

Listening Session: Tribal Priorities for Future Partnerships with Forest Service

Summary Report

Thursday, September 25, 2025

8:30-10am Alaska / 9:30-11am Pacific / 10:30am-12pm Mountain /
11:30am-1pm Central / 12:30-2pm Eastern

Prepared By

Morris K. Udall and Stewart L. Udall Foundation's
John S. McCain III National Center for Environmental Conflict Resolution

On Behalf Of

Intertribal Timber Council

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Facilitators

Stephanie Lucero | *Senior Program Manager, Udall Foundation*

Rachel Hammelman | *Senior Program Associate, Udall Foundation*

Speakers

Cody Desautel | *President, Intertribal Timber Council*

Beatra Wilson | *Associate Deputy Chief for State, Private and Tribal Forestry and National Forest System, USDA Forest Service*

Ian Fox | *Assistant Director for Forest Products, USDA Forest Service*

Rob Barnhart | *National Stewardship Contracting & GNA Coordinator, USDA Forest Service*

INTRODUCTIONS

On September 25th, 2025, Intertribal Timber Council (ITC) hosted a listening session in conjunction with the John S. McCain III National Center for Environmental Conflict Resolution (National Center) and USDA Forest Service on Tribal priorities for future partnerships with Forest Service. The intent of the listening session was to allow Forest Service to provide updates on agency activities and give Tribes the opportunity to share their priorities and questions with Forest Service.

Staff from Forest Service provided brief presentations on recent updates relating to the timber industry, sustainable forestry, and shared stewardship (aka co-stewardship), and opportunities for Tribal involvement. These presentations were followed by an open discussion forum for Tribal leaders, staff, and community members to share their priorities, identify questions, and prepare for various upcoming Tribal consultation sessions held by Forest Service.

This listening session was not intended to be or act in place of Government-to-Government Consultation.

ITC President, Cody Desautel, welcomed participants and thanked them for attending the session to provide their thoughts on interactions between Tribes and Forest Service. Mr. Desautel emphasized that there are a lot of moving parts nationally and with that comes opportunities to engage with Forest Service Partners. He acknowledged that ITC is seeing a lot of reductions in Federal workforce, and changes in funding. He shared that he has heard that federal partners are going to need assistance and technical capacity to meet the obligations they are charged with from a congressional perspective. He emphasized that all partners would need to explore how to work together to accomplish the work, exploring individual strengths, and weaknesses to combine forces, and collectively do more work together than can be accomplished individually. ITC is hosting this event as an opportunity to get feedback from Tribes on questions they have about opportunities, priorities they have and how to facilitate relationships and communication with Forest Service partners. He affirmed that Forest Service partners were there to listen to what Tribes have to say and share those through Forest Service ranks. ITC is a partner to provide technical expertise to Timber Tribes, facilitate connections with Forest Service and support priorities in Indian Country on both reservation and adjacent federal lands.

FOREST SERVICE UPDATE ON AGENCY ACTIVITIES

Overview

Associate Deputy Chief Beatra Wilson provided a brief opening and overview of Forest Service intent and support for the ongoing unique Government-to-Government and political relationship they have with Federally Recognized Tribes. Key points from her opening were:

- In September 2025, Chief Schultz signed a Chief's Letter of Intent Regarding Forest Service Tribal Relations (See Appendix III). This Letter went to agency leadership and emphasized their essential relationship with Tribes and expectations of pursuing opportunities to work with Tribes in shared stewardship to support rural economies, reduce wildfire risk, create and sustain healthy and resilient forests and watershed, and build capacity through workforce realignment.

- Secretary Rollins released [Secretarial Memo #1078-006](#) affirming Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations (ANC) as a force multiplier in increasing timber production and their participation and expertise in this work.
- USDA planned a Consultation regarding the planned reorganization of [USDA at the department level on October 14th and 16th](#) in person with a virtual option. Only duly elected Tribal government officials or their officially delegated proxies may provide comment during the Consultation series, and only official ANC representatives may provide comments on behalf of their corporation. The public comment period on the reorganization plan closed on September 30, 2025.
- Several Tribal Consultations were open as of the date of the Listening Session: Proposed Recission of the 2001 Roadless Rule; Geospatial Data Topics; Post-fire Recovery Environmental Assessment; Ski are definition; and climbing opportunities. Two additional Consultations will be scheduled soon: the Travel Management Rule and the EXPLORE Act. (See Appendix II for additional details and links.)
- As Mr. Desautel mentioned, Forest Service has signed an agreement with ITC that will support bringing Tribes and Forest leadership together through targeted technical assistance. This agreement aims to support improving the efficiency of delivering timber programs; building tribal capacity; aligning tribal and Forest Service priorities for critical treatment needs, areas, and projects; and supporting tribal shared stewardship on National Forest System lands.

Implementation of Administration Priorities

Ian Fox, Assistant Director of Forest Products for Forest Service provided an update on the Forest Service’s implementation of this Administration’s priorities. Mr. Fox started with High-level direction from the White House and USDA Secretary and then moved to Agency level actions such as the Active Forest Management Strategy, Forest Service’s emphasis on Shared stewardship, and some additional details regarding the upcoming Government-to-Government Consultations. Mr. Fox also acknowledged the various changes as Forest Service works through the administration transition but emphasized that as of the date of the Listening Session¹ administration priorities on safety, restructuring, communications, wildfire risk reduction, timber, recreation, and customer service. Slides from this presentation are available in the materials.

Relevant E.O.s and Secretarial Orders to the Forest Service

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- ¹ As of November 7, 2025, Forest Service staff shared that administration shared the following talking points: “Our priorities are clear and include:
 1. **Active forest management** to increase timber production and reduce wildfire risk.
 2. **Wildfire suppression commensurate with risk** to minimize unwanted impacts.
 3. **Reducing barriers and managing access to mineral and energy resources** on National Forest System lands in a way that respects the land and law while supporting development.
 4. **Keeping working lands working** through timely and responsive administration of grazing and other critical uses.
 5. **Providing world class recreation opportunities** for hiking, camping, hunting, fishing, and other recreational uses on National Forest lands.”

- OSEC Memo 1078-010 signed 5/5/2025 and titled, *Clarifying the Application of Certain Executive Orders to Federally Recognized Indian Tribes, American Indian Tribal Citizens and Alaska Natives, and the Native Hawai’ian Community*, affirming the government-to-government and political relationship with federally recognized Indian Tribes and distinguishing them from the policy-based DEI programs identified in several E.O.s.
- E.O. 14225 “*Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production*”, signed 3/1/2025 and the coinciding USDA Secretarial Order, “*Increasing Timber Production and Designating an Emergency Situation on National Forest System Lands*”, signed 4/3/2025.

Support Rural Economies and the Forest Product Industry

- Achieve land management goals and strengthen rural economies by increasing the annual timber volume offered by 25 percent over the fiscal year (FY) 2020 through FY 2024 average, with a goal of selling 4 billion board feet by FY 2028.

Reduce the Risk of Destructive Wildfire

- Create and sustain healthy and resilient forests and watersheds by doing the right treatments in the right places and locations and ensuring the agency’s fuels and timber programs coordinate efforts to accomplish priority work.

Build Capacity Through Workforce Alignment and Partnerships

- Expand workforce skills; leverage partnerships with States, Tribes, and industry; and modernize systems for more efficient project delivery.

Capacity Building and Streamlining Implementation

- Outdated processes, limited staff, and cumbersome certification processes create challenges for implementing active forest management.

Environmental Compliance

- Various statutes require environmental compliance to authorize forest management activities.

Salvage and Reforestation

- To accelerate the pace and scale of post-wildfire recovery and reestablish healthy and resilient forests, the agency must plan and execute salvage and reforestation projects as disturbances happen.

Shared Stewardship, Partnerships, Contracting, and Markets

- Shared stewardship, partnerships, contracting, and markets are critical to successfully meeting the agency’s goals of increasing active management to improve forest health and reduce threats of wildfire, insects, and disease.
- The scale of shared stewardship (aka co-stewardship) has expanded, and Tribes are encouraged to enter into large-scale shared stewardship agreements with the Forest

Service through several authorities and instruments such as: Tribal Forest Protection Act (TFPA), Good Neighbor Authority (GNA), and stewardship contracting.

