

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 13, 2019

Chief Vicki Christiansen
United States Forest Service
United States Department of Agriculture
Sidney R. Yates Federal Building
201 14th Street SW
Washington, DC 20227

Dear Chief Christiansen:

We write regarding the recent government shutdown and the impact it had on the United States Forest Service, specifically the Service's hazardous fuels work and other wildfire and forest health efforts.

As you know, Western states have been dealing with increasingly severe wildfires. For weeks at a time during the last several summers, families in Oregon have struggled to breathe and businesses have struggled to continue outdoor operations due to hazardous air-quality caused by wildfire-induced smoke. Last year, the Camp Fire in California killed 86 people, destroyed nearly 14,000 homes, and burned 153,000 acres, making it the deadliest and most destructive fire in California history.

While climate change is a significant driver of these severe wildfires, high fuel loads also contribute to their deadliness. Western states count heavily on reducing hazardous fuels to lessen the threat of wildfires to their communities. As the largest landowner in many Western states, the federal government has a duty to ensure that this essential forest work gets done.

Congress has repeatedly increased appropriations for hazardous fuels work, funding hazardous fuels at \$430 million for Fiscal Year 2018, which is used for critical fire preparedness activities and fuels treatments like prescribed burns and forest thinning. Prescribed burns, in particular, are weather-dependent and have a narrow window of opportunity for fuels treatment, relying on cool, damp weather conditions that occur in winter months. We have seen reports that the government shutdown curtailed the ability of the Forest Service to conduct fire prevention and fuels treatment activities.

While certain activities continued during the shutdown, given the short time window available to prepare communities for the next year of wildfires, we respectfully request that you respond to the following questions within 30 days:

1. Which previously planned, if any, hazardous fuels treatments was the Forest Service unable to conduct during the government shutdown?
2. Now that the shutdown has concluded, how will the Forest Service ensure necessary hazardous fuels treatments in priority areas are performed quickly and efficiently before the upcoming fire season?
3. What prescribed fire and pile-burning projects came into prescription during the shutdown that you could not accomplish? What are your plans and timelines for completing these activities?

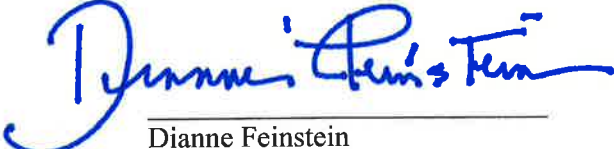
4. How did you use funding from Knutson-Vandenberg, brush disposal, other trust accounts, and prior year appropriations to continue forest management activities? What did you prioritize and why?
5. What steps are you taking to ensure that our national forests can continue to collaborate with community partners to plan priority projects during the compressed timeline of FY 2019?
6. Given that the shutdown happened during a time of the year typically devoted to wildland firefighting hiring and training, what are you doing to ensure there is an adequate number of trained firefighting personnel for the upcoming year?
 - a. In addition, please describe the medium- to long-term impacts on fire readiness of canceled trainings for the federal fire organizations and the potential impacts this could have on state and local fire operations that assist in fighting fires on federal lands.
7. The Forest Service and its university partners are engaged in vital fire research to provide new scientific knowledge and key decision support tools to fire and fuels management. What delays do you anticipate in the deployment of new tools and information caused by the shutdown, and how do you plan to address these impacts?
8. Given the possibility of another shutdown in the near future, what is the Forest Service doing to prepare for another lapse in appropriations, and how will the agency mitigate a further delay in critical projects and training?
9. Many tribal governments and their citizens rely on timber harvesting and fire mitigation work for jobs and government revenue. Has the Forest Service determined the economic impact of the shutdown on tribal forestry activities, and has it identified ways in which to mitigate future economic impacts on tribes due to any future lapse in funding?

We recognize that your agency has a large work burden in light of the shutdown. However, we request that you respond to these questions within 30 days due to the importance of this issue to communities across the country. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to working with you to protect communities from wildfire and to improving the health of our nation's forests.

Sincerely,




Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



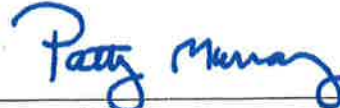
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