

**Statement of
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**Before the
House Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations**

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Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Stansbury, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to provide the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) views on border security on National Forest System Lands.

As a Federal agency in service to the American people, the Forest Service cares for shared natural and cultural resources in ways that promote lasting economic, ecological, and social vitality. The agency manages 155 national forests and 20 national grasslands, comprising 193 million acres in 41 states and Puerto Rico. Our partners include land management agencies across all levels of government, nonprofit, for-profit entities, and communities. Since the agency's founding in 1905, partnerships have made significant contributions to our nation's natural resource management. These partnerships extend to our work with the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). The U.S. Forest Service fulfills the agency's mission to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands and provides support to CBP on their mission to secure the nation's borders.

Proactive partnership management

The U.S. Forest Service and CBP rely on each other's strengths to advance our very distinct goals. For example, the U.S. Forest Service has established full-time liaison positions with the U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) for both the Tucson Sector, based in Tucson, Arizona, and for the Spokane Sector, based in Kalispell, Montana. The liaison positions are important in coordinating joint patrol efforts, facility development, environmental analyses, and long-term staffing needs.

U.S. Forest Service Law Enforcement and Investigations (LEI) is a member of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Alliance to Combat Transnational Threats, which is a multi-agency initiative. LEI provides routine patrol support and assistance to CBP when requested. Additionally, LEI has coordinated with USBP on special operations that combined the limited resources of LEI with USBP substantial presence on the Coronado National Forest to address the impacts of migration as well as narcotics and other drugs smuggling.

Joint operational activities have included long-term (multiweek) missions targeting armed criminal activity or smuggling routes and activities on the National Forest. To

mitigate safety risks to employees working in the forest, the agency takes precautions such as providing law enforcement escorts for management and fire suppression activities, while also regularly offering border awareness training.

Overview of the US Forest Service footprint and capabilities

The national forests in the “lower 48” share a border of over 400 miles with Canada and approximately 60 non-contiguous miles with Mexico. The U.S. Forest Service, through the USDA, is statutorily charged with managing all National Forest System lands along the international border. The U.S. Forest Service shares law enforcement responsibilities over these lands with federal, state, and local partners. While it is fully recognized that CBP has the primary mandate of controlling and guarding the nation’s borders, U.S. Forest Service stewardship and law enforcement responsibilities are vital to assisting USBP with effectively defending national security, responding to terrorist threats, safeguarding human life, and stopping the degradation of the natural and cultural resources on National Forest System lands.

In 2006, the U.S. Forest Service entered into a Memorandum of Understanding between DHS, the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), and USDA regarding cooperative national security and counterterrorism efforts on federal lands along the United States’ borders. Our collaborative work has aligned our agency priorities with these partners in pursuit of our shared objectives.

This year, CPB and U.S. Forest Service entered into a Memorandum of Agreement to strategically align CBP and U.S. Forest Service law enforcement resources for the purpose of providing support to CBP. The U.S. Forest Service will continue to provide CBP with additional support and resources as appropriate and authorized. The USDA takes very seriously the need to address emergencies involving human health and safety and preventing or minimizing environmental damage on public lands. The Department is committed to working with the Subcommittee and the Congress on these issues.

Chairman Gosar and Ranking Member Stansbury, that concludes my statement. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.