber production from National Forest System lands. Funding is provided through both the discretionary request and retainment of mandatory receipts made available to the Roads and Trails Fund for road maintenance and reconstruction.
- **Wildland Fire Management:** The FY 2027 Budget request proposes a landmark restructuring in Federal wildland fire to ensure an efficient and effective unified response apparatus managed by the DOI for all Federal lands, shifting the Forest Service Wildland Fire Management appropriations to DOI as part of the program's merging with the U.S. Wildland Fire Service. This DOI bureau will integrate the Forest Service Wildland Fire Management response program to include over 11,000 firefighters and approximately 300 additional business and support personnel.

The FY 2027 Budget requests reauthorization of the seminal Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) (P.L. 116-152) Legacy Restoration Fund for another five years. The Legacy Restoration Fund has been critical to the Forest Service's ability to repair and upgrade vital infrastructure and facilities in the national forests and grasslands.

The FY 2027 Budget request underscores the Forest Service's commitment to focusing on investments that prioritize the products and experiences that the American public expect from their national forests. We are getting back to the basics of responsibly managing our national forests for their intended purposes and ensuring maximum value for the American taxpayer.

We look forward to working with this Committee to fulfill the President's economic and land management goals for the long-term benefit of the Nation's forests and grasslands, and for all Americans. I will be glad to answer your questions.