

House Agriculture Committee

US Forest Service- Chief Tom Schultz

July 22, 2026

Highlights:

The hearing focused on Forest Service oversight amid a severe 2026 wildfire season, with Chief Tom Schultz highlighting increased firefighter staffing, hazardous fuels reductions, expanded timber harvests, and partnerships with states and Tribes. Members debated USDA's Forest Service reorganization, with supporters arguing it will improve local decision-making and efficiency through a new state-based structure, while critics warned it could reduce staffing, weaken research capacity, and undermine wildfire preparedness.

Key Points:

- **USDA Reorganization**
 - USFS is moving headquarters to Salt Lake City, UT.
 - The department is transitioning from 9 regional offices to a state-based model with 15 state directors. They will be establishing operational service centers, consolidating research leadership, and reducing leased office space and facility costs.
 - Chief Schultz argued that the reorg will move decision-making closer to local communities and improve coordination with states, counties, and Tribes.
 - Staffing- Schultz claimed that the agency does not expect significant employee losses from relocation and fewer than 500 employees are expected to face relocation.
 - Criticisms-
 - Members cited a 16% loss of Forest Service staff since 2024, the potential loss of institutional knowledge, uncertainty surrounding relocations, closure of evaluation of research facilities, and concerns that wildfire preparedness is being undermined.
 - Representative Angie Craig challenged whether USDA has legal authority to proceed without congressional approval. Chief Schultz responded that the USDA's Office of General Counsel advised the department that Congressional notification is required, but approval is not.
- **Tribal references**
 - Chief Schultz highlighted shared Stewardship agreements with “four Tribal Nations.”

- Research has shown that there is only two Tribes that have entered into stewardship agreements- the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians and the Great Sioux Nation.
 - Tribal governments were repeatedly referenced as important partners in wildfire and forest management.
 - Representative Andrea Salina (D-OR) noted that Tribal representatives were among those submitting negative feedback or opposition to the USDA reorganization plans. Schultz argued that the new state-based organizational model would improve coordination with Tribes.
- Wildfire Preparedness
- Hazardous Fuels Reduction