Strengthen partnerships

- Expand the use of shared stewardship, partner agreements, and Good Neighbor Authority to increase the capacity of States, Tribes, and partners.
- Develop a uniform, streamlined approach to all aspects of agreement implementation (August 2025).

Implement Good Neighbor Authority modifications

- Tribes, States, and counties to assist in project implementation and retain revenue.
- Issue a solicitation for Good Neighbor Authority projects to fund maintenance and reconstruction of roads and bridges (ongoing).

Support markets and facilities

- Develop long-term supply assurances such as 10+ year contracts and agreements, sustained yield units, and A to Z contracts.
- Invest in wood products innovation to maintain existing and attract new processing facilities to ensure stable demand for timber (including biomass).
- Assess facilities needs within 250 miles of the NFS to inform development of programs at nearby forests (September 2025).

EXPLORE Act

Rob Barnhart provided an overview of the Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences Act (EXPLORE Act), which became law on January 4, 2025. Slides from this presentation are available in the materials. Forest Service is leading implementation of specific sections of the EXPLORE Act:

- Section 351 – which expands GNA to be available throughout the US and Puerto Rico, allows GNA Agreements with any Tribal Nation, allows use of revenue for restoration and recreation services to occur either on or off National Forest System lands, and expands allowable activities to include forest, rangeland, watershed restoration services, and recreation services.
- Section 122 – directs Forest Service to formally recognize recreational climbing as a valid activity on National Forest System lands.
- Establishing a Forest Service Manual Chapter 2355 to guide climbing access, manage impacts, and ensure alignment with conservation laws, land management plans, and wilderness protections.

DISCUSSION

The session was then opened to participants for comments and questions. Comments and questions have been grouped by theme below. When possible, Forest Service staff and ITC subject matter experts provided answers and information to address questions. Some questions were

deferred for discussion at an upcoming National Consultations with Forest Service or at the Department (USDA) level Consultation (links and dates on these are listed in Appendix II).

I. GNA and EXPLORE Act Funding and Revenue

For any further questions or comments on GNA or EXPLORE Act implementation and tracking, please reach out to Robert Barnhart, National Program Manager End Results Stewardship Contracting: [robert.barnhart\[at\]usda.gov](mailto:robert.barnhart@usda.gov).

Questions

Question: Can you speak a little bit more about the difference between treating funds as program income vs. revenue with GNA agreements?

- **Answer:** The most important aspect of the EXPLORE Act is that Tribes can now remove timber on Federal lands, generate funds from the proceeds, and keep the revenue under Tribal control. Any funds generated through forest sale products are retained as revenue within Tribal Nations and can be used for recreation or restoration work on and off National Forest Service lands.
- **Additional Question:** Can this revenue be invested and is there a timeframe for when it needs to be spent?
 - **Answer:** Tribes have full control over revenue and revenue management, but they must come back to the project scope in some way. Timeframes of use are limited to within the schedule of work under the agreement. Federal funds, including these revenues, are subject to Government Accountability standards and audits, but are held by the Tribes until the work is completed.

Question: Is there a Forest Service position paper on the revenue to Tribes? Additionally, is there a link to more information on the revenue partnership under GNA and how the program works?

- **Answer:** The Congressional Research Service has an [outline on GNA](#) and there are references to the created as part of the EXPLORE Act.

Question: Are there example projects for GNA, from beginning to end?

- **Answer:** Not yet as the program is still in the beginning stages. Forest Service has just had one Tribal Nation, Nez Perce, signed an Early Adopter Agreement, however work has not yet started.

II. Authority of Tribes to Steward Resources on Forest Lands

Questions

Question: Is planning work supported by GNA? Or just implementation?

- **Answer:** Planning work is included.

Question: Can Forest Service authorities like the Good Neighbor Authority support 100-year leases to Tribes for developing biomass and salvage capacity?

- **Answer:** There are biomass demonstration projects authorized under the Tribal Energy Development and Self-Determination Act. Those agreements could extend up to 20 years.

Question: To enhance sovereignty, can agreements be created to:

- Allow tribes to lead NEPA compliance on joint projects?
 - Grant Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs) the jurisdiction of State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs) on ancestral lands?
 - Designate tribal scientists as the lead for consulting with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?
- **Answer:** With regards to GNA, they look at projects as a whole when they sign agreements. With NEPA, they can have Tribes do the work that would be the NEPA analysis, as the “left side of the triangle” where they do surveys and engagement. However, Forest Service reserves the right to sign and review any NEPA documents completed by the Tribes to ensure compliance with regulations and applicable laws.

Post-NEPA, Tribal Nations, can do the work from the preparation of such timber sales and restoration work under GNA. The sandtable exercises done bring in all these different points, and they’ll be looking at how to address these topics to provide answers to each of these specific questions. Forest Service is hoping to develop and provide training through the agreement with ITC on implementation as well.

Comments

Comment: Tribal-Led Stewardship Through Land Leases

To truly build tribal capacity, it is vital to move beyond a dependent relationship and empower tribes to lead stewardship efforts. We strongly encourage the Forest Service to identify and pilot opportunities to lease non-recreational priority areas to tribes.

This model would allow tribes to take the lead in directing land management projects, with the Forest Service providing technical assistance and on-the-ground support during training or off-season periods. This approach fosters genuine co-management, builds tribal expertise, and creates a more efficient and collaborative partnership.

Comment: Expanding THPO Authority

We also urge the Forest Service to advocate within the federal government for an expansion of Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) authority. Specifically, we request that the Forest Service ask the National Park Service to direct State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) to formally recognize the jurisdiction of THPOs over their respective tribal lands AND ancestral areas, ensuring tribes have the primary voice in their own cultural resource management.

III. Infrastructure Capacity, Supply Needs, and Capacity Constraints within Forest Service and Tribes

Questions

Question: How is the Forest Service going to address the limited forest health staff, which has historically been low and has been further reduced - especially entomology and plant pathogens - these positions are essential for regional interagency forest health management.

- **Answer:** Now that major staffing changes in Forest Service have settled, Forest Service is looking at remaining capacity across the board including Subject Matter Experts and has created interim operations plans to leverage capacity and stay nimble in ensuring minimal lapses in work.

Question: While Forest Services is helping support rural communities but there is a lack of lumber mills in certain communities. It is frustrating to push for timber harvest, but it is unclear where all this timber will go. Small logging companies can't handle the capacity, and a discussion has been had at local/county/State level and Tribes want to step in but how is it feasible? Maybe supplemental funding?

- **Answer:** Where infrastructure doesn't exist, it will take substantial commitment to justify the investment in new infrastructure. With the authorities available today, there can be a combination approach of wood producers to provide supply and create the need for more infrastructure and bring confidence that new investments need to be made. While it's not a short-term fix, there are opportunities, and in the short term they are working to increase capacity of the existing wood basket. Additionally, there are transportation limitations.
- **Answer:** Programs such as the Wood Innovations Grant Programs, Transportation Assistance Programs run on cycles and Tribes can be aware of those as they will continue, in addition Forest Service's commitment to supporting long term supply and new infrastructure.

Question: Who's tracking these successes of production to help lean towards large investments to mills?

- **Answer:** Tracking is limited and geographically specific, and additionally it is up to individual agencies to track it, and they don't share production accomplishments across all land managers.

Question: To overcome BIA capacity limitations, can the Forest Service create agreements to help the BIA approve prescribed burn plans and training to accelerate on-the-ground work?

- **Answer:** Forest Service and BIA are still working with capacity limitations and best the agencies can interact.

Comments (comments are provided as close to verbatim as feasible)

Comment: [There are] real opportunities to meet timber production goals, increase wood innovation, and reduce wildfire risk across the west and in Alaska. Very minimal mill/industry and workforce capacity though. This will require large federal investment in Tribes to co-manage lands, execute the EXPLORE Act, and build workforce and infrastructure.

Comment: The anchor forests concept may be helpful to investigate. Mr. Desautel noted that ITC could revisit this concept, as [ITC] have not worked on it in about a decade. (See Appendix II for resources on anchor forests.)

Comment: [They] need to look at innovations to deal with underutilized and residual wood from mills and other timber activities, such as pre-commercial thinning. Increased jobs and infrastructure could support what to do with these products – bioenergy, renewables, etc. Tribes such as Yakama are doing some of the most innovative work but need support on infrastructure. There is a missing link on incentives to have logging trucks, thinning, etc. Consider adding capacity to the front end of any future increase in harvest in rural/remote off-road communities such as in Alaska.

