

FEDERAL WORKFORCE

# Vilsack taps first African American to lead Forest Service

Marc Heller, E&E News reporter    Published: Monday, June 28, 2021



Randy Moore will be the new chief of the Forest Service, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced today. Forest Service/YouTube

Randy Moore, the Forest Service's regional forester for the Pacific Southwest, will be the agency's new chief, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced today.

Moore, a career Department of Agriculture employee since 1978, takes over the job from retiring Chief Vicki Christiansen on July 26.

In a news release, Vilsack called Moore "a catalyst for change and creativity in carrying out the Forest Service's mission to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands."

Moore will be the first African American to lead the Forest Service. In addition to leading the Southwest region since 2007, he was previously regional forester for the Eastern region. He started his USDA career at the Natural Resources Conservation

Service and worked as a soil scientist, he told the Western Forestry Leadership Coalition in a 2019 interview.

Vilsack noted Moore's experience in handling wildfire-related issues in the Southwest, a policy that will immediately confront him in the new position as Western states deal with drought and record heat. The federal government predicts another very active wildfire season as a result.

"In his role as Regional Forester, Randy has been a conservation leader on the forefront of climate change, most notably leading the Region's response to the dramatic increase in catastrophic wildfires in California over the last decade," Vilsack said.

Moore appeared to have beaten out a few other candidates for the job. Policy groups that work with the Forest Service had said Leslie Weldon, a former deputy chief, was a rumored top candidate.

The announcement several weeks before Christiansen's retirement allows them to collaborate before Moore steps in, an overlap the department noted in its news release.

Moore will also face the usual balancing act between environmental and conservation groups urging more restrained timber practices, and groups calling for more intensive forest management to reduce wildfire threats and produce more wood products at the same time.

The Federal Forest Resource Coalition, representing timber companies working on national forests, said it welcomed the announcement.

"Randy knows first hand the magnitude of the challenges facing our national forests," said FFRC President Tom Schultz in a statement. "As recent years have demonstrated, we need to drastically step up our management efforts to help our forests adapt to a changing climate and protect our communities from wildfires."

Moore has a bachelor's degree in plant and soil science from Southern University and A&M College in Baton Rouge, La., the USDA said. He and his wife, Antoinette, have two sons, a daughter-in-law and two grandsons.