

US Senator Maria Cantwell

**Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Hearing to Examine the President's
Budget Request for the U.S. Forest Service for Fiscal Year 2026**

July 10th, 2025

Senator Cantwell Q&A

[VIDEO]

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First, I want to thank you, Chief Schultz, for being here, and I want to take a moment with my colleague from Idaho to acknowledge the sacrifice and bravery of the firefighters in the Coeur d'Alene Idaho area. And my condolences go out to their families and into this community. And so we want to remember these individuals and again, thank the firefighters all across the nation.

Chief Schultz, the season is upon us. I think my staff probably has our most recent charts that show how bad our prediction is for this summer. Each month, it gets more dramatic. And so, the challenges that we face is we want to prepare. And I think as the nation sees practically 24/7 coverage of what natural disasters can do to a community, one of the best things that you can do is cache resources early.

And that cache – meaning c-a-c-h-e -- cache them early so that they're close to the proximity of where they need to be. And that's always the best thing to do. And I do think, people are probably asking questions, ‘Why, if you thought you were going to have flood season in Texas, why didn't you have more resources there at an earlier time?’

But now we know this is the outlook for us, my colleague and I, I think our whole states will be covered in red. I don't know about you, but as I fly home every week, I see less and less snow on the Cascades, and I keep thinking, ‘Wow, this is really a challenge, because you're just going to have drier and drier conditions.’

Okay, so where is the resource for the state? I think it's, you know, a budget that's already been approved. So why aren't we releasing the funds that go to the community so that they can best prepare for this fire season.

Schultz: Senator Cantwell, thanks for the question. I think you're talking about the SFA and the VFA funding. We were talking about that previously, so we are evaluating that right now. We've had a lot of feedback from the State Foresters. We're working with OMB on that question right now, looking at that issue. So, we have not made a determination yet, but that's something that is being evaluated.

Sen. Cantwell: So when do you expect that to go out?

Schultz: So we expect there probably to be determination in the next several weeks would be my expectation.

Sen. Cantwell: Okay.

Schultz: But we don't-- again, we can't commit that that's for sure going to go out yet. That's still under discussion.

Sen. Cantwell: Well, we just -- we want to follow the normal process so that the Forest Service is working with others to get the resources into those communities and do the work that they need to do.

Same question about LWCF: why is that money being held up by OMB or others?

Schultz: So Senator Cantwell, what we're looking at is just looking at the Administration's priorities and looking at the '25 budget to make sure the work that we're doing is in alignment with the priorities the Administration. So that's something that's just being evaluated right now, and we're still looking at that.

Sen. Cantwell: But if LWCF are projects submitted and approved by Congress, this committee played a key role in saying, 'We want to fund these and let's move forward.' Why is OMB now requiring a review of LWCF projects?

Schultz: Senator, I think it's just like I mentioned, we're looking at all those programs in the '25 budget, just looking at alignment with the priorities of the Administration.

Sen. Cantwell: What does that mean? That you're creating a different process than exists that has been practiced for 50 or 60 years?

Schultz: I don't think it's that we're creating a new process. I think what we're saying is that just given the authorities in the CR -- so I think the language look-in is that -- so we're saying the President is acting within his authority for the full year of continuing appropriations to revise spending within the amounts provided by Congress. I mean, I think that's what's being done. We're looking at that right now.

Sen. Cantwell: Okay, and then on the Roadless Rule. You know, I love my colleague from Idaho. He probably doesn't want me to say that, okay, I'll pretend I don't like you. How about that? I don't like you.

But he did implement a roadless rule in his state, which he got the people together and he got it done. He made the right decisions. Or he made a lot of decisions. Okay? He made a lot of decisions.

So that's the prerogative. That was the way it worked. A state could step up and do the work, or you could have somebody else tell you. In this case, he did the work. So are you aware that researchers found that approximately 88% of all wildfires are human caused, and 95% of those fires are ignited within a half a mile of a road?

And so one of the reasons why the Roadless Rule was good for some of these areas was because, 'No, we're not having roads all over the place, and we're not igniting fires all over the place.'

So, do you have an assessment of the of the cost of rescinding the Roadless Rule, when you might be building roads into pristine areas and causing more challenges?

Schultz: So Senator, I think our bigger concern isn't building roads into pristine areas, it's that we've got 24 and a half million acres of the roughly 60 million acres of roadless that is within either -- it's either in the WUI or it's within a mile of the WUI. So, that is our primary concern on this, is that we've got areas, and as I mentioned this earlier in my testimony, that there is much roadless area that actually has roads in it.

I was on the Helena Lewis and Clark Forest last week, the Lolo Forest has roads. It's not uncommon that roadless areas do have roads. It just didn't --

Sen. Cantwell: Well, no the question is whether we want to continue that process. And I think what everybody wants is to not -- we want to maintain our forests. We want to have recreational areas. We want to invest in the resources to have the public go enjoy those recreational areas. I personally don't want to sell public lands.

But at the same time, you're saying, 'Let's not build more roads in places we don't need to build more roads just because somebody, one or two people have a great idea that's what they want to go do. Let's set aside those areas that we think—.' No, really, we shouldn't be building roads there. That was the whole point of the Roadless Rule, is to make those decisions.

And as I said, my colleague was successful at making those decisions and prioritizing that. And so now, if you're saying the Wildland Urban Interface is really an issue, yeah, I agree. The Wildland Urban Interface should be debated every day of the week now, because what we're finding is that we almost had literally a fire approach Spokane. I mean, there are people who are looking at and saying, not where the next fire like the Palisades or like Hawaii, but people are saying the next event is going to be something that goes all the way from the WUI to a major urban city and could cause that much damage. And that's what happened outside of Spokane last summer.

So, I think we're all in, but I think you and I will probably have to continue this dialog about what's best to do to approach this issue. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.