Comment: Some rural places, such as Southeast Alaska, do not have the infrastructure or good wood for timber production and biomass feasibility. These increases in production expectations will hurt rural communities, especially since resources for upkeep and growth improvements have not been provided (such as thinning).

- **Additional Comment:** To achieve a sustainable supply of forest products in balance with ecological health, [we] advocate for a planning model built on early collaboration with Tribal and scientific experts. This process would guide a mosaic landscape approach, where active management like prescribed burning and variable harvesting is carefully planned around a network of preserved forested corridors to maintain biodiversity. By establishing a clear, science-based, and mutually agreed-upon framework from the start, this model will inherently streamline the NEPA process, increase overall efficiency, and reduce project costs.

IV. Relationship Dynamics between Forest Service, Tribes, and Rural Communities

Comments

Comment: [It seems] that USDA Forest Service is committed to working with Tribes. [However] so many solid relationships were destroyed this year, as Forest Service employees were ripped from their positions. It is those relationships, built over decades, that lead to the best results. It appears that we are starting over.

V. Complexity of Forest Service Partnerships and Agreements

Questions

Question: Has there been an internal review of Grants and Agreements that are available to Tribes to reduce the huge burden on Tribes to implement a grant or agreement? Those revenues sometimes aren't enough to carry into future projects, and for Tribes with smaller staff, that review is critical for Forest Service to hear from Tribes on what their process looks like and not assume where issues are.

- **Answer:** Forest Service values understanding bylaws and incorporation of input by Tribes into the documentation and are always looking for ways to reach out and discuss throughout development.

VI. Other Comments and Questions

Questions

Question: How are current agreements, such as within California SHPO Region 5, going to be impacted by the USDA Reorganization?

- **Answer:** The USDA Reorganization is occurring at a department level, and Forest Service staff encouraged participants to provide their questions and comments via public comment and/or at the upcoming Consultation. Please email [tribal.relations \[at\] usda.gov](mailto:tribal.relations@usda.gov) with additional questions. Additionally, the Forest Service is committed to existing shared stewardship agreements, but it is unclear what impact the reorganization will have.
- **Additional Comment:** These instruments are valuable but become challenged when capacity is an issue. The Region 5 agreement with SHPO is currently being updated and [the] contention that it should include Heritage-level projects and to also direct them to accommodate the flexibility offered in things like screened undertakings. The stovepipe created externally from agreement in CA creates a lack of accountability when it comes to supporting Tribally led projects. [They're] in a categorical exclusion for a sagebrush fuels project, and this agreement provides a lot of flexibility, but the authority vested lacks accountability when they don't offer that. Partner-led projects shouldn't be held to a higher standard than the agency itself. Take the opportunity to give direction to local units for ways to be more efficient.

Question: How is Forest Service interacting with State-recognized Tribes based on Letter and Memos?

- **Answer:** The Forest Service has not seen a change in posture in how they collaborate and work with non-Federally-Recognized Tribes.

Question: Also wondering if there's been any clarity regarding the certification process as a part of the new USDA NEPA regs? We have a collaborative project we're working with our USFS district on, but we've been unclear on the certification process that will "start the clock."

- **Answer:** Forest Service will need to provide a response later and will track this question.

Comment

Comment:

As a bit of history, I'm from Southeast Alaska and we've been involved with the roadless rule since 2001 and weathered two battles with USDA Forest Service and won both. The infrastructure is no longer in Southeast Alaska. There used to be 3 pulp mills in Sitka, Ketchikan, and Wrangell. Most of the good wood has been removed from our forests, they've been logged forever. They quit logging because it cost too much. The cost went very high [in Southeast Alaska] and with cheaper wood coming from other countries, logging here wasn't feasible. Also, Forest Service was subsidizing the timber industry very heavily.

It is just my opinion, but I don't know how it can be called consultation when the Forest Service and USDA already know what they are going to do. So, what are we doing here? Are we minimizing the impacts like where I'm from in Tongass National Forest. Consultation needs to be where we are at

the table, we can protect what is at the [discussion] table. It is not just listening, [Tribes] must be able to protect our lands. Co-management is the least we would accept.

On my little island of Kupreanof Island, years of logging reduced the populations of deer, moose, bear and everything else. Now that logging has stopped for decades we are seeing growth of our deer, moose, and bear populations. [These populations and] the streams around us are just now healing from the logging. I know other rural communities in Southeast Alaska will be hit hard again [from increased logging]. [For example,] Kasaan and Old Island (aka Prince Wales Island) those islands have been logged extensively. There is only a small fraction of old growth timber. I think a good point is that there are so many millions of acres that have been clear-cut logged, but nothing has been done to help those acres grow. There is no thinning or work to help those areas grow. Instead, Forest service is looking to shut down roads they have built now that they've logged those acres. Those acres need to be taken care of and [support] second growth trees and leave the old growth trees alone. It's just my opinion, but instead of targeting rural communities in Southeast Alaska, log in the bigger communities. They won't let you because they have more power than the smaller tribes.

CONCLUSION

Reed Robinson Forest Service Office of Tribal Relations thanked those who participated in this listening session and ITC for hosting this event. Forest Service is committed to learning more and understanding better what is needed to have healthy and resilient landscapes, and working with Indian Country is the best, shortest route to success. Forest Service recognizes there is a lot more to learn and do to remove barriers, upgrade technical understanding and assistance to Tribal Nations, and build trust to work together.

Cody Desautel provided closing remarks, offering ITC's thanks everyone for participating and providing their perspectives. Building on the last comment, Mr. Desautel shared that ITC recognizes that there are unique differences around the country, and hopes to pull all the tools in the toolbox and try to provide opportunities that are geographically and tribally specific. When looking at the situation in Southeast Alaska, it is much different from Mr. Desautel's situation in eastern Washington, where they've burned 1.4 million acres on the reservation in the last decade. Mr. Desautel shared the need for more forest harvests to reduce stocking, to create fire resilience. That's very different than what is needed in the Alaska speaker's neck of the woods. Again, the intention for the Listening Session was to hear all those different perspectives and incorporate that into ITC's messaging and its work with Forest Service on how to combine and utilize needed tools to meet the local or geographic needs. Those needs may be met through co-stewardship, shared stewardship agreements, TFPA and GNA. ITC is working with pieces of legislation that will hopefully provide even more tools for the toolbox. Mr. Desautel reiterated that ITC does not view the September 25 session as consultation. ITC is adamant that consultation is at the government-to-government level between tribal elected officials at each respective tribe and the federal government. ITC is an intertribal body that tries to represent and share some of the interests they hear from forest and fire communities within Tribes. ITC recognizes that there's unique differences around the country, and the things mentioned during the Listening Session are tools in the toolbox that can be utilized where appropriate for each geography and tribally specific situation. ITC would

also like to thank Forest Service and acknowledge the opportunity for engagement, feedback, and collaboration between Forest Service and Tribes.

Appendix I: Agenda



Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

ITC Hosted Listening Session: Tribal Priorities for Future Partnerships with Forest Service

Thursday, September 25, 2025

9:30-11am Pacific/ 10:30am-12pm Mountain

11:30am-1pm Central / 12:30-2pm Eastern

Register here: <https://www.zoomgov.com/meeting/register/DI-8XJzQq6pkoRwHmlcOw>

Meeting Goals

Intertribal Timber Council is hosting a listening session for Tribes to share their priorities and questions with Forest Service partners. Tribes are an important partner in improving forest health and resilience, addressing wildfire risks, and supporting a thriving timber industry in rural communities. Forest Service has undergone significant changes during the current administration transition. With a focus on US Timber industry, sustainable forestry, and Shared Stewardship (aka co-stewardship), Tribes play an integral role in that implementation. ITC is hosting a listening session with Tribes and their partners to discuss Tribal priorities and identify questions as Forest Service implements new Executive Orders and Agency priorities. This listening session is intended to support Tribal leaders in discussing their priorities, identifying questions they have and preparing for various upcoming Tribal consultation sessions that USDA Forest Service may hold in the coming months.

