

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 24, 2026

The Honorable Stephen Vaden
Deputy Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Tom Schultz
Chief
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Deputy Secretary Vaden and Chief Schultz,

We are writing to express serious concerns about the proposed closure of the United States Forest Service (USFS) Baltimore Urban Field Station. This field station is essential to maintaining the important USFS work that has been taking place in Baltimore for nearly 30 years – work that benefits communities and forests in Maryland and across the entire country. Closing the Baltimore Urban Field Station is unnecessary and misguided; it will stymie highly effective and productive forestry and urban ecology work that Congress has directed the Forest Service to pursue.

The USFS Baltimore Urban Field Station has operated from the campus of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County since 1998, which has allowed the field station to develop important academic and Baltimore-area community partnerships. This longstanding Baltimore location has enabled the place-based relationships and collaborations that underpin the impactful, high-quality work that this field station has produced, including:

- Inventing high-resolution landcover mapping which has become the basis for urban and community forest management plans in the U.S. and internationally, is used to assess fire risk in woodland-urban interface areas, and serves as a key data source for the Chesapeake Bay Watershed model that informs Chesapeake Bay watershed restoration work.
- Developing and maintaining the longest running rural-suburban-urban watershed study in the world, which has transformed scientific understanding of human-settled watersheds and profoundly influenced policy and planning for the Chesapeake Bay watershed restoration.
- Pioneering research that is critical to improving the quality of life in cities such as long-term research on social-ecological systems and research on the role of trees, forests, and nature to promote public health and safety.
- Leading the Forest Service's Wildland Urban Interface program to understand and develop policies, plans, and practices to reduce vulnerabilities to forest fires and improve human health, security, and livelihoods.
- Creating urban and community wood utilization programs that foster a sustainable market for urban wood at local, regional, and national scales, creating new wood products that generate jobs and economic value in urban communities.

The USFS Baltimore Field Station’s proven record of successful research, partnerships, and projects demonstrates its incredible value to the American people. Agency and program office relocations invariably result in the loss of talented staff, institutional knowledge, and partnerships, undermining the agency’s mission, performance, and effectiveness; this is exactly what happened when the Trump administration relocated the Bureau of Land Management, the Economic Research Service, and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture in 2019.^{1,2}

Closure of the USFS Baltimore Urban Field Station jeopardizes many highly important initiatives and undermines key partnerships in the region. As a core collaborator in Chesapeake Bay Program work, the USFS Baltimore Urban Field Station provides essential forestry-related ecosystem services estimates and expert guidance on forestry issues in the watershed – data that state and federal partners rely on to guide Bay restoration spending decisions. The field station also leads the Baltimore Urban Waters Partnership, acting as a convener to bring together federal, state, and local agencies to streamline efforts to support community-led restoration and urban revitalization efforts in the Baltimore and Patapsco River watersheds. Another important Baltimore-based project that the Baltimore Urban Field Station supports is the Stillmeadow Church and Peace Park, which hosts a job training program that delivers professional skill building and training in innovative forest restoration techniques to Baltimore youth. And the Baltimore Urban Field Station leads a number of Baltimore-based research projects that require USFS to have an on-the-ground presence, including: experimental research on forests impacted by invasive threats like the Emerald Ash Borer and Beech Leaf Disease to better understand how to help forests recover, and studies on forest patch distribution and fragmentation across the Baltimore region to inform land management practices.

Please answer the following questions by April 28, 2026:

1. Has USDA conducted a cost-benefit analysis to understand the economic impact of closing the USFS Baltimore Urban Field Station?
 - a. If so, what were the findings?
 - b. If not, what evidence is USDA using to justify this proposed closure?
2. Will the USFS Baltimore Urban Field Station’s partnership and place-based work continue, including the initiatives described in this letter, if the field station is closed?
 - a. If so, please explain in detail how this will happen.
 - b. In not, how does USDA justify the termination of this important work?
3. Will any of the Baltimore-based USFS employees be terminated?
4. Will any of the Baltimore-based USFS employees be relocated?
 - a. If so, where will these staff be transferred?
 - b. If not, where will their duty station be if the USFS Baltimore Urban Field Station is closed?

¹ Government Accountability Office. (2021) Report to the Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources, House of Representatives. *Bureau of Land Management: Better Workforce Planning and Data Would Help Mitigate the Effects of Recent Staff Vacancies*. (GAO Publication 22-104247). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-104247.pdf>

² Government Accountability Office. (2022) Report to the Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources, House of Representatives. *Agency Relocations: Following Leading Practices Will Better Position USDA to Mitigate the Ongoing Impacts on Its Workforce*. (GAO Publication 23-104709). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-104709>

5. Will Baltimore-based USFS employees be offered the opportunity to transition to remote work status?

For nearly 30 years, the USFS Baltimore Urban Field Station has generated exceptional applied research with an impact reaching far beyond Baltimore city limits. The USFS Baltimore Urban Field Station has shown itself to be an incredible asset to the community, region, and to the nation. It should not be closed.

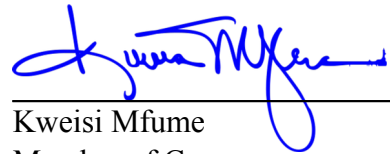
Sincerely,



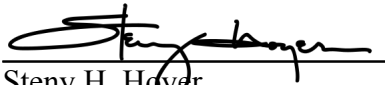
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Angela D. Alsobrooks
United States Senator



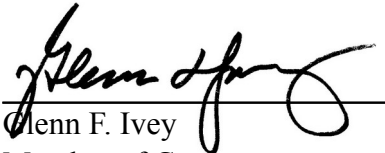
Kweisi Mfume
Member of Congress



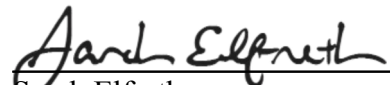
Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress



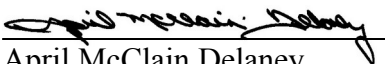
Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



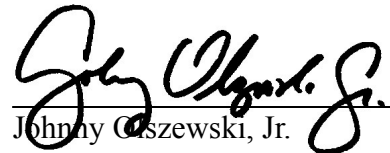
Glenn F. Ivey
Member of Congress



Sarah Elfreth
Member of Congress



April McClain Delaney
Member of Congress



Johnny Giszewski, Jr.
Member of Congress