

Fired U.S. Forest Service worker at Coronado National Forest speaks out

Danelle Scott is one of 2,000 probationary employees fired to eliminate wasteful spending, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

By: [Maria Staubs](#)

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**Editor's note: This article has been updated since the video originally aired. New information from the USDA on prescribed burns is not reflected in the video above.*

TUCSON, Ariz. (KGUN) — Thousands of probationary U.S. Forest Service workers across the country are navigating life after being fired as the Trump administration continues cutting federal jobs.

One of those employees is Danelle Scott, who said she was the only hydrologist working for the entire Coronado National Forest. Now, she has concerns about forest maintenance and wildfire control.

"My first thought was how does a mom support two kids without an income?" Scott said.

After years of wildland firefighting, Scott moved from Michigan to Tucson in January 2024 to begin working full-time as a hydrologist for the Coronado National Forest, which spans 1.78 million acres.

"I fell in love with the area, fell in love with the job," Scott said.

She secured water rights for the forest for wildlife and recreation purposes.

"Here we don't have a lot of water, so it's really important that we manage the waters that we have," Scott said.

Last summer, she served as the Burned Area Emergency Response Specialist, collecting data on three active fires and running models to identify areas at risk for potentially deadly flooding.

But after more than a year in her role, a phone call on a Sunday ended her career.

"They said you're fired. And my 11-year-old ran off crying," Scott recalled. "Then they called 30 minutes later and said, 'Wait, no, never mind. We refreshed the list, and now you're not on it.' Then they called Monday morning and said, 'Wait, no, never mind. You are fired. Come in on Tuesday and turn in all your stuff.'"

When she arrived at work, she saw an email firing her for her performance. But, less than a month before, she said she had received a fully successful performance appraisal.

Scott is one of 2,000 probationary employees fired to eliminate wasteful spending, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. She said she knows of three others also fired from Coronado National Forest.

A USDA spokesperson said in a statement:

"Secretary Rollins fully supports the President's directive to improve government, eliminate inefficiencies, and strengthen USDA's many services to the American people. We have a solemn responsibility to be good stewards of the American people's hard-earned taxpayer dollars and to ensure that every dollar spent goes to serve the people, not the bureaucracy.

As part of this effort, USDA has made the difficult decision to release about 2,000 probationary, non-firefighting employees from the Forest Service. To be clear, none of these individuals were operational firefighters. Released employees were probationary in status, many of whom were compensated by temporary IRA funding. It's unfortunate that the Biden administration hired thousands of people with no plan in place to pay them long term. Secretary Rollins is committed to preserving essential safety positions and will ensure that critical services remain uninterrupted."

But Scott is concerned the job cuts could increase the chances of wildfires.

"We had funding that was appropriated by Congress to do prescribed burning to reduce fuels ahead of the fire season, and those monies were seized and we were given directives not to do any prescribed burning," Scott said.

A USDA spokesperson said there has been no order to stop prescribed fires on the Coronado National Forest.

"In the last two weeks, the Coronado National Forest has completed more than 1,000 acres of prescribed fire with more active management activities planned as conditions allow," the spokesperson said. "Active management continues across all national forests and grasslands, including hazardous fuels reduction projects and prescribed fires. Protecting the people and communities we serve, as well as the infrastructure, businesses, and resources they depend on to grow and thrive, remains a top priority for the USDA and the Forest Service."

In the meantime, Scott is searching for her next job.

"It's been really stressful, very anxious. Just appealing and applying," Scott said. "A lot of people have really rallied, but it would be better if I just didn't lose my job."