

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 6, 2026

The Honorable Tom Schultz
Chief
U.S. Forest Service
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Chief Schultz:

We write to request a detailed breakdown of all criteria and factors driving the decision to potentially close the 57 U.S. Forest Service Research and Development Facilities announced on March 31, 2026. Spanning 31 states, these facilities perform critical, specialized research that cannot be easily replicated or relocated – nor can it be terminated without jeopardizing long-term environmental and economic priorities.

Despite repeated inquiries from both the House and Senate, the U.S. Forest Service has failed to provide a transparent, detailed accounting of the analytical framework used to evaluate these facilities. Instead, official responses rely on broad assurances- stating only that the agency is assessing ‘operating costs, amount of space, utilization rate, number of employees’ and proximate facilities – without revealing the actual methodology or criteria driving these determinations.

The establishment of many of these facilities took decades of thoughtful work by numerous experts and stakeholders. They were designed to serve a specific purpose and fill a critical gap in forestry needs within their geographic region. For example, the Institute of Pacific Islands Forestry facility in Hawaii took roughly 60 years to be realized and serves the islanded forestry needs of the entire Pacific Region. The next closest U.S. Forest Service-owned office space is in California. Similarly, the Pacific Wildland Fire Sciences Laboratory in Seattle and the Forestry Sciences Laboratory in Wenatchee conduct crucial wildfire research and forecasting for the Pacific Northwest region. Closing both of those facilities in Washington State will leave numerous communities throughout that entire region vulnerable to increasing wildfire threats. In fact, according to reporting, 20 of the 57 facilities being considered for closure conduct important wildfire prevention research.

Since announcing the list of facilities being evaluated for possible closure in March, very little detail or analysis has been provided to Congress or the public on the factors being considered for each facility. We are very concerned that missing from the list of considerations are factors such as current benefits of research services provided to surrounding communities, what research services would be lost with facility closures, estimate of travel expenses resulting from facility

closures, estimate on the number of staff unwilling or unable to relocate or travel an additional distance as a result of closing a facility, the replacement costs of each facility, etc.

Decisions as significant as closing 57 facilities across 31 states must include consultation with local communities and governments. To the best of our knowledge, these consultations have not occurred. Indeed, community outcry has been so great that the Forest Service was forced to walk back their initial March 31 announcement that these facilities would close and instead announced that these facilities are being analyzed for closure.

To help us and impacted communities all across the nation better understand what factors you are utilizing to determine whether to close these facilities, please avail your staff for a briefing on, or provide in writing, the complete list of criteria that you are using for each of the 57 facilities, a list of local stakeholders that you are consulting with on each of these determinations, and a timeline for which you expect to make a determination for each facility no later than August 19, 2026.

Sincerely,



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



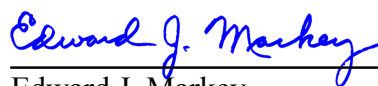
Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



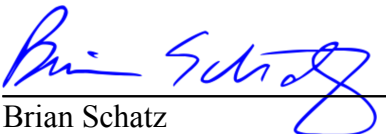
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

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Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator

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Angela D. Alsobrooks
United States Senator

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Brian Schatz
United States Senator

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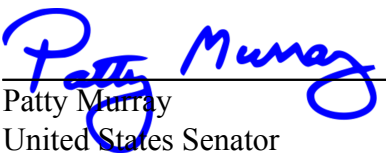
Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator

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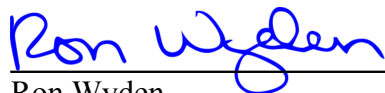
Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator

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Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

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Patty Murray
United States Senator

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Ron Wyden
United States Senator

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Martin Heinrich
United States Senator