



AGRICULTURE

Forest Service fires 3,400 people after 'deferred resignation' deadline passes

The cuts amount to about a 10 percent reduction in the agency's workforce.



A U.S. Forest Service sign welcomes visitors to Clackamas Lake Historic Area, Sept. 27, 2014. | Natalie Behring/Getty Images

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The U.S. Forest Service will fire roughly 3,400 federal employees across every level of the agency beginning Thursday, according to two people familiar with the plans.

The move targets employees who are still within their probationary period, which means it's easier for them to be let go.

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Public safety employees at USFS are exempt from the firing. While firefighter jobs appear to be unaffected, other roles that support wildfire prevention are being cut. Employees who work on road and trail maintenance, timber production and watershed restoration are also impacted.

The layoffs come one day after the deadline for the Trump administration's "Fork in the Road" program, which encouraged employees to resign but stay on the government payroll through September. It's not yet clear how many USDA employees accepted the deferred resignation option.

A USDA spokesperson declined to comment on "individual personnel actions."

"Protecting the people and communities we serve, as well as the infrastructure, businesses, and resources they depend on to grow and thrive, remains a top priority for the USDA and the Forest Service," the spokesperson said in a statement. "Our wildland firefighter and other public safety positions are of the utmost priority."

The cuts would reduce the agency’s workforce — a total of 35,000 employees — by about 10 percent, potentially making it harder for the federal government to address increasingly intense wildfires and manage millions of acres of federal forests and grasslands. Forest Service employees in probationary periods are more likely to be the ones doing field work, such as moving timber sales and helping to mitigate wildfires, than their more senior counterparts.

Federal agencies, including the Department of Energy and Small Business Administration, are also planning similar cuts.

The Trump administration — with its allies at Elon Musk’s so-called Department of Government Efficiency — has moved quickly to slash government spending and shrink the federal workforce. USDA has already put employees who worked in diversity, equity and inclusion-related roles on administrative leave. Trump’s dismantling of U.S. Agency for International Development also placed more than a dozen employees at the Foreign Agricultural Service on administrative leave with the possibility of furlough.

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