Agenda

TIME PT	AGENDA ITEM
9:30am PT	ITC Host Welcome & Introductions Cody Desautel, President Intertribal Timber Council (ITC)
9:45am PT	Forest Service Update on Agency Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Beatra Wilson, USDA Forest Service• Ian Fox, USDA Forest Service• Rob Barnhart, USDA Forest Service <p><i>Additional Forest Service Staff will be in attendance to hear from Tribes and answer questions, where feasible.</i></p>

TIME PT	AGENDA ITEM
10:05am PT	<p>Open Forum</p> <p>Questions and Comments from Tribal Leaders, Staff, and partners.</p> <p><i>* Priority will be given to Tribal representatives.</i></p>
11am PT	ADJOURN

The Udall Foundation prohibits use of third-party automated transcription, recording, and note-taking services on the call.

September 25, 2025, Listening Session, is an *Intertribal Timber Council (ITC) hosted event*. ITC invited USFS leadership and staff to provide updates on a range of topics and issues of importance to Tribes working within and adjacent to National Forest lands. ITC has pulled together a list of materials and information that may be of interest to participants. For reference only, there are dates and links for USDA and Forest Service hosted consultation sessions and forums on specific topics. We hope you will join us on Thursday to identify which Forest Service events to focus on, share your concerns with Forest Service and USDA in preparation for those Tribal Consultation events.

- May 21, 2026, Chief’s Wildfire Letter of Intent 2025: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/inside-fs/leadership/wildfire-letter-intent-2025>
- Secretary’s Memorandum 1078-010: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/sm-1078-010.pdf>
- Secretary’s Memorandum 1078-006: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/sm-1078-006.pdf>
- USDA Released a Reorganization Plan on July 24, 2025 ([Secretary Memorandum 1078-015](#))
 - USDA Virtual and In-person Tribal Consultation series scheduled on Reorganization Plan, details here: [Office of Tribal Relations Consultation website](#)
 - October 14, 2025, Washington DC
 - October 16, 2025, Denver, CO
 - Questions on Reorganization Tribal Consultations, email: tribal.relations@usda.gov.
- USDA Upcoming National Consultations: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/working-with-us/tribal-relations/national-consultation>
 - [Recission of the 2001 Roadless Rule](#)
 - [Geospatial Data Topics](#)
 - [Post-fire Recovery Environmental Assessment](#)
 - [Ski area definition and climbing opportunities](#)
 - Project-level Administrative Review Process 36 CFR 218, details forthcoming
 - Travel management Rule, details forthcoming

- EXPLORE Act (Climbing, Recreation Special Uses, Outfitter & Guide, GNA authority), details forthcoming
- For additional questions to Forest Service please see this list of Points of Contact,
 - <https://www.fs.usda.gov/working-with-us/tribal-relations/contacts> *

*If your Regional Tribal Relations POC is currently vacant, please message either Rachael.novak@usda.gov or Robert.h.bailey@usda.gov

Appendix II: Reference Materials

September 25, 2025, Listening Session, is an *Intertribal Timber Council (ITC) hosted event*. ITC invited USFS leadership and staff to provide updates on a range of topics and issues of importance to Tribes working within and adjacent to National Forest lands. ITC has pulled together a list of materials and information that may be of interest to participants. For reference only, there are dates and links for USDA and Forest Service hosted consultation sessions and forums on specific topics. We hope you will join us on Thursday to identify which Forest Service events to focus on, share your concerns with Forest Service and USDA in preparation for those Tribal Consultation events.

- May 21, 2026, Chief's Wildfire Letter of Intent 2025: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/inside-fs/leadership/wildfire-letter-intent-2025>
- Secretary's Memorandum 1078-010: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/sm-1078-010.pdf>
- Secretary's Memorandum 1078-006: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/sm-1078-006.pdf>
- National Active Management strategy: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/national-active-forest-management-strategy.pdf>
- USDA Released a Reorganization Plan on July 24, 2025 ([Secretary Memorandum 1078-015](#))
 - USDA Virtual and In-person Tribal Consultation series scheduled on Reorganization Plan, details here: [Office of Tribal Relations Consultation website](#)
 - October 14, 2025, Washington DC
 - October 16, 2025, Denver, CO
 - Questions on Reorganization Tribal Consultations, email: [tribal.relations \[at\] usda.gov](mailto:tribal.relations@usda.gov).
- USDA Upcoming National Consultations: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/working-with-us/tribal-relations/national-consultation>
 - [Recission of the 2001 Roadless Rule](#), this consultation is open 120 days (through Nov. 19, 2025)
 - [Geospatial Data Topics](#)
 - [Post-fire Recovery Environmental Assessment](#)
 - [Ski area definition](#) and [climbing opportunities](#), these consultations are open 120 days (through Nov. 19, 2025)
 -
 - Project-level Administrative Review Process 36 CFR 218, details forthcoming
 - Travel management Rule, details forthcoming
 - EXPLORE Act (Climbing, Recreation Special Uses, Outfitter & Guide, GNA authority), details forthcoming
 - All national policy summary analyses for ongoing consultations can be found at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/working-with-us/tribal-relations/national-consultation>

- To reach the FS National Office of Tribal Relations regarding consultations:
SM.FS.otrtribalcon@usda.gov
- For additional Details on the Explore Act and Good Neighbor Authority Agreements, please contact:

For additional questions to Forest Service please see this list of Points of Contact,

- <https://www.fs.usda.gov/working-with-us/tribal-relations/contacts> *

*If your Regional Tribal Relations POC is currently vacant, please message either Rachael.novak@usda.gov or Robert.h.bailey@usda.gov

- Anchor Forest resources:
 - https://www.itcnet.org/issues_projects/issues_2/carbon/anchor-forests/anchor-forests.html
 - <https://academic.oup.com/jof/article/115/5/341/4599877>
 - <https://academic.oup.com/jof/article/119/6/605/6283110>



USDA Forest Service Updates

—
ITC-hosted Tribal Listening Session

Ian Fox

Assistant Director for Forest Products,
USDA Forest Service

September 25, 2025

Topics

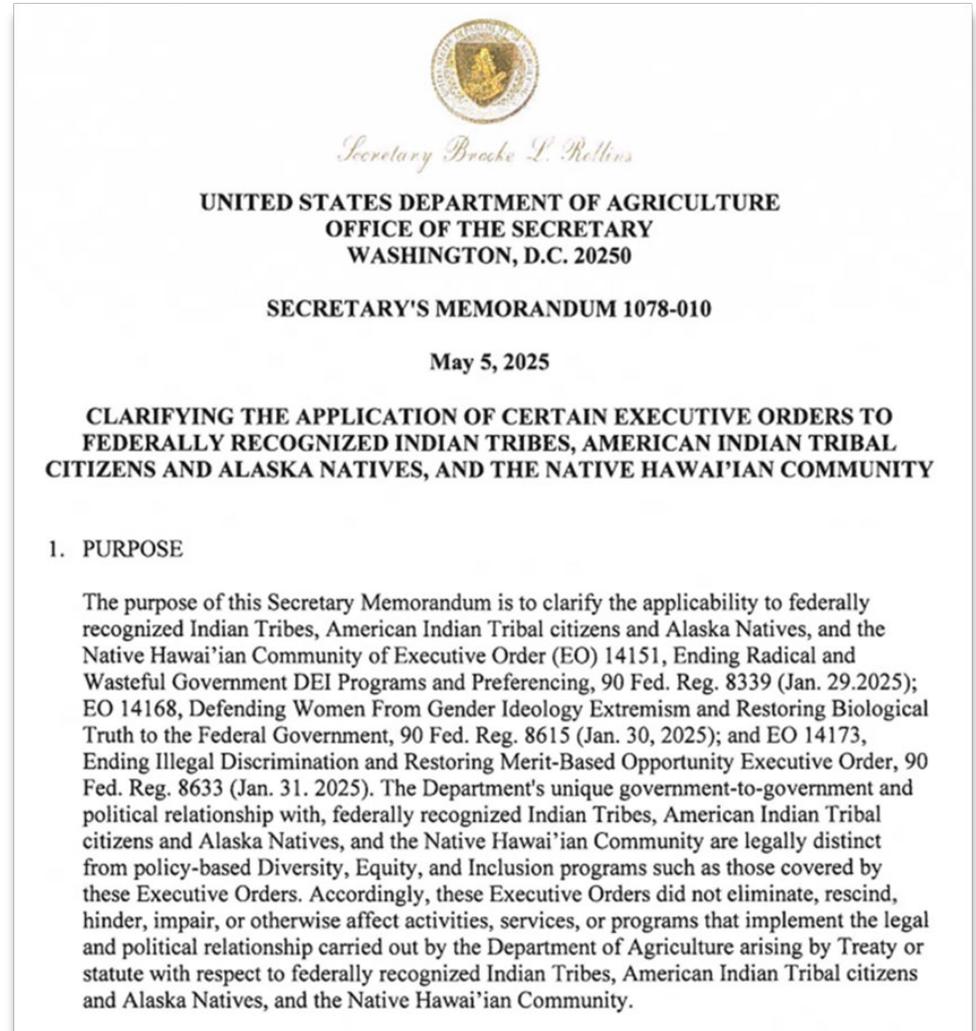
- Federal Trust Relationship (Executive Orders, Secretary's memos, Agency Strategy)
- Shared Stewardship
- Current and Upcoming Consultations
- EXPLORE Act



