



Protecting Forest Service Research & Stewardship: A Faithful Call to Action

What Is Happening?

The **U.S. Forest Service has announced a sweeping reorganization that would close 57 of its 77 research facilities** across the country, consolidate research into a centralized office, and relocate its headquarters from Washington, D.C. to Salt Lake City. These **research stations study wildfire risk, forest health, water quality, climate change, and biodiversity**, often through long-term experiments that span decades.

While the administration says the changes will improve efficiency and bring leadership closer to the land, **scientists, former agency leaders, and communities warn that closing these facilities could disrupt or end critical research**. Many fear that relocating staff will lead to the loss of experienced scientists and weaken the knowledge needed to care for nearly 200 million acres of public lands.

At a time of increasing wildfires, drought, and environmental stress, **these changes raise serious concerns about whether we are strengthening or weakening our ability to steward forests** for future generations.

The ELCA's Commitment

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) affirms that **caring for creation is a central part of our faith**. In *Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice* (1993), we are called to serve as stewards of God's earth—protecting ecosystems, preserving biodiversity, and ensuring the wellbeing of all people.

Our church teaches that:

- Creation is God's gift, entrusted to our care.
- Sound science is a vital tool for faithful stewardship.
- Environmental harm often falls most heavily on vulnerable communities.
- We are called to act in ways that promote justice, sustainability, and the common good.

Forest Service research has long supported these goals by helping us understand how to care for forests, respond to wildfire, protect clean water, and adapt to a changing climate.

Why Lutherans Must Speak Up

- **Faith and Knowledge Together:** Caring for creation requires both moral commitment and scientific understanding. Weakening research undermines both.
- **Stewardship of Creation:** Forests are complex, living systems. Without ongoing research, we risk managing them without the knowledge needed to sustain them.
- **Care for Neighbor:** Healthy forests protect clean air and water, reduce wildfire risks, and support communities and livelihoods.
- **Responsibility to Future Generations:** Long-term research helps ensure that forests remain healthy and resilient for generations to come.
- **Public Trust:** Our national forests belong to all people. Decisions about their care should be grounded in knowledge, transparency, and the common good.

As Lutherans, we are **called to speak out when actions may harm creation and our neighbors**. This is a moment for faithful advocacy.

Midwest Facilities Slated for Probable Closure

South Dakota

- Rapid City

Minnesota

- Grand Rapids
- Ely

Wisconsin

- Prairie du Chien
- Wisconsin Rapids

Illinois

- Evanston

Michigan

- East Lansing
- Houghton
- L'Anse
- Wellston

Talking Points & Sample Letter

***What do you know about your Members of Congress? Are they climate skeptics, but concerned about wildfires? Do they emphasize their faith a lot? How might this Forest Service change impact your community or state? Choose your points based on what is more likely to persuade them.**

Congressional "Ask":

I urge you to oppose in the closure of Forest Service research facilities, including those in the Midwest. Please work to ensure continued funding and support for forest research, and exercise oversight of the Forest Service reorganization.

Possible Talking Points (choose a couple):

- I believe we are called to be good stewards of God's creation, and that requires strong scientific research.
- Forest Service research helps us understand wildfire risk, forest health, and climate impacts.
- Closing research stations threatens long-term studies that cannot be replaced.
- Relocating scientists may lead to the loss of experienced staff and institutional knowledge.
- This comes at a time of worsening wildfires, drought, and environmental stress.
- Healthy forests are essential for clean air, clean water, wildlife, and local economies.
- Research helps protect communities from wildfire and environmental harm.
- Public lands belong to all Americans and should be managed using the best available knowledge.
- Weakening research capacity may lead to poorer decision-making and higher long-term costs.
- These changes could shift responsibility to states without ensuring they have the resources to respond.
- Future generations depend on the decisions we make today about our forests.

Example (please use your own words)

Date

Dear Rep. _____ (or Sen. _____),

As a Lutheran and a concerned constituent, I urge you to oppose the closure of U.S. Forest Service research facilities and to support strong federal investment in forest research.

My faith calls me to care for God's creation and to seek the wellbeing of my neighbors. Forest Service research plays an important role in helping us understand wildfire risks, protect clean water, and ensure that our forests remain healthy and resilient. Closing these facilities and relocating scientists risks losing critical knowledge at a time when environmental challenges are growing more severe.

I ask you to exercise oversight of this reorganization and to work to preserve the scientific capacity needed to manage our national forests for the benefit of all.

Thank you!
Name
Address

Minnesota: <https://www.lutheranadvocacymn.org/> Wisconsin: <https://loppw.org/>

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