



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

APR 24 2018

The Honorable Mick Mulvaney
Office of Management and Budget
Director
725 17th Street, NW.
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Director Mulvaney:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Forest Service is planning to collect information from farmers and rural residents in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands to understand the impacts of Hurricanes Irma and Maria on agriculture, forestry, and rural communities in the U.S. Caribbean. We plan to use this information to assess the effectiveness of conservation practices and strategies to mitigate hurricane risks. The information we intend to collect will be used in near-real time to help ensure the effectiveness of USDA investments in restoration, recovery, and resilience efforts in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. We are committed to supporting agricultural and forest products producers, rural landowners, and the many others affected by these catastrophic storms.

In March 2018, the Forest Service submitted to the Office of Management and Budget – Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OMB-OIRA) a request for emergency processing of an information collection request, "Understanding the Effects of Hurricanes Irma and Maria on Agriculture, Forestry, and Rural Communities in the U.S. Caribbean," consistent with requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act (Public Law 10–13). On April 17, 2018, OMB-OIRA concluded that the request was improperly submitted, and we have revised and are resubmitting our request.

I am affirming USDA's need for emergency processing. The emergency request reflects the time-sensitive nature of gathering this information and its critical role in informing effective recovery programs. Given the urgent need to collect this information and the rapidly approaching 2018 hurricane season, the timeframe for processing routine information collection requests would not allow the research to commence when necessary. Further, the Agency has not identified an existing approved collection that could be used. We request OMB to take action within 5 days of the closure of the 30-day comment period in the Federal Register notice.

The results of this work are very important to USDA and others in improving the resilience of farms, forests, and rural communities in the U.S. Caribbean and in other areas affected by hurricanes and other major disturbances. It is important to complete the initial research prior to the next hurricane season, and I appreciate emergency processing of this information collection request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen L. Censky", written over a horizontal line.

Stephen L. Censky
Deputy Secretary