

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0506

March 2, 2026

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary
United States Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Burgum,

We strongly urge you to develop a comprehensive reforestation strategy for Department of Interior (DOI) managed forests as an integral component to accomplishing President Trump's public land management goals for strengthening wildfire response, post-wildfire recovery, and active forest management. DOI manages millions of acres of land in need of reforestation due to the cumulative impacts of extreme wildfire, extended drought, and invasive insects and diseases that have decimated our forests. Without timely reforestation, these scarred landscapes can be highly susceptible to flash flooding, impacting the public health and economic stability of nearby communities. Failing to address reforestation needs after tree mortality events can also inhibit recreation access and create fodder for future extreme wildfire. Reforestation, when conducted appropriately, is a valuable forest management tool and can help mitigate future threats to DOI-managed forests and surrounding communities.

Between the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, Fish & Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs' Tribal trust lands, and potential abandoned mine lands overseen by the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, there is an estimated immediate 2.7-million-acre backlog of reforestation needs. Other analyses have identified approximately 11 million acres of DOI lands that are ecologically suitable for reforestation across the lower 48 states.¹

Reforestation is an effective wildfire management strategy for both pre-wildfire forest management and post-wildfire recovery. Post-disturbance reforestation can counteract forest loss, aid in reducing risk of future repeated high-severity fire, and re-establish forests that are more resilient to fire, insects, and diseases. Well-designed reforestation can also address safety concerns of both the public and forest workers and serves as a future timber base, thereby sustaining future forest products. Importantly, forest restoration, which can include pre-wildfire reforestation site preparation done in conjunction with active forest management, can also save tax-payer dollars.

¹ This ~11 million acre estimate is derived from a spatial analysis of [reforestationhub.org](https://www.reforestationhub.org) data originally published in [Cook-Patton et al. 2020](#) and recently updated by Dr. Ciara Hovis in February 2023.

Reforestation also significantly improves post-fire landscape resilience. Burn scars left in the wake of wildfire prevent the absorption of rainfall, resulting in land that is more susceptible to flash flooding, debris flows, and landslides—events that threaten local economies, water supplies, and can even turn deadly. Unfortunately, there are far too many examples of this catastrophic weather whiplash that have occurred across the country. Timely, well-planned reforestation can prevent tragedies like these by accelerating forest recovery and stabilizing post-fire soil conditions.

To prioritize reforestation as a forest health and wildfire management strategy, **we urge you to conduct a reforestation needs and capability assessment** on lands managed by DOI. To our knowledge, DOI does not currently track reforestation needs or accomplishments across all its subagencies. We recommend addressing this data gap with a full department-wide needs and capability assessment. The recent establishment of the United States Wildland Fire Service recognizes the need to coordinate wildfire management across all DOI subagencies, and we encourage the Administration to take a similar approach to coordinating reforestation across the Department. As part of this assessment, and in alignment with the comprehensive technology roadmap called for in Executive Order (E.O.) 14308, we encourage the use of cutting-edge technology, such as remote sensing, to assist in identifying and prioritizing land for reforestation and for post-reforestation monitoring. Technology can play an important and cost-effective role in not only quantifying the agency's reforestation needs, but also in future reforestation efforts.

Second, we believe that effective cross-agency collaboration is critical to make the most of limited Federal resources. As such, **we ask that you enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the United States Forest Service** regarding the cross-agency coordination of reforestation needs. An MOU should focus on the sharing of procurement and property services (including federal seedling nurseries), the sharing of expertise (including planting techniques and knowledge of fire-resistant species), the processing of agreements with reforestation partners to increase the speed at which reforestation occurs, and cross-agency sharing of data, an ask that aligns with President Trump's prioritization of data sharing called for in E.O. 14308.

Finally, we urge you to prioritize reforestation efforts and address reforestation backlogs through the *Make American Beautiful Again Commission* established in E.O. 14313. Notably, E.O. 14313 calls for "actionable recommendations for improving conservation efforts" and "solutions to expand access to clean drinking water...and to improve water quality and availability." Reforestation plays a critical role in addressing these needs. As such, in your role as Chairman of the Commission, **we request information concerning your plans for this Commission as they relate to reforestation**, especially in regard to the outstanding reforestation needs across the country.

We thank you for your attention to this important matter and we look forward to your responses to our requests.

Sincerely,



Doris Matsui
Member of Congress



Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



Kevin Mullin
Member of Congress



Russ Fulcher
Member of Congress

CC: The Honorable Brooke Rollins, Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture
Tom Schultz, Chief of the U.S. Forest Service
Brian Fennessy, Director of the United States Wildland Fire Service