



United States Senate

June 2, 2021

Ms. Vicki Christiansen
Chief, U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Chief Christiansen:

I am writing to follow up on the federal wildland firefighting issues we discussed during your appearance before the Senate Interior and Environment Appropriations Subcommittee on May 26, 2021. As I noted at the hearing, the federal government must address long-term issues with our firefighting workforce. I urge you to address inequities in pay between federal and state wildland firefighters to ensure fair compensation and to help with recruitment and retention.

I appreciated your acknowledgement during the hearing that there is a real gap in competitive pay for federal firefighters, and that it is especially acute in California. For example, the starting salary of a Forest Service firefighter in the Bay Area—which has a high cost-of-living—is \$33,912, compared to a starting salary of \$58,668 for a Cal Fire firefighter. This discrepancy has resulted in an inability to recruit and retain federal firefighters, which is especially problematic for California where the federal government owns 58 percent of the State's forest land. In 2020, Cal Fire employed a peak of nearly 8,000 firefighters and expects to exceed that level in 2021. In contrast, the Pacific Southwest Region of the Forest Service consistently has trouble retaining 5,000 firefighters on staff.

Please know that I am committed to working with you to reach a solution, and I consider it one of my highest priorities to ensure that California has the firefighters it needs to respond as quickly and effectively as possible to wildfire. Bridging the salary gap will help the federal government recruit and retain the staff necessary to fulfill its responsibilities on the land it owns, and provide aid to others when needed. I am grateful for your attention to this critical matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dianne Feinstein".

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

DF/cm