

30 July 2025

The Honorable John Boozman

Chair, U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar

Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Letter for the Record concerning the July 30th Full Committee Review of the USDA's Reorganization Proposal

Dear Chairman Boozman and Ranking Member Klobuchar,

The Southern Environmental Law Center writes to express serious concern about the USDA's recently announced reorganization plan, which your Members plan to hear testimony about today. This plan would further erode capacity by closing critical research facilities - including the extraordinarily valuable Southern Research Station in Asheville, NC – and negatively impact the ecological and recreational values of Southern Forests. Alarming, it does all this while skirting Congressional oversight.

Additionally, the USDA's reorganization plan risks substantial cuts to agricultural and forest research—work that is foundational to ensuring U.S. leadership in food security, public health, climate resilience, pest and disease control, and nutrition science.

These impacts follow a massive attrition of USDA staff, and the proposed changes include shuttering the agency's regional offices and firing even more dedicated public lands workers. The already-understaffed Forest Service has lost thousands of workers in the last six months, losing nearly 10 percent of its staff. Dispersal of staff will cause further attrition and jeopardizes conservation programs and thus will negatively impact the enjoyment of those who rely on our public forests to hike, hunt, paddle, and fish with their families and friends.

It would also harm forest health initiatives. As referenced above, closing Asheville's Southern Research Station means losing an extremely valuable tool for studying how forest management practice interact with private and working lands, and how to better help protect communities from natural disasters. Recently, the Southern Research Station has been working with other organizations to study fire risk in the wake of Hurricane Helene.

Today's hearing provides an essential opportunity to thoroughly vet this reorganization before irreversible decisions are made. It also allows the agency to be reminded of longstanding General Guidelines for Reprogramming that require agencies funded by the Congressional Appropriations to submit reorganization proposals for review prior to implementation.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and thank you for noticing today's hearing. This is an issue of critical importance to the millions of forest users in the Southeast, to say nothing of the communities who rely on these public lands for clean water, clean air, and outdoor recreation opportunities. SELC stands ready to help you as you move forward with this important oversight.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sam Evans". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sam" being more prominent and the last name "Evans" following in a similar style.

Sam Evans
Senior Attorney and Leader of the National Forests and Parks Program