



FAQ: Why We're Organizing at USFWS



1 Why organize a union now?

Because our jobs and our mission are on the line. It's always important to have a voice at work, but when RIFs and reorganizations are looming, the stakes are too high to stay silent. Without a union, management makes decisions from the top down. With a union, they are required to negotiate with us.

AFGE has fought across the federal government—in court, at the bargaining table, in the press, and on Capitol Hill—to delay cuts, stop RIFs, and defend federal workers. We can do the same at USFWS, but only if we come together.

No one will fight for our jobs like we will. When we stand together, we win.

2 Can a union really make a difference during RIFs or reorganizations?

Yes. A union gives us the power to fight back. We gain the legal right to bargain over how RIFs are carried out, propose alternatives, challenge unfair changes, and apply public and political pressure.

Example: the VA RIF

Earlier this year, the VA proposed cutting more than 80,000 jobs. But VA employees, organized through AFGE, pushed back. They lobbied Congress, rallied veterans, and demanded transparency.

They won. In July, the VA canceled the RIF. Reductions will now happen only through attrition and retirement. AFGE made it clear: "Because we raised our voices... the agency pulled back. That's a major victory."

Even the biggest cuts can be stopped when workers take action together.

3 Can management punish me for supporting the union?

No. It is illegal for management to threaten, retaliate against, or interfere with you for exercising your right to organize. These rights are protected under the Federal Service Labor-Management Relations Statute (5 U.S.C. Chapter 71) and enforced by the FLRA.

Here is what the law guarantees:

- **Right to organize freely:** You have the right to form, join, or assist a union, or not, "freely and without fear of penalty or reprisal" (5 U.S.C. §7102). You can sign a petition, attend meetings, and talk about the union on your own time.
- **Right to act together:** You and your coworkers can take collective action on workplace issues, such as submitting group petitions or statements.
- **Right to union representation:** Once our union is certified, your elected representatives can bargain on your behalf. You also gain the right to representation in formal discussions or investigative interviews that may lead to discipline.
- **Right to bargain collectively:** Management must negotiate in good faith over working conditions, including job security and RIF procedures (5 U.S.C. §7106(b)(2) and (3)).
- **Protection from retaliation:** It is an Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) for any agency official to interfere with, restrain, or coerce an employee who is exercising union rights, or to discriminate based on union activity (5 U.S.C. §7116(a)).
- **Protection for petition activity:** You cannot be punished for signing a petition, filing a complaint, or testifying about union rights (5 U.S.C. §7116(a)(2)).
- **Right to discuss the union:** You can talk about the union and invite others to join during breaks, lunch, and off-duty hours. These conversations are protected even in the workplace, as long as they do not disrupt work.

Bottom line: You have the legal right to organize. And when we stand together, we're not just protecting each other: we're building power to defend our jobs and the USFWS mission. History shows that when we federal workers unite, we win.

