



EFFECTS OF USFS REORGANIZATION

House Committee on Agriculture, Food Resiliency & Forestry

May 12, 2026

Oliver Pierson, Director, Division of Forests



Big Picture



- FPR enjoys a **longstanding and productive partnership** w/ USFS
 - Cooperative Forestry Act – State, Private and Tribal Forestry - Funding
 - Good Neighbor Authority – Green Mountain National Forest
- USFS Reorganization has **more cons than pros** for Vermont
 - Shift of focus to Western States
 - Closure of many R&D Facilities nationwide (walking back?)
 - More uncertainty for USFS employees, departures
 - Wildland Fire changes could create disruption & add complexity
- White House FY26 & FY27 budget requests **zeroed out important funding**
 - Congress reinstated this funding in FY26, FY27?

Current State of USFS

- USFS manages approximately **193 million acres** of land, which constitutes the National Forest System and are organized into **154 national forests** and **20 national grasslands**, located across 43 states
- As of mid-2026, the U.S. Forest Service has approximately **30,000 employees**, including 10,000 wildland fire fighters
- Chief Tom Schulz has a land management background in Idaho/Montana and has worked as a lobbyist for timber industry
 - Advocates “**cooperative federalism**” or essentially delegating work and responsibility to states
- Under Trump 2.0, USFS is striving to **reduce costs** via staffing cuts and closures of facilities and programs
- USFS lost 5,860 employees in 2025, around 16% of its workforce, hiring freeze?

Current USFS Policy Priorities

- Wildland Fire Focus: increasing readiness against a changing federal approach
- Timber Production: Executive Order mandating 25% increase, streamlined permitting
- Organizational Efficiency: Reduction in Costs & Staffing, Restructuring
- Big Beautiful Bill:
 - **Funding Rescission:** All unobligated balances for forestry programs under the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) rescinded for a total of \$150m in deficit reduction
 - **Mandatory Timber Harvest Increases** – From FY26-FY34, USFS must sell at least 250 million board feet more timber each year than it did the previous year
- Fix our Forests Act: **Bipartisan Legislation** to speed up management, fire
- Increasing recreational access
- Shared Stewardship with States

Vermont FPR and USFS Partnership

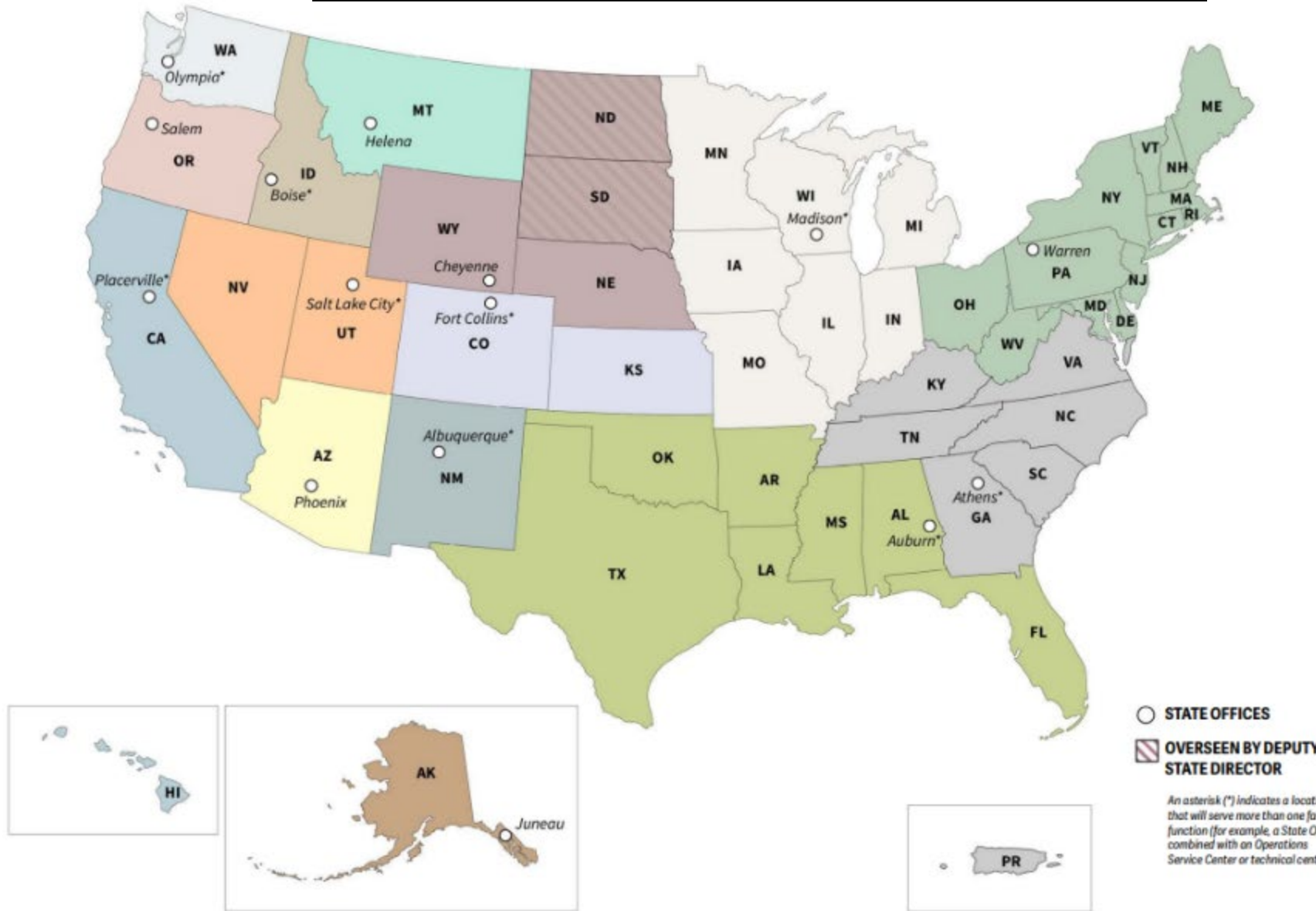
- USFS provides 1/3 of FPR Forestry's budget, around \$4.5M year
- Annual core funding in 4 areas supports positions, grants to partners, innovative work, equipment, fire support
- Competitive Grants (Temporary Bridge, Forest Resilience, Landscape Scale Restoration, Wood Innovation)
- Most USFS funding to VT comes from State, Private & Tribal Forestry under Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978
- Limited funding comes from the Green Mt National Forest under Good Neighbor Authority
 - FPR supporting GMNF to meet expanded productivity goals by hiring staff, implementing approved forest management projects

2026 Reorganization



- Recently announced reorganization is a fundamental operational shift, part of a Trump 2.0 effort to reduce federal government size and budget
- Focus on extractive industries (increase timber production by 25%) and wildland fire
- USFS wants leadership closer to forests, moving headquarters to Salt Lake City
- Replacing 9 existing regional offices with 15 state-based directors to enhance direct communication with local stakeholders, states, and Tribes.
- Major reduction in R&D funding, staffing, and facilities, consolidating dozens of research stations into a single entity headquartered in Fort Collins, CO, with roughly 20 main sites preserved, 57 being closed (including in Burlington VT) ****reversal?**
- Expected to impact thousands of positions with many staff required to relocate
- Center of gravity shifting to Western States where USDA Leadership is from

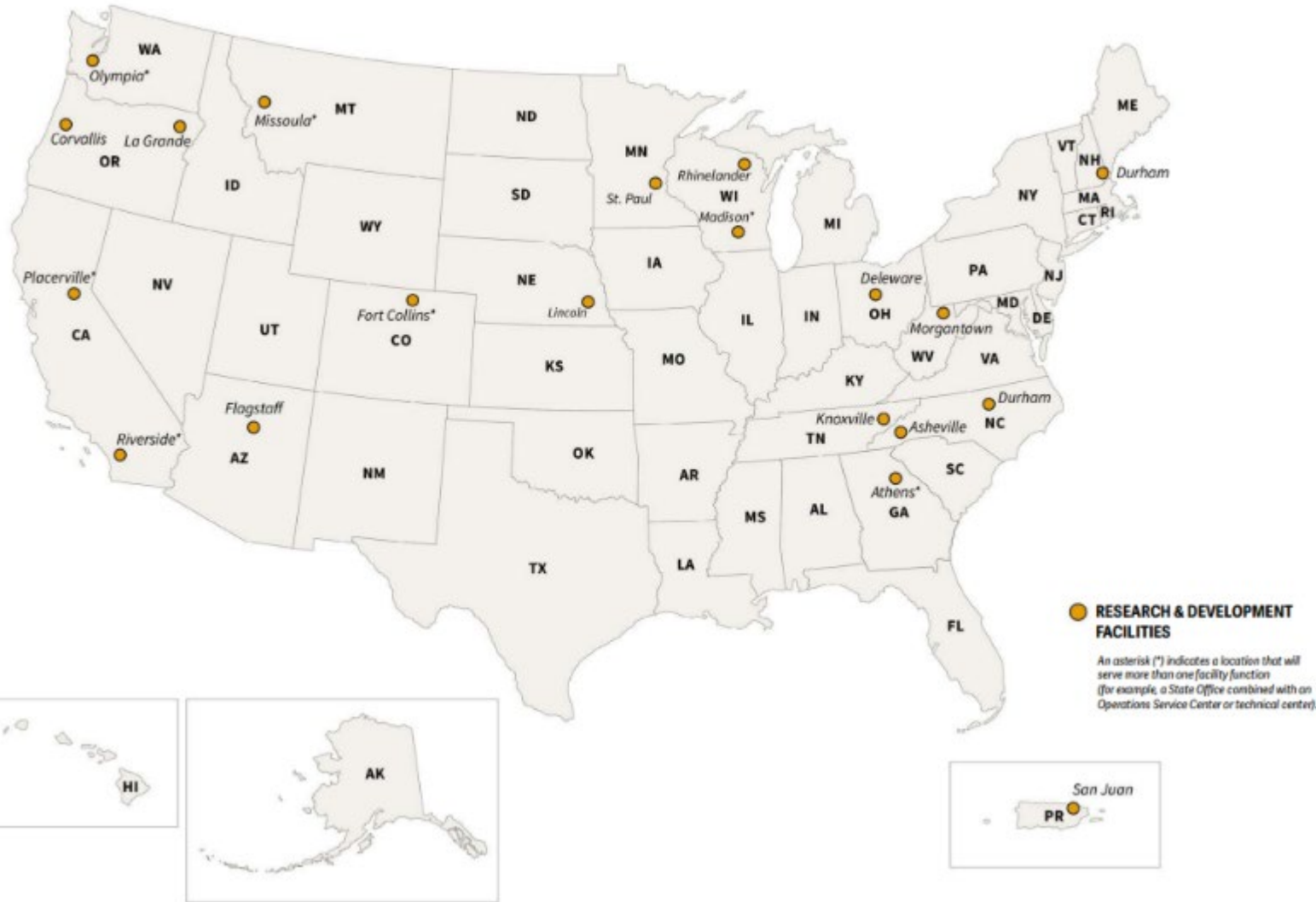
National Structure: 15 State Directors



Impact on VT:

- Shift from Region 9 (20 states) to Northeast State Director (13 states) is not significant
- Lack of clarity on how State Support will be provided is

Research and Development Changes



Impacts

- 20 sites retained
- 57 being closed*
 - Burlington, Bartlett NH
- Others still TBD
 - Hubbard Brook NH, 2 sites in Maine

Impacts of R&D closures

- FS R&D excels at long-term place-based research to serve natural resource managers.
- Reorganization will dismantle a high functioning science program and reduce USFS ability to provide data and info to states to effectively manage natural resources
 - 1/3 of Forest Inventory & Analysis (FIA) staff are in closing facilities, resulting staff losses will reduce effectiveness of FIA, which VT relies on for data on forest trends
- 6500 total FS workers are impacted by facility closures, with 2700 of these in research
- 25% of PhDs left the FS in 2025

Other Thoughts

- Strong pushback from elected leadership nationwide and NASF
- 82% of public comments about the reorganization were negative
- Could explore partnerships to reduce costs and maintain site-based research

What's Really Going on? Follow the Money!

- Reorganization must be viewed in tandem with administration funding requests & actions
- FY 25: OMB threatened to rescind significant amounts of USFS funding and delayed apportionment until July 23, 2025 (2 months to commit before end of FY)
 - Significant lobbying led to this outcome
- Administration FY26 Request essentially zeroed out USFS State, Private and Tribal Forestry and Research & Development

USDA Forest Service - FY 2026 President's Budget compared to previous years

<i>(thousands of dollars)</i>	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY25	FY 2026	Difference	%
	Enacted	Enacted	Estimated	President's Budget	between 2025 and 2026	Decrease
Discretionary Appropriations						
Forest Service Operations Appropriation Level	1,152,744	1,150,000	1,150,000	759,000	(391,000)	-34%
Salaries and Expenses	389,406	389,000	389,000	256,740	(132,260)	-34%
Facility Maintenance and Leases	169,900	169,000	169,000	111,540	(57,460)	-34%
Information Technology	450,000	449,000	449,000	296,340	(152,660)	-34%
Organizational Services	143,438	143,000	143,000	94,380	(48,620)	-34%
Forest and Rangeland Research	307,273	300,000	300,000	0	(300,000)	-100%
Salaries and Expenses	215,576	212,000	233,400	0	(233,400)	
Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA)	32,197	31,500	31,500	0	(31,500)	
Joint Fire Science Program *	4,500	3,000	3,000	0	(3,000)	
Research and Development Programs	55,000	53,500	32,100	0	(32,100)	
State, Private, Tribal Forestry	337,758	303,306	283,500	0	(283,500)	-100%
Salaries and Expenses	65,091	52,000	95,250	0	(95,250)	
Landscape Scale Restoration	17,000	14,000	7,000	0	(7,000)	
Forest Health Management - Federal Lands	17,000	16,000	16,000	0	(16,000)	
Forest Health Management - Cooperative Lands	33,000	32,000	32,000	0	(32,000)	
State Fire Capacity Grants	76,000	76,000	76,000	0	(76,000)	
Volunteer Fire Capacity Grants	21,000	21,000	21,000	0	(21,000)	
Forest Stewardship (Working Forest Lands)	12,500	12,000	6,000	0	(6,000)	
Community Forest & Open Space Conservation	6,000	5,500	2,750	0	(2,750)	
Urban and Community Forestry	40,000	36,000	18,000	0	(18,000)	
Forest Resource Information & Analysis **	30,167	19,806	0	0	0	
International Programs and Trade	20,000	19,000	9,500	0	(9,500)	
National Forest System	1,974,388	1,863,557	1,863,557	1,296,305	(567,052)	-30%
Salaries and Expenses	1,519,083	1,459,352	1,459,352	1,117,000	(342,352)	-23%
Land Mgmt Planning, Assessment & Monitoring	17,000	14,500	14,500	10,000	(4,500)	-31%
Recreation, Heritage and Wilderness	55,000	45,000	45,000	31,000	(14,000)	-31%
Hazardous Fuels ***	207,000	175,450	175,450	0	(175,450)	-100%
Grazing Management	6,300	6,000	6,000	5,000	(1,000)	-17%
Forest Products	40,000	39,000	39,000	39,000	0	0%
Vegetation and Watershed Management	32,000	30,000	30,000	20,500	(9,500)	-32%
Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat Management	24,000	22,000	22,000	15,000	(7,000)	-32%
Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Fund	32,000	31,000	31,000	0	(31,000)	-100%
Minerals and Geology Management	14,500	14,000	14,000	14,000	0	0%
Land Ownership Management	8,000	7,750	7,750	4,000	(3,750)	-48%
Law Enforcement Investigations	19,505	19,505	19,505	19,505	0	0%
Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) ****	-	-	-	21,500	(10,000)	-32%





<u>Priority USFS State and Private Programs for Vermont</u>	FY 2024 Enacted (Budget in M\$)	FY26 Administration Request (Budget in M\$)	FY 2026 Enacted (Budget in M\$)
Forest Stewardship Program	\$12.00	\$0.0	\$12.00
State Fire Assistance*	\$76.00	\$0.0	\$76.00
Volunteer Fire Assistance*	\$21.00	\$0.0	\$21.00
Urban and Community Forestry	\$36.00	\$0.0	\$37.00
Landscape Scale Restoration	\$14.00	\$0.0	\$14.00
Forest Health on Cooperative Lands	\$32.00	\$0.0	\$42.00
Forest Legacy Program	\$92.25	\$???	\$88.46
Forest Inventory and Analysis**	\$31.50	\$21.5	\$32.197
Forest and Rangeland Research	\$300.00	0	\$308.00