Government-to-Government Relationship

Secretary's Memorandum 1078-010, May 5, 2025

- Honor United States trust relationship with federally recognized Indian Tribes
- Pays particular attention to the Indian Self-Determination & Education Assistance Act and other statutes



Shared Stewardship

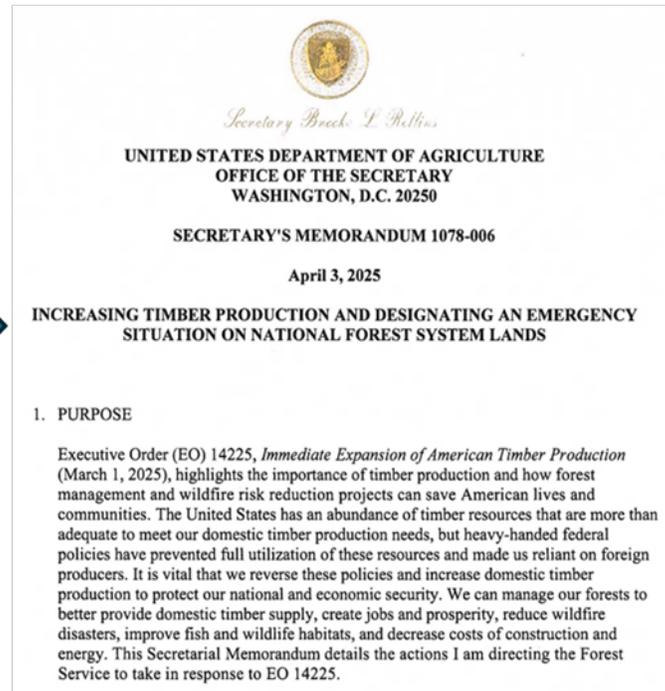
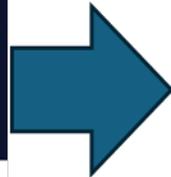
Secretary's Memorandum 1078-010, May 5, 2025

- Highlight the importance of Shared Stewardship agreements, including Tribal Forest Protection Act (TFPA) agreements to accomplish timber production and forest management, including wildfire risk reduction projects.



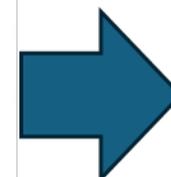
By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, it is hereby ordered:

Section 1. Purpose. The production of timber, lumber, paper, bioenergy, and other wood products (timber production) is critical to our Nation's well-being. Timber production is essential for crucial human activities like construction and energy production. Furthermore, as recent disasters demonstrate, forest management and wildfire risk reduction projects can save American lives and communities.

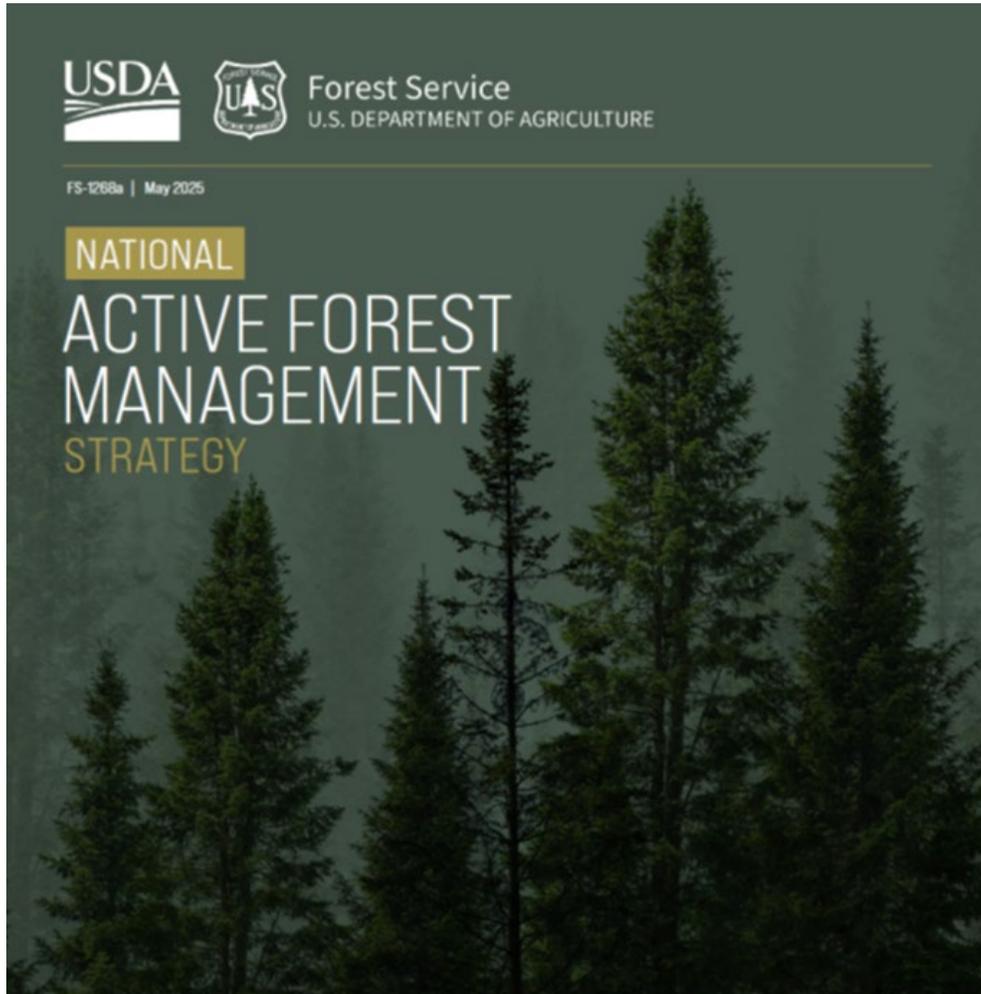


1. PURPOSE

Executive Order (EO) 14225, *Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production* (March 1, 2025), highlights the importance of timber production and how forest management and wildfire risk reduction projects can save American lives and communities. The United States has an abundance of timber resources that are more than adequate to meet our domestic timber production needs, but heavy-handed federal policies have prevented full utilization of these resources and made us reliant on foreign producers. It is vital that we reverse these policies and increase domestic timber production to protect our national and economic security. We can manage our forests to better provide domestic timber supply, create jobs and prosperity, reduce wildfire disasters, improve fish and wildlife habitats, and decrease costs of construction and energy. This Secretarial Memorandum details the actions I am directing the Forest Service to take in response to EO 14225.



National Active Forest Management Strategy– Goals



- Support Rural Economies and the Forest Product Industry
- Reduce the Risk of Destructive Wildfire
- Build Capacity Through Workforce Alignment and Partnerships
- \$200M committed to implement

National Active Forest Management Strategy – Topics

USDA **Forest Service**
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

FS-1268b | May 2025

NATIONAL
ACTIVE FOREST
MANAGEMENT
STRATEGY

As the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service enters a new era, it faces urgent challenges such as meeting domestic lumber demand, reducing wildfire risk, and revitalizing economies. Focusing on priority actions that support active forest management, the agency will fulfill direction from Executive Order 14225 by modernizing processes, building capacity, streamlining compliance, and strengthening partnerships. These actions will deliver greater value to the public, protect natural resources, and ensure America's forests remain resilient and productive for present and future generations.

Goals

- Support Rural Economies and the Forest Product Industry
- Reduce the Risk of Destructive Wildfire
- Build Capacity Through Workforce Alignment and Partnerships

STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS

Capacity Building and Streamlining Implementation

Outdated processes, limited staff, and cumbersome certification processes create challenges for implementing active forest management.

