

May 15, 2026

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

Dear Chief Schultz:

During Wednesday's Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee hearing, you made assurances before the committee that you would provide me with a copy of the Hawaii National Forest Study report. I still do not have a copy. Your failure to provide Congress the report, as required by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (P.L. 117-328), Division DD Title II, Section 202, is unacceptable.

This law requires the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Forest Service to report on the results of a 3-year study to determine the suitability and feasibility of establishing a unit of the National Forest System in Hawaii. This study was to be comprised of eight separate components, which include the following:

1. An analysis of unique vegetation types in Hawaii that should be targeted for inclusion in a National Forest System unit;
2. A determination on the ability of the Forest Service to improve and protect forest areas and water flows in Hawaii;
3. A determination on whether a National Forest System unit would expand, enhance, or duplicate resource protection and visitor-use opportunities;
4. The economics of administering parcels under consideration for becoming part of the National Forest System;
5. The willingness of landowners to sell or transfer land to the Forest Service;
6. The suitability of the land to serve as a research natural area or experimental forest;
7. Estimates of the cost of federal acquisition, development, operation, and maintenance needed to establish a unit of the National Forest System; and
8. A list of alternatives for the conservation, protection, and use of area within Hawaii by the Federal Government, State or local government entities, or private and nonprofit organizations.

Instead of providing Congress with a report containing detailed results and analyses covering the aforementioned areas, as required by law, USDA Secretary Rollins transmitted a letter to Congress last week with the recommendation that “the U.S. Department of Agriculture does not recommend establishing a unit of the National Forest System in the study area. The Trump Administration recognizes that those closest to lands and the people who use them - State and local governments that understand and respect the needs and desires of their communities - are in the best position to manage lands to meet those needs.”

When I questioned you about the report before the Committee, you said that you had the report ready and you were willing to provide it on the spot. Yet I have been told by your staff that they are unable to transmit the report as it is currently held up in clearance. This is profoundly unacceptable and is a disturbing example of this administration’s disrespect for Congress and the law.

Additionally, during our exchange on the Forest Service’s evaluation to close the Institute of Pacific Islands Forestry (IPIF), I asked you to provide details on the \$17 million deferred maintenance needs that your Associate Chief, Chris French, had quoted to my staff six weeks ago. My staff received information late yesterday afternoon clarifying that Mr. French had the wrong information and the \$17 million figure was the replacement cost for IPIF, not the deferred maintenance cost. In other words, it would cost the Forest Service \$17 million to purchase a similar facility, which would be a valid argument for keeping IPIF open.

During Mr. French’s briefing with my staff, he reiterated that evaluating IPIF for closure was strictly a business decision. Based on the information that the Forest Service has provided me and my staff to date, the costs incurred by IPIF are as follows:

- A \$1 lease that ends on April 30, 2067.
- Annual utility costs of approximately \$170,000.
- Deferred maintenance totaling \$2.85 million.

When confirming these expenses with your staff, we were told that these costs “will be factored in among other factors as a decision is being made.” This is concerning, as Mr. French explicitly stated that whether to close IPIF would be strictly a business decision. It now seems like the decision will be political, if not solely based on facility costs. As such, please provide a list of factors, other than these costs, that will inform the decision on whether to close IPIF.

You told me during the hearing that you fight for the Forest Service every day. Your actions tell a very different story. Your dismissive attitude towards Congress, the law, and the impact that closing IPIF would have on our Forest Service employees and forests throughout the Pacific region is unacceptable. So that I understand your decisions, provide me the National Forest Study Report and complete analysis on IPIF immediately.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mazie K. Hirono". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator