

The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act

Issue: The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act expires in FY2011.

NACo policy: NACo, in cooperation with the [Partnership for Rural America Campaign], supports the reauthorization and enhancement of the Secure Rural Schools program (PL 110-343). Reauthorization should maintain coupling between payments to counties and active natural resource management; and the connection between sustainable natural resource management and the stability and well being of forest counties and communities.

Action needed: Ask your members of Congress to support legislative efforts to provide for a long-term reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (SRS).

Background: The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act Contract (SRS) provides assistance to rural counties and school districts affected by the decline in revenue from timber harvests on federal lands. Historically, rural communities and schools have relied upon a share of receipts from timber harvests to supplement local funding for education services and roads. The steep decline in timber sales during the 1980s decreased the revenues that rural school districts received from these timber sales.

In response to this decline, Congress passed the "Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act" (the Contract) to stabilize the payments to counties and to compensate for lost revenues. In 2010, the Contract will provide approximately \$419 million in funding to 729 rural counties, parishes, and boroughs across the United States.

President Teddy Roosevelt developed and implemented the policy of conserving lands for multiple uses. He understood the economic challenges that this placed on the rural communities in which these conserved lands were situated. To address this challenge, a revenue sharing plan was formulated that specified that 25 percent of all revenues from National Forests would be re-turned to the counties in which they were located.

This law worked for nearly a century. However, in the 1980s, national policies substantially diminished the revenue-generating activity permitted in these forests. In 2000, the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (P.L. 106-393) was enacted. The goal of the Act was to provide assistance to rural counties and schools affected by declining revenues from timber harvests on federal lands. In October of 2008, SRS was reenacted (P.L. 110.343); it reauthorized and amended SRS 2000 to continue, on a sliding payment scale, through 2011.

In the United States, rural counties must fund education and maintain roads on a tax base that is constrained by high child poverty rates, a limited business tax base, and a property tax base that is restricted by the tax-exempt status of national forest land within their boundaries. Secure, reliable payments from SRS are an essential source of revenues that enable rural communities to meet their financial obligations.

The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act will expire in 2011. The reauthorization of SRS will ensure that students receive essential education services and that rural communities have funding for roads, conservation projects, Search and Rescue missions, and fire prevention programs. It is important for Congress to commit the resources necessary to ensure that rural communities do not have to make further cuts to children's education or other vital services.

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