SOLUTIONS:

- Streamline training and certification requirements.
- Make existing authorities more usable and standard.

Shared Stewardship, Partnerships, Contracting, and Markets

Shared stewardship, partnerships, contracting, and markets are critical to successfully meeting the agency's goals of increasing active management to improve forest health and reduce threats of wildfire, insects, and disease.

SOLUTIONS:

- Strengthen partnerships.

- Capacity Building and Streamlining Implementation
- Environmental Compliance
- Shared Stewardship, Partnerships, Contracting, and Markets
- Salvage and Reforestation

National Active Forest Management Strategy – Topics



- Shared Stewardship, Partnerships, Contracting, and Markets
- Strengthen partnerships
- Implement Good Neighbor Authority modifications
- Support markets and facilities

Shared Stewardship- Tribes are a force multiplier

 Forest Service Washington Office 1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

File Code: 1200 Date: September 11, 2025
Route To:

Subject: Chief's Letter of Intent Regarding Forest Service Tribal Relations

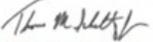
To: District Rangers, Forest and Grassland Supervisors, Regional Foresters, Station Directors,
Deputy Chiefs and Washington Office Directors

As we look to the future and align our strategies around proactive forest management, reducing wildfire risk, and enhancing recreation opportunities, I want to make clear that our relationships with federally recognized Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations (ANCs) are unchanged and unwavering. This unique government-to-government and political relationship is recognized by Congress, case law, treaties, and the founding documents of this great country. Per the Secretary's Memorandum 1078-010, it is the policy of the Department of Agriculture to honor the laws of the United States' trust relationship and Tribal treaty rights and to faithfully execute the laws of the United States as they relate to federally recognized Indian Tribes, American Indian Tribal citizens and Alaska Natives, and the Native Hawaiian Community. This is also Forest Service policy and my expectation.

As we expand forest productivity, increase efficiency, prioritize responsible conservation, and restore our lands and waters, I expect us to also expand our working relationships with Tribes to achieve these ends. Alongside States, our relationship with Tribes is essential in delivering the agency's mission. Tribes share in the stewardship of National Forest System lands, and the agency has a multitude of authorities and agreement mechanisms for this purpose. It is my expectation that we will maximize these opportunities to increase our work with Tribes to support rural economies, reduce wildfire risk, create and sustain healthy and resilient forests and watersheds, and build capacity through workforce realignment.

As the Forest Service implements the Secretary's direction to increase timber production and addresses the forest health and wildfire risk emergency over more than 112 million acres, Tribes and ANCs are valued partners and a force multiplier in our shared work. Per Secretary's Memo 1078-006, the Secretary is providing Tribes and ANCs with the ability to request additional areas to be included in the Forest Health and Fuels Reduction Emergency Situation Determination. We will invite Tribes to bring their expertise to the table to assist us in this work and we will expand these important partnerships by removing unnecessary barriers, adhering to pertinent policy, and ensuring timely contracting and agreement support to fully utilize Tribal shared stewardship authorities and instruments.

Fulfilling our mission of sustaining the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forest and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations will require focus, commitment, and strong partnerships, including with Tribes. Together, we will address emergency needs in the short term and ensure full delivery of the Forest Service mission in the long term. I am committed to this mission for the benefit of the American people and the land we all treasure, and I am honored to share in that dedication with you.


THOMAS M. SCHULTZ, JR.
Chief

 America's Working Forests - Caring Every Day in Every Way 

- Chief Schultz' letter on Tribal Relations, Sept. 11, 2025
- *"We will invite Tribes to bring their expertise to the table to assist us in this work and we will expand these important partnerships by removing unnecessary barriers, adhering to pertinent policy, and ensuring timely contracting and agreement support to fully utilize Tribal shared stewardship authorities and instruments."*

Shared Stewardship- Tribes are a force multiplier

USDA Forest Service Signs Historic Agreement to Reduce Wildfire Risk in Montana

USDA Press Release

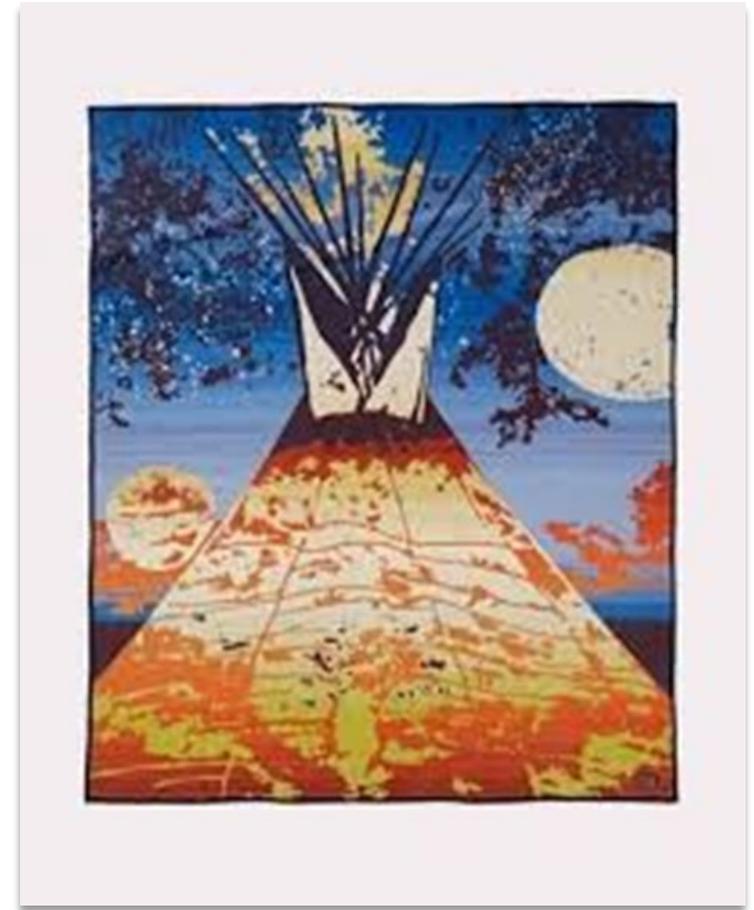
Helena, MT., June 30, 2025 - Today, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke L. Rollins announced U.S. Forest Service Chief Tom Schultz and Montana Governor Greg Gianforte signed a historic Shared Stewardship Memorandum of Understanding, establishing a new framework between the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the State of Montana to advance forest restoration and reduce wildfire risk across the state.

Montana's Shared Stewardship Agreement expands collaborative efforts to accelerate active forest management, safeguard communities, and support sustainable timber production.

- Shared Stewardship agreements
- State of MT example
- Bring communities together to support rural forest infrastructure and economies
- Scale up to address large-scale forest health issues
- 12 authorities, 14 instruments support various aspects of Tribal shared stewardship

National Consultations

- Recission of the 2001 Roadless Rule
- Geospatial Data Topics
- Post-fire Recovery Environmental Assessment
- Ski area definition and climbing opportunities
- Upcoming Tribal Forums- to be scheduled soon
- Travel Management Rule
- EXPLORE Act
- All national policy summary analyses for ongoing consultations can be found at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/working-with-us/tribal-relations/national-consultation>
- To reach the FS National Office of Tribal Relations regarding consultations: SM.FS.otrtribalcon@usda.gov



EXPLORE Act

- Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences (EXPLORE) Act became law on January 4, 2025, with bipartisan support
- Improves recreation opportunities and facilitates greater access
- Requires intra- and interagency coordination
- 75+ provisions with agency implications



EXPLORE Act

- Implementation relies heavily on collaboration with
 - other federal land management agencies
 - Tribes
 - state and local governments
 - nonprofits
 - universities
- FS program manager- oversees implementation
- Strategic plan- identifies agency priorities, timelines, and a staffing structure.



EXPLORE Act

- Implementation
 - Sec. 351 Good Neighbor Authority for Recreation
 - Sec. 122 Protecting America’s Rock Climbing
 - Proposed directives expected to be available for public notice and comment in Fall 2025.
 - Sec. 311, 312, 313, 315, 316, 353 Permitting
 - Directives scheduled to be published for notice and comment spring 2026.
- For more information please contact Elizabeth Townley, Elizabeth.townley@usda.gov, EXPLORE Act Program Manager.



