

# Idaho Forest Service employees told their positions may be affected by federal agency restructure

A local federal employee union is concerned about impact to employees and forest health amid the uncertainty

BY: LAURA GUIDO - APRIL 22, 2026 4:25 AM



📍 The Salmon-Challis National Forest covers over 4.3 million acres in east-central Idaho. Included within the boundaries of the forest is 2.3 million acres of the Frank Church- River of No Return Wilderness Area, the largest contiguous wilderness area in the continental United States. (Photo courtesy of the Salmon-Challis National Forest)

The recently announced [major restructure](#) of the U.S. Forest Service may disrupt a number of forestry positions in Idaho. But the details as to how those positions will be affected and what work will continue or be eliminated under the plan remain unclear.

Anna Webb, an entomologist and federal employee union representative based in Boise, received a notice about two weeks ago that her position in the agency would be affected. The letter said affected employees may have to move, find another position within the federal agency, or resign.

There was no expected timeline to the changes.

“It makes things difficult to plan,” Webb said, speaking to the Idaho Capital Sun in her capacity as a union representative. “It causes unprecedented amounts of stress.”

Leaders of the federal employee union that represents Forest Service employees for the Boise, Payette, Salmon-Challis and Sawtooth national forests are concerned about the

disruption to local employees as well as the potential long-term consequences to forest health.

Their positions are very important to our overall forest health and fire resiliency, and if they go away ... we're not sure where that expertise will come from right now," Bradley Laplante, an Idaho-based Forest Service employee and vice president of a local arm of the National Federation of Federal Employees, or NFFE said on behalf of the union.

Although Idaho's forests are overseen by two out-of-state regional offices, many regional and some national positions are based in Idaho — all of these may be affected by the proposed restructure.

Laplante said 60 union-represented employees in Idaho have recently received the same notice that their position in the agency will be affected, and that they may either have to find a new position within the Forest Service or leave. He said there's an estimated total of more than 100 employees in the area who might be affected by the changes.

Webb's position has been a critical resource in Idaho's national forests, Laplante said.

Webb works in the Forest Service's [State and Private Forestry](#) organization, which includes resources to help identify diseases or pest infestations across the intermountain region that are killing off trees, and assist local private and public foresters treat the problem, according to the agency's website. The federal program reported spending more than [\\$13 million in Idaho](#) on projects related to fire assistance, forest health, restoration and more.

Forests with too many dead trees pose a greater wildfire risk, Laplante said. He said the union is concerned about the lack of clarity as to whether work done by regional office employees, such as insect infestation mitigation, will continue.

Additionally, if these positions move out of state, union leaders worry the work they do on-the-ground in Idaho forests will be more difficult to accomplish.

### **What is the Forest Service reorganization, and why is it happening?**

The proposed restructure would move much of the agency's leaders from Washington D.C. to Salt Lake City, close and consolidate a number of research facilities, and open new, smaller state-based offices.

Forest Service Chief Tom Schultz, an Idahoan, told a [U.S. House budget subcommittee](#) last week that the reorganization is intended to balance the budget and address a shortfall while also "driving decision making down to the most appropriate level."

"The Forest Service says two things, we're stewards of the land," Schultz said. "We're supposed to be serving the public, and we think this will better serve the people on the ground where they live and work."

Idaho Republican U.S. Rep. Mike Simpson, who serves as chairman of the House Appropriations subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies, asked

Schultz if he believed he had the authority to do the reorganization without approval from Congress. Simpson also said he supported the move.

Schultz said that his agency and head of the United States Department of Agriculture — which oversees the Forest Service — consulted with the department's legal office and determined that USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins has the authority.

The ranking Democrat on the subcommittee, Maine U.S. Rep. Chellie Pingree said she disagreed with the interpretation of the secretary's role in executing the reorganization without federal lawmakers.

"I don't believe you have all this authority," she told Schultz.

Pingree expressed frustration that the federal budget writers hadn't seen an organization chart to see what the impact of the reorganization would be and how the money would be spent on it.

Schultz said work on the organizational charts was still being done.

### **President's proposed budget would make more changes, cuts to Forest Service**

Schultz told congressional lawmakers on the committee that although research centers will close under the reorganization, the plan itself does not call for the reduction of any scientists. However, President Donald Trump's [proposed budget](#) would eliminate funding for all Forest Service research and development, he said. That budget would need to be approved by Congress to be enacted.

"The president's budget is looking to shift research from where it is today to more of a model that would be done either in the private sector or with universities," Schultz told the subcommittee.

The president's proposal would also eliminate funding for State and Private Forestry — the umbrella under which Webb and other affected Idaho employees work. The branch of the USDA assists state, local, private and tribal authorities through training, technical assistance and funding.

Schultz in the hearing last Thursday said states such as Idaho have put more investment into helping manage federal lands in recent years, and it would be expected for those investments to continue.

"That's what I think this budget is proposing, is that we will continue to work with states," Schultz said. "We will continue to have a liaison role through state directors, but that ultimately, we would expect more of the funding for those state and private programs to shift from the federal government to the states themselves."

John Robison, public lands and wildlife director at the Idaho Conservation League, noted in an email to the Sun that the president made similar budget proposals last year.

"Congress has previously rejected or modified the President's budget and restored funding for natural resource agencies," Robison wrote. "Complying with the President's zeroed-out budget in advance of Congress having a say is a sure-fire way to further dismantle our public lands agencies."

## **Uncertainty around reorganization may impede forest management, critics say**

The reorganization has generated concern that the disruption will cause more employees to get lost and hamper work to manage forest lands.

Bill Avey, chairman of the National Association of Forest Services Retirees, told the Idaho Capital Sun in an interview for a previous story, that the agency must recognize the losses the Forest Service is already dealing with after mass layoffs last year, in an effort spearheaded by the now-defunct Department of Government Efficiency.

"Not only did they lose employees, they lost a lot of their most highly skilled, most highly knowledgeable employees as well," Avey said.

"... They need to acknowledge the losses they've had and the impacts that those losses and things like this reorganization have on productivity, because the current employees that they have are truly working their butts off, and they're going to lose more people if they keep putting more pressure on them to do more and more work that's just not capable of being done with fewer people."

Both Idaho-based federal union representatives said that Forest Service workers tend to get into the job because of their love for public lands.

Laplante said he grew up in Idaho, went to the University of Idaho and after living and working in Stanley for some time, joined the Forest Service in his 30s.

"I got to really love the land and the Idaho public land, so that motivated me to actually go work for the Forest Service and do my best to make sure that our forests remain healthy," he said. "... a lot of us are in it just for those purposes. We really love the Forest Service, we really love our jobs and we love our public lands."