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July, 14, 2025

Chief Tom Schultz
United States Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-0003

Dear Chief Schultz,

I am deeply concerned regarding the misleading and apparently inaccurate statements that you made during your testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources last week on July 10. I am writing now to provide you with an opportunity to clarify your answers in writing regarding the Forest Service's current preparedness and resources as Oregon and a significant portion of the West enter the throes of what is forecast to be an especially difficult fire season.

Oregonians are understandably seeking to understand the extent to which the actions of the Trump administration have hurt the agency's ability to keep them safe. Last year, wildfires burned roughly 2 million acres in Oregon and, despite a significant commitment of firefighting resources at all levels of government, qualified wildland firefighting personnel were still in short supply. That record-setting year should have made clear the need to increase federal resources available to battle these infernos. Unfortunately, the Trump administration has apparently not only failed to increase the overall resources available, it has failed to maintain the inadequate resources it previously had. This is recklessly irresponsible and could cost lives and livelihoods.

When pressed during the hearing on the loss of resources for wildfire operations, first by me and subsequently by other members of the committee, you cherry picked numbers that suggest that the agency is just below the capacity it had in 2024. Those numbers only considered a subset of the employees who are critical to wildland fire suppression operations. Only after continuing to be pressed by members of the committee did you acknowledge the loss of 1,400 employees with an Incident Qualification Card, yet you seemed unwilling to admit the extent of their critical importance to overall preparedness. These employees were qualified to provide much needed auxiliary fire fighting support. It is clear that the Forest Service now internally recognizes their importance given the agency's attempts to reactivate them. Unfortunately, you could not provide us with any estimate of the number that have rejoined the agency after this administration used precious resources to incentivize them to leave. This overall lack of transparency through obfuscation and omission inhibits the Senate's responsibility and congressional authority to conduct oversight of federal agencies, and protect our constituents.

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Your misleading testimony didn't end there. Hazardous fuels treatments play a critical role in reducing fire severity and risk to nearby communities so it is important that the committee understands the pace and scale of these risk mitigation efforts. The most recent number shared by senior officials within the Department of Agriculture showed that only 1.7 million acres of hazardous fuels reduction treatment have occurred so far this fiscal year, less than half of the 4.29 million acres treated during the last year of the Biden administration in Fiscal Year 2024. This sharp decline is no doubt a direct result of the chaos that Trump's agenda has created within the federal land management agencies. Your own testimony about the number of acres treated directly contradicts the numbers provided to the committee by other Trump administration officials. I ask that you explain the discrepancy between your testimony and the numbers that this administration has provided by August 1, 2025 so that Congress has a clear understanding of the current scope of the problem.

I also expressed concern during the hearing about the proposed reorganization of the federal wildland firefighting apparatus in the midst of a difficult fire season pursuant to Trump's executive order without explicit congressional authorization. You assured me that no reorganization would occur this season and I now ask that you confirm that in writing.

Let me be clear: it will be the height of folly to move federal lands firefighting efforts away from the agencies that best know their lands. In addition, it would be reckless and illegal to move forward with such a reorganization prior to necessary congressional approval and oversight, including dedicated hearings in all relevant committees of jurisdiction. Please also confirm in writing by August 1, 2025 that the agency intends to make its detailed plan available to Congress with sufficient time for such oversight to occur and will secure congressional authorization prior implementing any changes.

In sum, I recognize that the decisions that led to these concerns regarding your agency's ability to effectively protect communities and the resources it is tasked with managing were not yours alone. Yet, you have an obligation to be honest and transparent with Congress about how your actions will affect the safety of the American people. I hope you will take this responsibility seriously and respond by August 1, 2025 with a detailed, accurate and holistic picture of the Forest Service's wildfire mitigation and preparedness capacity, as well as the additional information that I've requested.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator

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