A close-up photograph of a large stack of cut logs, showing the circular cross-sections of the wood with visible growth rings and bark. The logs are piled together, filling the left and center portions of the frame.

Thank you!





Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

EXPLORE Act Modifications to the Good Neighbor Authority

Presented by Washington Office Natural Resources

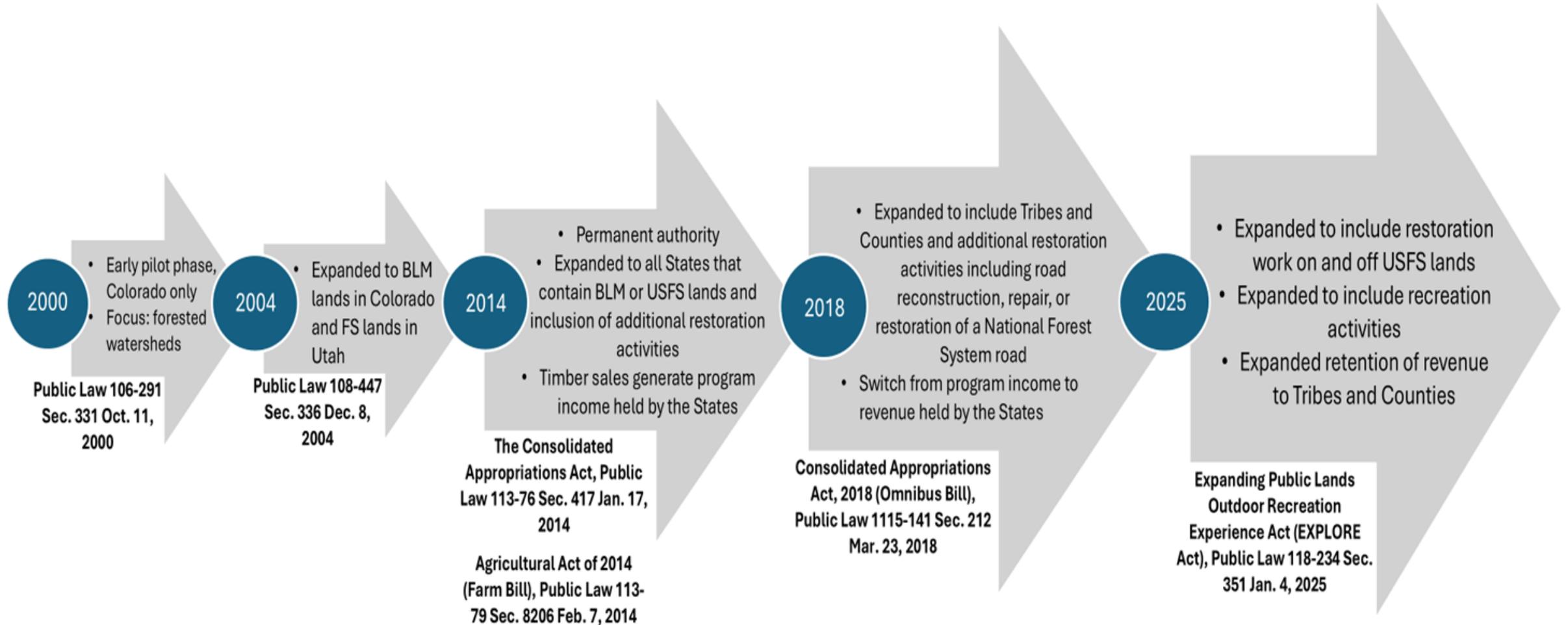
September 25, 2025

Purpose of Today's Presentation

Provide background and context for the expanded Good Neighbor Authority, which authorizes States, Counties, and Tribes to perform **forest, rangeland, and watershed restoration services**, as well as provide **recreation services**, both on and off National Forest System lands.



Progression of Good Neighbor Authority Over the Years



EXPLORE Act Expands the Good Neighbor Authority

- The EXPLORE Act (Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences Act) was signed into law on January 4, 2025.
- The law includes expansion of Good Neighbor Authority. Specific updates to Good Neighbor Authority provided through the EXPLORE Act include:
 - Available in the United States and in Puerto Rico
 - “Good Neighbor Agreements” can be entered into with any Tribal Nation
 - Allows the use of revenue for restoration and recreation services to occur either on or off National Forest System lands
 - Allowable activities include forest, rangeland, and watershed restoration services, as well as recreation services

EXPLORE Act Section 351 Implementation

Good Neighbor has used a sand table exercises also know as Early Adopters to pilot the implementation of the law with the following objectives

- Start work as quickly as possible
- Assess changes in Forest Service Handbooks for direction to the field
- Assess changes in Agency agreement forms that will require OMB review
- Early Adopters Phase I was started April 2025
- Early Adopters Phase II



Forest Service

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

Appendix III: Chief's Letter of Intent Regarding Forest Service Tribal Relations



File Code: 1200
Route To:

Date:

Subject: Chief's Letter of Intent Regarding Forest Service Tribal Relations

To: District Rangers, Forest and Grassland Supervisors, Regional Foresters, Station Directors, Deputy Chiefs and Washington Office Directors

As we look to the future and align our strategies around proactive forest management, reducing wildfire risk, and enhancing recreation opportunities, I want to make clear that our relationships with federally recognized Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations (ANCs) are unchanged and unwavering. This unique government-to-government and political relationship is recognized by Congress, case law, treaties, and the founding documents of this great country. Per the Secretary's Memorandum 1078-010, it is the policy of the Department of Agriculture to honor the laws of the United States' trust relationship and Tribal treaty rights and to faithfully execute the laws of the United States as they relate to federally recognized Indian Tribes, American Indian Tribal citizens and Alaska Natives, and the Native Hawai'ian Community. This is also Forest Service policy and my expectation.

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As the Forest Service implements the Secretary's direction to increase timber production and addresses the forest health and wildfire risk emergency over more than 112 million acres, Tribes and ANCs are valued partners and a force multiplier in our shared work. Per Secretary's Memo 1078-006, the Secretary is providing Tribes and ANCs with the ability to request additional areas to be included in the Forest Health and Fuels Reduction Emergency Situation Determination. We will invite Tribes to bring their expertise to the table to assist us in this work and we will expand these important partnerships by removing unnecessary barriers, adhering to pertinent policy, and ensuring timely contracting and agreement support to fully utilize Tribal shared stewardship authorities and instruments.

Fulfilling our mission of sustaining the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forest and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations will require focus, commitment, and strong partnerships, including with Tribes. Together, we will address emergency needs in the short term and ensure full delivery of the Forest Service mission in the long term. I am committed to this mission for the benefit of the American people and the land we all treasure, and I am honored to share in that dedication with you.

THOMAS M. SCHULTZ, JR.
Chief



Appendix IV: Questions and Comments for Follow-up

The following is a reiteration comments shared above, and questions that were not answered or only answered in part. This Appendix is intended as a reference tool only. Tribes are encouraged to share these questions and comments during Government-to-Government meetings with Forest Service and USDA.

GNA and EXPLORE Act Funding and Revenue

Question: Are there example projects for GNA, from beginning to end?

- **Answer:** Not yet as the program is still in the beginning stages. Forest Service has just had one Tribal Nation, Nez Perce, signed an Early Adopter Agreement, however work has not yet started.

Authority of Tribes to Steward Resources on Forest Lands

Questions

Question: To enhance sovereignty, can agreements be created to:

- Allow tribes to lead NEPA compliance on joint projects?
- Grant Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs) the jurisdiction of State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs) on ancestral lands?
- Designate tribal scientists as the lead for consulting with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?
- **Answer:** With regards to GNA, they look at projects a whole when they sign agreements. With NEPA, they can have Tribes do the work that would be the NEPA analysis, as the “left side of the triangle” where they do surveys and engagement. However, Forest Service reserves the right to sign and review any NEPA documents completed by the Tribes to ensure compliance with regulations and applicable laws.

Post-NEPA, Tribal Nations, can do the work from the preparation such timber sales and restoration work under GNA. The sandtable exercises done bring in all these different points, and they’ll be looking at how to address these topics to provide answers to each of these specific questions. Forest Services are hoping to develop and provide training through the agreement with ITC on implementation as well.

Comments

Comment: Tribal-Led Stewardship Through Land Leases

To truly build tribal capacity, it is vital to move beyond a dependent relationship and empower tribes to lead stewardship efforts. We strongly encourage the Forest Service to identify and pilot opportunities to lease non-recreational priority areas to tribes.

