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## USDA Forest Service News Release

(Washington, D.C., February 19, 2026) - The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service is inviting public comment on proposed updates to its regulations governing occupancy and use of National Forest System lands for mineral prospecting, exploration, development, mining, processing, and reclamation.

The proposed revisions are designed to streamline review procedures and improve customer service while maintaining strong protections for surface resources like forests, water, wildlife habitat and recreational areas. This effort supports President Trump's Executive Orders [Unleashing American Energy](#), [Declaring a National Energy Emergency](#) and [Immediate Measures to Increase American Mineral Production](#).

"For 50 years, these regulations have slowed our ability to secure the critical minerals that underpin both energy security and national security," said **Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins**. "Under President Trump's leadership, we are bringing clarity, efficiency and accountability to the process, allowing for responsible domestic mineral production that supports public services and protects the health of our forests and watersheds."

"President Trump has charged us to unleash American Energy Dominance and rebuild domestic mineral supply chains," said **Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum**. "On National Forest System lands, the Department of the Interior — through the Bureau of Land Management — manages the subsurface mineral estate in close coordination with the Forest Service's surface stewardship. These updates provide a clear, timely path for responsible development that strengthens national security and lowers costs for American families."

The current rules were adopted in 1974 to ensure that timber, water, paleontological, cultural, historic and recreation resources are protected to the extent practicable while prospecting, development, extraction and processing of locatable minerals occurs. The rules have remained largely unchanged for more than five decades.

“This isn’t about relaxing the rules,” said **Forest Service Chief Tom Schultz**. “It’s about improving the review process for small-scale operations that have consistently proven to have minimal effect on surface resources. This also provides clearer direction, practical examples, and greater consistency to make the review of all proposed mining operations more efficient. These updates also bring our regulations into alignment with the Bureau of Land Management, ensuring a more predictable and coordinated framework across federal lands.”

The comment period is open for 60 days. The proposed rule can be viewed and comments submitted through the [Federal eRulemaking Portal](#).

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