



BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Mark Newcomb, Chair
Wes Gardner, Vice-Chair
Luther Propst
Natalia D. Macker
Len Carlman

April 21, 2026

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary of U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable John Barrasso
United States Senate
307 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harriet Hageman
U.S. House of Representatives
170 Cannon Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Cynthia Lummis
United States Senate
127A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mark Gordon
Governor of Wyoming
State Capitol Building
200 W 24th Street
Cheyenne, WY 82002

Re: Federal Land Management Office Actions and Erosion of Institutional Capacity

Dear Secretary Rollins, Senator Barrasso, Senator Lummis, Representative Hageman, and Governor Gordon:

The Teton County Board of County Commissioners writes to express strong concern regarding dramatic actions announced in a March 31, 2026, press release from the US Department of Agriculture¹. Implementation of the measures noted in the press release will undoubtedly result in the erosion of institutional capacity and resource stewardship within federal land management agencies, and particularly within the US Forest Service. That is not acceptable.

Federal employees on the Bridger-Teton National Forest manage approximately 1,095,900 acres in Teton County.² This is 40.6% of the total land area in our County. Federal employees on the

¹ <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2026/03/31/usda-prioritizing-common-sense-forest-management-moves-forest-service-headquarters-salt-lake-city>

² At 585,238 acres, the Teton Wilderness is the largest designated USFS entity in Teton County. Other key Bridger-Teton National Forest designations include the Gros Ventre Wilderness at 317,874 acres, approximately 200,000 acres of multiple use lands and approximately 325 of the 374.1 miles of wild and scenic rivers protected by the Craig Thomas Snake River Headwaters Act of 2008.

Caribou-Targhee National Forest manages about 11% of the acreage in Teton County.³ Together, by their vast acreage, major economic importance, and wide-ranging cultural impact, these two National Forests have long given Teton County ample reason to be dedicated to responsible partnership and stewardship work with the US Forest Service. With a common dedication to the greatest good for the greatest number for the long run, and open public decision-making processes, the regional US Forest Service has built successful partnerships and achieved good forest management outcomes. That positive relationship is now threatened.

Moving the headquarters to Salt Lake County and shifting from a regional structure to a state-based management model will affect 193 million acres of US Forest Service lands and tens of thousands of employees. Such sweeping changes should not be implemented without transparent process, without clear justification, and without meaningful public engagement.

Actions that destabilize experienced workforce structures run directly counter to the agency management principles first laid down 120 years ago by Forest Service Chief Gifford Pinchot. By emphasizing the interconnectedness of natural resources and the necessity of managing ecosystems for what he called “the long run,” Chief Pinchot fundamentally shaped American natural resource management. The actions noted in the March 31, 2026 USDA press release appear to materially weaken the institution responsible for carrying out responsible federal forest land management. If implemented, these actions will jeopardize the continued stewardship of our public trust estate for future generations.

The Forest Service is widely recognized as the premier wildland fire fighting agency in the world. We benefit from that. In Teton County, in just the past twenty-five (25) years, with their fast, experienced, sophisticated and effective responses to wildland fires, we have seen Forest Service-led teams save countless homes and other structures, (and, probably, many lives as well). They do it with training, longevity of service, coordinated resources, food and fuel and specialized equipment, and high attention to agency and public safety. As the intermountain west, including Teton County, approaches a spring, summer and fall fire season on the heels of an extraordinarily dry and warm winter, a well-organized, fully staffed, experienced and well-trained Forest Service fire fighting team is essential.

Relocating US public land management agencies has consequences. The relocation of the Bureau of Land Management headquarters to Grand Junction resulted in substantial staff attrition and measurable degradation of agency capacity. The Government Accountability Office found that vacancies increased by approximately 169 percent, contributing to delays in policy development and reduced effectiveness⁴. Leadership functions were later returned to Washington, D.C. to restore access to decision-makers and coordination.

The stated objective of placing national agency staff closer to the land does not match likely outcomes. Only a limited number of employees are expected to relocate, while many experienced staff may leave federal service entirely. The result is not improved efficiency. It is erosion of

³ The Caribou-Targhee National Forest acreage total in Teton County, Wyoming is approximately 306,000, comprised of the Jedediah Smith Wilderness Area at 123,451 acres, Winegar Hole Wilderness Area at 10,715 acres, 53% of the Palisades Wilderness Study area at 71,780 acres, and about 100,000 acres of multiple use forest lands between the Jed Smith, Winegar Hole and the western boundary of Teton County.

⁴ GAO-22-104247: <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-104247.pdf>

institutional capacity and loss of expertise. These actions also impose significant human and operational costs. Repeated displacement of staff and families tied to shifting administrative decisions undermines retention, depresses morale and accelerates loss of experienced professionals.

The proposed redistribution of leadership functions risks reducing coordination with Wyoming communities and elected representatives. This is opposite the stated goals of the March 31, 2026, USDA press release. In several cases, the press release plan places decision-making further from the landscapes and local governments most affected. For example, our elected federal delegation now has ready access to the headquarters staff in Washington, D.C and can meet and conduct oversight efficiently. Placing these staff in Salt Lake City creates a firewall for communications, hamstringing our delegation's ability to engage in land-use policy.

Further, the current regional office structure places forest leadership for the Bridger-Teton National Forest and Caribou-Targhee National Forests in Ogden, Utah, a short 3.5hr drive from Teton County. Placing these offices in Cheyenne more than doubles the distance to meet with these decision makers. If the goal is to bring mid-level National Forest decision-makers and support staff closer to the Forests and their adjacent Wyoming communities, Cheyenne is a terrible location. We respectfully ask that if this proposal holds, Lander be considered as the Wyoming State Office headquarters. Lander is a central location that will facilitate equal and efficient access to all Forests and communities across Wyoming.

One of the aims of the March 31, 2026, press release announcement is the closure of USFS research stations. Management for "the long run" benefits from long histories of continuous research and development. Experimental forests have yielded significant gains in understanding forests and forested landscapes. Teton County is particularly interested in maintaining a solid core of research capability in wildfire science. Forest stewardship that optimizes the health and benefits of our National Forests requires an array of research stations and research partnerships with land grant universities and others around our nation will help advance forestry science.

Teton County has a strong interest in durable, effective, and locally informed land management. Time and again, we've built successful shared agreements over the management of public lands. Continuity of operations, retention of experienced personnel, provision of adequate funding, and meaningful engagement with affected communities is essential. "If it ain't broke don't fix it."

Notably, the Wyoming Legislature overwhelmingly passed a joint resolution⁵ during the 2026 legislative session that was then signed by Governor Gordon. SJ0009 showed broad support for public land ownership, stewardship and access. It received strong support because it evoked the tremendous benefits and enjoyment these lands provide Wyoming citizens and our economy. SJ0009 emphasizes local input in land use decisions and opposition to wholesale transfer or sale of public lands. This resolution is directly pertinent to these decisions to dismantle US Forest Service offices and research sites across the Nation. It warrants your respect.

Teton County is concerned the restructuring referenced in the March 31, 2026, press release will result in a measurable loss of capability at precisely the moment when the people of Wyoming,

⁵ <https://wyoleg.gov/2026/Enroll/SJ0009.pdf>

including the 24,333 residents of Teton County and our several million annual visitors who are drawn here by our public lands, can least afford it.

Sincerely,

Mark Newcomb, Chair
Teton County Board of County Commissioners

Attest: Maureen E. Murphy
Teton County Clerk