This model would allow tribes to take the lead in directing land management projects, with the Forest Service providing technical assistance and on-the-ground support during training or off-season periods. This approach fosters genuine co-management, builds tribal expertise, and creates a more efficient and collaborative partnership.

Comment: Expanding THPO Authority

We also urge the Forest Service to advocate within the federal government for an expansion of Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) authority. Specifically, we request that the Forest Service ask the National Park Service to direct State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) to formally recognize the jurisdiction of THPOs over their respective tribal lands AND ancestral areas, ensuring tribes have the primary voice in their own cultural resource management.

Infrastructure Capacity, Supply Needs, and Capacity Constraints within Forest Service and Tribes

Questions

Question: How is the Forest Service going to address the limited forest health staff, which has historically been low and has been further reduced - especially entomology and plant pathogens - these positions are essential for regional interagency forest health management.

- **Answer:** Now that major staffing changes in Forest Service have settled, Forest Service is looking at remaining capacity across the board including Subject Matter Experts and has created interim operations plans to leverage capacity and stay nimble in ensuring minimal lapses in work.

Question: While Forest Services is helping support rural communities but there is a lack of lumber mills in certain communities. It is frustrating to push for timber harvest, but it is unclear where all this timber will go. Small logging companies can't handle the capacity, and a discussion has been had at local/county/State level and Tribes want to step in but how is it feasible? Maybe supplemental funding?

- **Answer:** Where infrastructure doesn't exist, it will take substantial commitment to justify the investment in new infrastructure. With the authorities available today, there can be a combination approach of wood producers to provide supply and create the need for more infrastructure and bring confidence that new investments need to be made. While it's not a short-term fix, there are opportunities, and in the short term they are working to increase capacity of the existing wood basket. Additionally, there are transportation limitations.
- **Answer:** Programs such as the Wood Innovations Grant Programs, Transportation Assistance Programs run on cycles and Tribes can be aware of those as they will continue, in addition Forest Service's commitment to supporting long term supply and new infrastructure.

Question: Who's tracking these successes of production to help lean towards large investments to mills?

- **Answer:** Tracking is limited and geographically specific, and additionally it is up to individual agencies to track it, and they don't share production accomplishments across all land managers.

Question: To overcome BIA capacity limitations, can the Forest Service create agreements to help the BIA approve prescribed burn plans and training to accelerate on-the-groundwork?

- **Answer:** Forest Service and BIA are still working with capacity limitations and best the agencies can interact.

Comments

Comment: [There are] real opportunities to meet timber production goals, increase wood innovation, and reduce wildfire risk across the west and in Alaska. Very minimal mill/industry and workforce capacity though. This will require large federal investment in Tribes to co-manage lands, execute the EXPLORE Act, and build workforce and infrastructure.

Comment: The anchor forests concept may be helpful to investigate. Mr. Desautel noted that ITC could revisit this concept, as they have not worked on it in about a decade. (See Appendix II for resources on anchor forests.)

Comment: [They] need to look at innovations to deal with underutilized and residual wood from mills and other timber activities, such as pre-commercial thinning. Increased jobs and infrastructure could support what to do with these products – bioenergy, renewables, etc. Tribes such as Yakama are doing some of the most innovative work but need support on infrastructure. There is a missing link on incentives to have logging trucks, thinning, etc. Consider adding capacity to the front end of any future increase in harvest in rural/remote off-road communities such as in Alaska.

Comment: Some rural places, such as Southeast Alaska, do not have the infrastructure or good wood for timber production and biomass feasibility. These increases in production expectations will hurt rural communities, especially since resources for upkeep and growth improvements have not been provided (such as thinning).

- **Additional Comment:** To achieve a sustainable supply of forest products in balance with ecological health, [we] advocate for a planning model built on early collaboration with Tribal and scientific experts. This process would guide a mosaic landscape approach, where active management like prescribed burning and variable harvesting is carefully planned around a network of preserved forested corridors to maintain biodiversity. By establishing a clear, science-based, and mutually agreed-upon framework from the start, this model will inherently streamline the NEPA process, increase overall efficiency, and reduce project costs.

Relationship Dynamics between Forest Service, Tribes, and Rural Communities

Comments

Comment: [It seems] that USDA Forest Service is committed to working with Tribes. [However], so many solid relationships were destroyed this year, as Forest Service employees were ripped from their positions. It is those relationships, built over decades, that lead to the best results. It appears that we are starting over.

Complexity of Forest Service Partnerships and Agreements

Questions

Question: Has there been an internal review of Grants and Agreements that are available to Tribes to reduce the huge burden on Tribes to implement a grant or agreement? Those revenues sometimes aren't enough to carry into future projects, and for Tribes with smaller staff, that review is critical for Forest Service to hear from Tribes on what their process looks like and not assume where issues are.

- **Answer:** Forest Service values understanding bylaws and incorporation of input by Tribes into the documentation and are always looking for ways to reach out and discuss throughout development.

Other Comments and Questions

Questions

Question: How are current agreements, such as within California SHPO Region 5, going to be impacted by the USDA Reorganization?

- **Answer:** The USDA Reorganization is occurring at a department level, and Forest Service staff encouraged participants to provide their questions and comments via public comment and/or at the upcoming Consultation. Please email [tribal.relations \[at\] usda.gov](mailto:tribal.relations[at]usda.gov) with additional questions. Additionally, the Forest Service is committed to existing shared stewardship agreements, but it is unclear what impact the reorganization will have.
- **Additional Comment:** These instruments are valuable but become challenged when capacity is an issue. Region 5 agreement with SHPO is currently being updated and [the] contention that it should include heritage level projects and to also direct them to accommodate the flexibility offered in things like screened undertakings. The stovepipe created externally from agreement in CA creates a lack of accountability when it comes to supporting Tribally led projects. [They're] in a categorical exclusion for a sagebrush fuels project, and this agreement provides a lot of flexibility, but the authority vested lacks accountability when they don't offer that. Partner-led projects shouldn't be held to a higher standard than the agency itself. Take the opportunity to give direction to local units for ways to be more efficient.

Question: How is Forest Service interacting with State-recognized Tribes based on Letter and Memos?

- **Answer:** The Forest Service has not seen a change in posture in how they collaborate and work with non-Federally Recognized Tribes.

Question: Also wondering if there's been any clarity regarding the certification process as a part of the new USDA NEPA regs? We have a collaborative project we're working with our USFS district on, but we've been unclear on the certification process that will "start the clock."

- **Answer:** Forest Service will need to provide a response later and will track this question.

Comment

Comment: As a bit of history, I'm from Southeast Alaska and we've been involved with the roadless rule since 2001 and weathered two battles with USDA Forest Service and won both. The infrastructure is no longer in Southeast Alaska. There used to be 3 pulp mills in Sitka, Ketchikan, and Wrangell. Most of the good wood has been removed from our forests, they've been logged forever. They quit logging because it cost too much. The cost went very high [in Southeast Alaska] and with cheaper wood coming from other countries, logging here wasn't feasible. Also, Forest Service was subsidizing the timber industry very heavily.

It is just my opinion, but I don't know how it can be called consultation when the Forest Service and USDA already know what they are going to do. So, what are we doing here? Are we minimizing the impacts like where I'm from in Tongass National Forest. Consultation needs to be where we are at the table, we can protect what is at the [discussion] table. It is not just listening, [Tribes] must be able to protect our lands. Co-management is the least we would accept.

On my little island of Kupreanof Island, years of logging reduced the populations of deer, moose, bear and everything else. Now that logging has stopped for decades we are seeing growth of our deer, moose, and bear populations. [These populations and] the streams around us are just now healing from the logging. I know other rural communities in Southeast Alaska will be hit hard again [from increased logging]. [For example,] Kassan and Old Island (aka Prince Wales Island) those islands have been logged extensively. There is only a small fraction of old growth timber. I think a good point is that there are so many millions of acres that have been clear-cut logged, but nothing has been done to help those acres grow. There is no thinning or work to help those areas grow. Instead, Forest service is looking to shut down roads they have built now that they've logged those acres. Those acres need to be taken care of and [support] second growth trees and leave the old growth trees alone. It's just my opinion, but instead of targeting rural communities in Southeast Alaska, log in the bigger communities. They won't let you because they have more power than the smaller tribes.