

U.S. Congresswoman Emily Randall (D, WA-06)
HNR Federal Lands Oversight Hearing - The State of Our Nation's Federal Forests and Outlook
for the 2026 Wildfire Year
Witnesses: Tom Schultz, U.S. Fire Chief
June 4, 2026

Rep. Randall: Mr. Chair and Chief Schultz, thank you for appearing before our committee again.

I have some questions for you about fire readiness and climate resiliency. Across the Pacific Northwest and throughout my district in Washington 6th, we've had historically low snowfall over the winter. In fact, we've had the third lowest snow pack on record.

My neighbors and I are deeply concerned about the impact low snowfall combined with a hot and dry summer may have on wildfire risk. I've also brought some charts that map out fire outlook for July and August.

Fire season is here and my entire district faces significant wildfire risk. My concerns are doubled when I think about how this administration has repeatedly attacked our federal workforce. Last year, they DOGED almost 600 employees at the National Weather Service and are proposing major changes affecting the agency's ability to monitor significant weather events.

Similar changes are being made at U.S. Forest Service. 3,400 U.S. Forest Service workers were fired last year, and now 57 of 77 research labs including two in Washington State, are being shut down. Now, I heard you say before that you still plan on doing some of the science work, but 57 of 77 labs shutting down seems to pose a significant risk for our ability to do that work.

My neighbors are terrified and angry about what this might mean for them going into wildfire season, and rightly so. I held a town hall in Grays Harbor in April, where a constituent was furious about the closures, and just earlier this week, a wildfire was burning in his community.

Chief Schultz, do you believe that climate change is making wildfires more severe?

U.S. Fire Chief Schultz: Ms. Randall, Mr. Chairman, you know climate has been changing, for sure, for millennia. And I do think we have longer, drier fire seasons. It's drought related, we also have higher densities of trees out there on the landscape, so there's a lot of components. But I do think that we do have hotter, drier years that are ahead of us.

Rep. Randall: Yeah, we definitely do have hotter, dry years, and I heard you say the climate has been changing. I'll just say that the science overwhelmingly says that human-caused climate change has a role to play in wildfire — like the seriousness of wildfires — and you know that I have a New York Times article about climate change making fire weather worse for the world's forests.

In Washington, Tribal governments and state agencies are taking every precaution to mitigate and prepare for a potentially devastating wildfire season ahead. Washington State Department of Natural Resources has informed me that the general terms and conditions of their partnership with Forest Service conflict with Washington state law and create substantial barriers to getting any work done.

We've got \$49 million in Washington state that is held up, including \$8 million that the state is prepared to invest on the national forest system for recreation and forest health treatments, but the general terms and conditions are preventing that. 80 million board feet of timber that Washington DNR can help with through Good Neighbor Authority, but they can't sign any new agreements.

In my district, we've got critical pass-through funding for volunteer fire departments that is held up. This is on the heels of the largest wildfire in Western Washington in recent history, Bear Gulch Fire. I talked about it in this committee a lot, because we had some wild immigration enforcement happening on an active wildfire, and it was finally extinguished in April of this year.

Chief Schultz, how is this, these new terms and conditions, and the holdups they're causing in states like Washington, helping you achieve the goals of the administration's active management strategy with regards to state forestry agencies?

Chief Schultz: Ms. Randall, Mister Chairman, this is a similar question, Ms. Malloy asked about terms and conditions. So, we're working through this as I stated.

There's a seminar webinar today with states, in which the state of Washington will be invited to that. Mr. Geisler, I work with him on a regular basis, I've talked to him about this. We have signed almost, we signed 297 agreements with the state of Washington since those new terms and conditions, so it has been a burden on some agreements, but others they move forward with even regardless of those agreements and those conditions that are in place. So, we are working through this, even with the state of Washington.

I don't disagree with the comments you made, that there are some things that are hung up, and we're working through that, but there have been almost 300 agreements that they have signed in light of those terms and conditions that are still in place.

The other thing I just want to touch, and you talk about climate resilience, and what can we do, and what are we doing. And what you're going to see in the Pacific Northwest, in Region Six, so that's Oregon and Washington, we are stepping up to provide more management, more fuels treatments, and more timber sale volume that's going to be sold over the next few years. When I look at what can we do to address those conditions on the ground, a lot of it is thinning forests, it's opening things up, it's reducing risk to communities.

So, I would agree that forest management is probably the most important thing that we can do if we're concerned about effects of changing climate over time. What can we do to address

that? The biggest thing I would say we can do is implement active forest management, whether it's grazing, whether it's thinning forest, whether it's fuel treatments, prescribed fire, all of those things help us better manage the forest and address those risks to communities.

Rep. Randall: Well, thank you, Chief Schultz. I will look forward to hearing the results of the webinar and how that may or may not change the analysis from my state agencies that the terms and conditions are in active disagreement with Washington state law, because ensuring that we are following the environmental practices of our state, which is a leader in the fight against climate change, is important to me.