

File Code: 2300

Date: October 8, 2025

Dear Partner:

Thank you for your ongoing collaboration and support of important priority work for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service. I am writing to share updated information regarding the lapse in appropriations for FY 2026.

During this lapse in appropriations, the Forest Service is operating in accordance with the USDA Shutdown Plan with a focus on life, safety, and Administration priorities. The plan's link has not been functioning correctly. It is included again below and may also be copied and pasted into your browser. Please note, the plan may change if the funding lapse persists.

<https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fy2026-usda-lapse-plan.pdf>. This priority work is being carried out by employees who are exempt from furlough and funded by sources other than annual appropriations. Many activities and projects associated with supplemental appropriations (e.g., deferred maintenance projects funded by Great American Outdoors Act, disaster recovery projects funded by American Relief Act, etc.) are still active.

To keep key partners apprised of our operations, I am sharing the following guidance which continues to be updated and shared with our field offices. Its intent is to help clarify the type and level of work allowed during this lapse in appropriations. This guidance may change again over the course of the lapse in appropriations. If that is the case, we will provide another letter. Guidance that is new or updated is called out in the descriptions below.

- **Prescribed fire (new):** The Forest Service resumed its prescribed fire operations effective October 7, 2025.
- **Travel:** Travel for Forest Service employees is only allowed for the field delivery of exempt activities related to critical functions by employees designated as exempt. This does NOT include travel for attending meetings, conferences, or other non-critical functions.
- **Payments (updated):** It is a priority to meet our financial commitments on prior year obligations to partners. Regarding the former direction we provided on payments, including grants and agreements, the agency will continue to accept invoices and process all payments during the lapse in funding.
For wildfire and emergency work, the Agency will continue to process payments, including those for casual hires (administratively determined) on emergency assignments.
- **Law Enforcement:** Law Enforcement and Investigations (LEI) will focus on protecting employees and the public, Forest Service facilities, and developed recreation areas. LEI personnel will collaborate with local line officers as needed to ensure alignment.
- **Recreation:** National Forest recreation sites remain open during the Federal



government's lapse in funding. However, some services may be limited or unavailable. Our ability to maintain this operational status will be continuously monitored and is subject to change based on budget considerations and Administration priorities. Forest Service employees who directly support developed recreation site operations are continuing to work. Volunteer activities, such as campground hosting, will continue under existing agreements. Outfitter and guide services may continue under existing agreements. Regular seasonal closures will proceed as planned. Visitor centers, unless operated by a third party, will be closed. Concessionaire operations are not impacted by the lapse in funding. Recreation special uses, such as ski areas, are also continuing operations. Partner and contract work under existing funded agreements is currently ongoing and will continue as funding allows.

- **Timber Production:** Forest Service timber work is aligned with Executive Order (EO) 14225, "Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production". Therefore, all aspects of active forest management will continue as normal.
- **Active Harvest Projects:** Active timber sale contracts, special forest products, and integrated resource contracts (Integrated Resource Timber Contracts and Integrated Resource Service Contracts) will continue. Good Neighbor Authority and agreements that include product removal administered through partners including States, Tribes, counties, and other partners, may continue if the project does not involve funding that may result in violations of the ADA.
- **Bid Openings and Stewardship Offerings:** All current advertisements for timber and forest product sales, as well as stewardship contract offerings, will continue as planned. Bid openings and oral auctions may continue, and appropriate sale officers, contracting officers, forest products resource specialists, and collection officers will be available to conduct the sealed bid or oral auctions.
- **Timber Contracting Support Functions:** Refunds, bill cancellations, and other transactions should be submitted in accordance with standard processes and procedures. Online processing systems will be available for routine business transactions after annual downtime.
- **Special Forest Product Permits (updated):** The information that was shared around the sale of special forest product permits initially stated that over-the-counter sales will continue. Please be advised that such in-person sales may not occur in all locations depending on whether available staffing has been exempted. Online sales remain an option to purchase such permits. Permits already sold to the public are still valid within their existing terms and conditions.
- **Working Capital Fund Nursery System:** The Working Capital Fund Nursery System and staff, which includes six nurseries and two stand-alone seed extractories, will continue normal operations as they are critical life and safety facilities that process and protect the nation's seed cache and other living biological material and seedlings.
- **Reforestation and Stand Improvement Activities:** Reforestation (e.g., planting,

seeding, and surveys or certifications), stand improvement (e.g., non-commercial thinning, release, etc.), and other related activities (e.g., site preparation or cone and acorn collection) will continue.

- **Environmental Compliance Activities:** It is expected that planning and associated processes for projects pursuant to EOs will continue through the lapse in appropriations. This includes but is not limited to compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, National Historic Preservation Act, and Endangered Species Act. The Forest Service will continue to work on the nationwide environmental assessment to expedite post-fire recovery in burned areas, facilitating safe infrastructure, healthy forests, and timely recovery of forest products important to rural economies and communities reliant on National Forest Systems lands. This is a Forest Service and USDA priority in response to EO 14225 and Secretarial Memo 1078-006, “Increasing Timber Production and Designating an Emergency Situation on National Forest System Lands”.
- **Grazing:** In general, the Forest Service will not provide daily oversight of grazing operations except in a few special cases, such as complying with court-mandated, periodic oversight and monitoring direction, or facilitating orderly, end-of-grazing-season removal of livestock.

Upon the enactment of appropriations or a continuing resolution, Forest Service offices and facilities will resume program activities consistent with all applicable Agency and USDA operating procedures.

The Forest Service values your partnership and support. Your resilience during this time is recognized and appreciated. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me or your Forest Service point of contact with questions. We are committed to supporting our partnership and the important work we do in service to the American public.

Sincerely,

JOHN W. CROCKETT
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Acting Deputy Chief, National Forest System