

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 29, 2026

The Honorable Doug Burgum  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20242

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

Dear Secretary Burgum and Secretary Rollins,

We write today regarding the dire wildfire and drought conditions currently facing the Western United States. As you know, record-high temperatures and drought conditions have resulted in historic snowpack deficits across the Western United States. As we approach the summer months, we write to express our deep concerns about these conditions and respectfully implore your agencies to take immediate actions to better prepare for unprecedented wildfire risks.

Every major river basin in the West experienced one of the warmest winters on record in 2025-2026, in addition to nearly every basin experiencing record low snowpack, or snow water equivalent, levels.<sup>1</sup> The Colorado River Basin, for example, reported record-low snow water equivalent, and the majority of the Western United States is currently under 50 percent of the median snowpack for this point in the year.<sup>2</sup> More than 60% of the United States is currently experiencing drought conditions.<sup>3</sup>

These record-low levels of snowpack and moisture, coupled with high winter temperatures, have significantly increased wildfire risk throughout the West as temperatures continue to rise heading into the summer months, threatening to overwhelm federal, state, local, and tribal firefighting resources. We have already seen fires burning throughout the winter months, as more than 22,000 fires have burned 1.8 million acres in 2026 – a 20-year high for this point in the year.<sup>4</sup> As snowpack worsens and the number of high-severity wildfires increases, these conditions will require continued partnership and quick action from all levels of government.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) are integral partners, along with state, local, and tribal governments, in mitigating, monitoring, and responding to wildfires. In light of the increased risk of wildfire and resulting resource needs this year, rapid, responsive coordination between federal, state, local, and tribal partners will be critically important. We urge you to take immediate steps to maximize early detection of wildland fires and reduce any delays to ensure that federal resources are prepared to respond efficiently.

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<sup>1</sup> [Drought Status Update: Snow Drought Current Conditions and Impacts in the West.](#)

<sup>2</sup> [NRCS National Water and Climate Center Interactive Map- Snow Water Equivalent.](#)

<sup>3</sup> [More than 60 percent of U.S. is covered by drought as impacts worsen.](#)

<sup>4</sup> [National Interagency Fire Center National Fire News.](#)

Therefore, we request that you take the following actions and provide our offices with a briefing on their status by May 29, 2026:

1. Take steps to convene additional cooperative preparedness efforts with local, state, and tribal governments and across all federal agencies to increase preparedness and rapid response capabilities. Quick, collaborative coordination across all levels of government will be critical to addressing and responding to wildfires, particularly during this heightened risk.
2. Work to pre-position assets and resources across the West in areas of highest risk before a fire breaks out, using qualified and capable state and local agencies to strengthen response capacity. This includes partnering with willing local fire departments to participate in severity assignments throughout the duration of the spring, summer, and fire season, including engine, crew, and overhead supports. Early partnerships with local and state fire departments will strengthen response capabilities in the areas of highest risk— decreasing costs, improving efficiency, and utilizing local knowledge of terrain, vegetation, and geography.
3. Continue with planning and implementation of wildfire mitigation projects—including the use of hazardous fuels reduction, actions to increase defensible space, and in areas that contribute to Potential Operational Delineation (POD) management strategies and adjacent to private lands—to the extent possible. This includes providing flexibility for pre-positioned federal fire crews to address wildfire mitigation needs where practical.
4. Extend the duration of exclusive-use federal contracts for wildfire resources this year so that they are available throughout the season. This includes beginning aviation contracts earlier in the spring and extending them throughout the entirety of this high-risk period, to ensure that needed resources are available early and late into the year as needed.
5. Provide an update on the planned reorganization of the USDA and DOI, and how this reorganization will impact wildfire preparedness and response capabilities for 2026.
6. Publicly release DOI and USFS staffing levels for 2026, including the number of federal wildland firefighters that have been hired and the number of Red-Card-holding staff that will be available to assist with wildfire suppression and response efforts.
7. Suspend existing hiring freezes and promotion prohibitions for all open positions in areas that are experiencing Moderate to Exceptional Drought (D1-D4), per the U.S. Drought Monitor.

We thank you for your attention to this urgent need across the Western United States and your swift actions to increase and accelerate wildfire preparedness well in advance of the summer months.

Sincerely,



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Joe Neguse  
Member of Congress



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Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator