

Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

United States Forest Service FY27 Budget Hearing

May 13, 2026

Witness: Tom Schultz, Chief of the United States Forest Service

Highlights:

The hearing highlighted strong bipartisan concern over the Forest Service's FY27 budget proposal, particularly the elimination of key programs and major restructuring of wildfire and land management functions. While agency leadership emphasized partnerships with Tribes, the proposed elimination of Tribal forestry funding raised significant concerns about reduced federal support for Tribal land management and increased burden on Tribal governments.

Key points:

- Rhetoric against resources
 - Chief Schultz emphasized that Tribes are essential partners in land management and bring local knowledge.
 - However, the FY27 Budget proposes eliminating the "State, Private, and Tribal Forestry" account entirely.
 - This work supports non-federal lands, including Tribally managed forests and cross-boundary work.
- Impacts of cuts to Tribal Forest management funds
 - Senator Martin Heinrich (D-NM) highlighted that these programs are "Vital for supporting... federal, state, private, and Tribal stewards. Eliminating them would undermine non-federal forest management, including Tribal lands."
 - Senator Angus King (I-ME) said that the cuts would shift responsibility onto the states and Tribes without funding support.
- Shift towards shared management without clear structure
 - Chief Schultz highlighted expanded collaborative tools such as new authorities under the EXPLORE Act that allow recreation and land management to be co-managed with states, Tribes, and counties.
 - There is potential for greater co-management opportunities, but there is no clear funding mechanism, unclear consultation or authority structure, and risk that Tribes are expected to take on more responsibilities without resources.
- Broader reorganization could affect Tribal coordination

- Key structural changes discussed:
 - Wildfire program shifted to Department of Interior
 - Reduction in Forest Service workforce and research capacity
 - Centralization of policymaking in Washington
 - Increased reliance on partners
- Potential impacts include:
 - Disruption of existing federal-Tribal coordination in wildfire and fuels work
 - Reduced technical assistance and research support
 - Greater fragmentation between land management and fire response systems.