State, Private & Tribal Forestry Ceases to Exist

*Fire moved to US Wildland Fire Service in DOI

**FIA moved to National Forest System

USFS State & Private FY2026 Funding and Reductions

Priority USFS State and Private Programs for Vermont	Total As Enacted	Fixed Costs	Leadership Decisions	Total Less "Fixed Costs" "Leadership Decisions"	% "Fixed Costs" and "Leadership Decisions"
State Fire Assistance*	76,000,000	0	0	76,000,000	-
Volunteer Fire Assistance*	21,000,000	0	0	21,000,000	-
Forest Health*	16,000,000	586,000	480,000	14,934,000	-6.7%
Forest Stewardship*	12,000,000	1,211,000	1,000,000	9,789,000	-18.4%
Urban & Community*	37,000,000	3,709,000	4,000,000	29,291,000	-20.8%
Landscape Scale Restoration	14,000,000	1,400,000	1,000,000	11,600,000	-17.1%
Congressional Projects	18,094,000	0	0	18,094,000	-
Salary and Expense*	50,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	40,000,000	-20.0%
TOTAL	328,647,585	64,496,989	16,980,000	287,170,596	-12.6%

* Part of Core Funding that comes to Vermont FPR

Federal Fiscal Year 2027 USFS Funding



- President's Budget again **zeroes out all** programs in the State, Private and Tribal Forestry and R&D, except Forest Legacy and Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA)
- Like FY26, the State Fire Assistance and Volunteer Fire Assistance are zeroed out and any "legacy" activities are proposed moved to the US Wildland Fire Service
- FIA is again moved under the National Forest System and is roughly level funded at FY 2026 levels (as opposed the cut made in last year's budget).
- "Forest Products" program, which funds timber harvests and associated partnership agreements, is proposed to receive a 350% increase, growing from \$40M to \$180M
- Additional funding would be invested in "ongoing partnerships" such as GNA to increase NFS harvest in line the President's EO and Congress' mandated timber target.

Forest Service Budget Requests and Appropriations (\$, millions)

	FY26 Request	FY26 Appropriations	FY27 Request	Change from FY26 Appropriations
Forest Service Operations	759	1,091	611	-44%
Forest & Rangeland Research	0	309	0	-100%
State, Private, & Tribal Forestry	0	311	0	-100%
National Forest System	1,472	1,858	1,420	-24%
Capital Improvement & Maintenance	78	137	99	-28%
Land Acquisition	2	4	7	90%
Wildland Fire Management	0	2,426	0	-100%
Wildland Fire Reserve Fund	0	2,480	0	-100%
USFS Discretionary Funding	\$2,311	\$8,615	\$2,137	-75%

US Wildland Fire Service



Established in January 2026, the US FWS is Administration attempt to consolidate all federal wildfire management activities within the Department of the Interior

The President's FY 2027 Budget would again move all USFS fire activities and funding to the newly-created US WFS; Congress did not support this move in FY26

Pros of Consolidating USFS Fire Suppression into US WFS:

- Moving USFS Fire Suppression to US WFS could improve federal firefighting inter-agency coordination along with streamlining aviation, logistics, and pay systems.

Cons of Consolidating USFS Fire Suppression into the US WFS



- Absorbing USFS wildfire into DOI could impact suppression effectiveness, as DOI has a track record of larger fire sizes (10x compared to USFS, and 100x compared to states)
- Numerous aspects of the current wildfire coordination system are working well, could be disrupted by a transfer (tiered interagency dispatch system, National Cache System)
- The legislation defines the wildland fire functions broadly as “wildland fire prevention, planning, preparedness, operations, suppression, mitigation, recovery, and science.”
 - List includes land management functions, which if removed from land management agencies would require coordination that is not needed today, adding complexity
- 1.5 year timeline coincides with two western fire seasons, creating potential readiness gaps, qualification delays, and adversely affecting Incident Management Team stability.

Final Thoughts

- State Foresters and many other partners have reached out to Congressional Delegations to express concerns about certain aspects of USFS reorganization
- Announcement about Hubbard Brook and R&D closure reconsideration is positive
- State Foresters heading to DC in early June to advocate for FY27 funding levels
- VT FPR's partnership with USFS will hopefully persist, thanks to Congress and with support of USFS rank and file
- Uncertainty about future status of State, Private and Tribal Forestry, Wildland Fire, and Research and Development creates a shaky foundation
- Grateful for partnership, excited to implement USFS-funded forest management projects



FORESTS, PARKS & RECREATION

VERMONT



AGENCY OF NATURAL RESOURCES

