

Summary of Seismic Changes to National Forest Management Under the Trump Administration and Congress

Recent legislative and administrative changes have dramatically altered how our national forests will be managed. The changes elevate commercial timber production to the detriment of other forest resources and dramatically reduce government transparency and citizen engagement. Commercial timber production doesn't save lives; it undermines wildfire mitigation.

Major Changes

Mandated Escalating Commercial Timber Targets Without Safeguards (Reconciliation Bill, Trump Timber Executive Order and Emergency USDA Directive). Section 50301 of the reconciliation bill mandates an automatically increasing amount of commercial logging on federal forests. Between 2026 and 2034 the Forest Service is required to sell 250 million board feet greater than the amount sold the prior year. For BLM lands, the annual required increase is 20 million board feet. The bill also mandates 45 long-term logging contracts of not less than 20 years. This timber mandate layers on top of the Trump Administration's [Timber Executive Order](#) and [USDA directive](#) to fast-track logging across 113 million acres by shortcutting environmental safeguards including endangered species consultations.

Elimination of Transparency and Public Engagement (Rescission of Forest Service National Environmental Policy Act regulations). The USDA's revised [National Environmental Policy Act \(NEPA\) regulations](#), in effect as of July 3, eliminate requirements for the Forest Service to inform Americans about proposed projects and permits. It also eliminates the opportunity for Americans to comment on the vast majority of Forest Service logging projects —98% — that are done with an environmental assessment (EA) or categorical exclusion (CE). The agency has effectively removed any semblance of transparency or public accountability.

Elimination of Protections for the Last Undeveloped Places (Forthcoming rescission of Roadless Area Conservation Rule). USDA Secretary Rollins [announced](#) that the Forest Service will rescind the Roadless Rule, which protects 58.5 million acres from commercial logging and roadbuilding. These last unfragmented, intact forests are crucial for wildlife and clean water and have been protected from industrial development since 2001.

Loss of Habitat for Imperiled Wildlife (Impending rescission of the regulatory definition of "harm" under the Endangered Species Act). The Department of Interior's Proposed Rule attempts to redefine "harm" so that habitat loss, which is a leading cause of species endangerment, would not qualify.

Loss of Agency Staff and Expertise (DOGE reductions, reductions in force and agency reorganization, rescissions/reductions of appropriations). Thousands of Forest Service employees have left public service, and more cuts are pending, including to staff that oversee projects, permits, and timber sales to assure compliance with contract conditions, land use plans, and environmental requirements. Additionally, President Trump's [proposed budget](#) slashes USFS funding by 65%, eliminating all funding for Forest and Rangeland Research and shifting all Wildland Fire Management funding to the Department of the Interior.

Implications

The individual and aggregate effect of these seismic changes will be unsustainable levels of logging, increased wildfire risk, and harm to fish and wildlife and local communities. These changes will also perilously undermine the trust of the American public in federal forest management.

Timber dominance undercuts science-based forest management and wildfire objectives.

- Mandating escalating amounts of timber sales will lead to increased logging of older and larger trees because they yield more board feet and are more commercially valuable than smaller trees. Yet, older mature and old growth trees are generally more fire resistant than younger trees owing to thicker bark and higher canopies. Older trees are also crucial contributors to watershed integrity, biological diversity, and climate change mitigation.
- Logging older forests is the opposite of what is needed to reduce wildfire risk, which is the removal of small trees in frequent fire forest types, creating defensible space and home hardening and integrating the appropriate role of fire.

Stripping protections from Roadless Areas leads to loss of fish and wildlife, degraded drinking water sources, more wildfire ignitions, and a massive bill for taxpayers.

- More roads lead to more wildfires. [Research](#) demonstrates that wildfires are four times as likely to start in roaded forests than in roadless forests.
- Roadless Areas ensure exceptional watershed benefits: 1) provide clean [drinking water](#) by reducing [the intensity and frequency of flooding and major erosion](#) that would otherwise result from roads and logging, 2) maintain viable salmon and trout fisheries.
- Roadless areas save the taxpayer billions of dollars annually in water treatment and flood damage. The cost savings to water treatment plants and highway departments from avoiding sedimentation caused by logging in Roadless Area watersheds [is estimated at up to \\$18 billion annually](#).

Stripping protections from critical habitats for threatened and endangered species leads to more extinctions.

More than 400 federally listed species call national forests home.

Eliminating Forest Service transparency and accountability will catapult us back to the controversy and environmental harm of 1980s and 1990s. Since these tumultuous decades, the Forest Service has made significant strides in building public trust by being transparent and inviting the public to participate in planning and project design and implementation. As a result, the Forest Service successfully advanced projects with social acceptance and reduced litigation. The public's ability to know what its government is doing and participate in decision-making and hold public agencies accountable is the crucial foundation of our democracy.

Recommendations

Legislation **should not** weaken bedrock environmental laws – e.g., expand CE authorities under NEPA, codify emergency authorities, undermine the Endangered Species Act or weaken standards of judicial review or access to the courts.

Legislation **must** focus on restoring American's trust in the Forest Service by reinstating public transparency and citizen engagement, assuring the protection of endangered species and their habitat, protecting roadless areas and ancient forests, and replacing timber volume metrics with ecological sustainability metrics.