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Date:

THE HONORABLE RON WYDEN
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate
221 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Wyden,

Thank you for your August 6, 2025, letter regarding my testimony to the United States Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources on July 10, 2025. I appreciate your advocacy for wildfire preparedness and public safety.

In your letter, you requested additional information regarding the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Forest Service employees with Incident Qualification Cards who separated from the Agency through the Deferred Resignation Program (DRP) but have rejoined to support wildfire response this season. As I stated at the hearing, 1,400 employees with these qualifications have left the Agency. Over the past five years, approximately 350 of those individuals have been activated to support fire incidents—meaning about 25 percent of red-carded employees who took the DRP supported wildfire response during that period. As of September 2, 2025, 130 red-carded employees who voluntarily separated through the DRP have opted to return for the current fire season, with 90 of them already mobilized to fire assignments.

You also asked for additional information regarding hazardous fuels reduction treatments on National Forest System lands. To date, the Agency has treated approximately 2.2 million acres nationally. Operational challenges have disproportionality impacted the ability to implement prescribed fire across the country. Additionally, active fires that began in California in January—followed by significant fire activity in the Southeast and the upper Midwest—combined with extremely dry conditions, have limited our ability to conduct prescribed burns in many parts of the country. Early and sustained support to Canada through the spring and early summer further reduced available resources to conduct prescribed fire.

The continued high level of fire activity and extreme conditions in the West are requiring significant resources and personnel, which has constrained our capacity to treat additional acres. Several Forest Service regions in western states, however, have already surpassed their annual targets in excess of 100 percent. The Northern, Intermountain, and Pacific Regions, covering nine western states, including Washington State, have already completed over 985 thousand acres. The Pacific Northwest Region, in particular, has accomplished more than their target by treating over 400,000 acres so far this fiscal year. We will report our final number of acres treated after our field units have reported their accomplishments after the end of the fiscal year.



In relation to the President's Executive Order signed on June 12, 2025, I want to emphasize that no structural or operational changes to our firefighters will occur this year. Our firefighters must remain focused on the mission at hand, and the Forest Service will not compromise its obligation to respond to wildfire.

Again, thank you for your advocacy. If you have additional questions, please contact Jacob Donnay, Forest Service Director of Legislative Affairs, at (571) 414-7077 or jacob.donnay@usda.gov. Alternatively, your staff can contact USDA's Office of Congressional Relations at (202) 720-7095 or ocr@usda.gov.

Sincerely,

Thomas M. Schultz, Jr.
Chief