

Questions and Answers for SRS reauthorization

Question: Was Secure Rural schools reauthorized?

Response: Yes, the Secure Rural Schools Act (SRS Act) was reauthorized by section 524 of P.L. 114-10 and signed into law by the President on April 16, 2015.

Question: When will payments be made to the states (under SRS Titles I and III)?

Response: We anticipate being able to process the payments with 45 days or less from enactment (May 31, 2015), as required in the SRS reauthorization. There are several steps in this process and it is not as easy as the FS just sending out checks once the bill has been signed into law. Making these payments is a high priority and we will process them as expeditiously as possible.

Question: Do we use the post 2013 payments, minus five percent? Or do we have to recalculate nationally using updated per capita income at the county level and redistribute? This seems a key question as people are interested in knowing if they have a five percent cut at the county level from 2013 so they can plan their road department budgets and pass through to school districts, or are we going to recalculate everything nationally?

Response: Payments are calculated based on a specific formula defined in the Law, but a good estimate is to use 95% of the prior year payments. We anticipate having the county payment figures on the SRS website's receipts page within a few days.

Question: If we are going to recalculate everything with changes to per capita income how much time will that take and affect the distribution to the state and then counties?

Response: The per capita income figures have already been incorporated into the formula. We anticipate being able to process the payments with 45 days or less from enactment, as required in the SRS reauthorization.

Question: What is the deadline for RACs to make recommendations? Do they have to hustle and get everything decided by 30 Sept. 2015 or do they have more time?

Response: The deadline to initiate a title II or title III project has been extended to September 30, 2017. The deadline for the Forest Service or BLM to obligate title II funds and for the county to obligate title III funds has been extended to September 30, 2018.

Question: If RACs have more time is it a local decision when they start to meet? I am getting questions from people who want Title II funds for their favorite projects. Some of these are NGOs who live hand to mouth and work closely at the local Ranger District level. Some are state agencies who have existing programs.

Response: RACs should be able to meet once the SRS reauthorization is signed. The existing charter will continue until its expiration on June 10, 2016, and the only amendment that would need to be

made to the charter upon enactment of section 524 would be a minor amendment to cite the new Act as additional authority for the RACs.

Question: If a RAC does not have a quorum to meet and make decisions can we still use the option in the charter to have such as RAC become a subcommittee to another RAC in the same state who can then meet and approve the recommendations from the subcommittee? Can we also look at combining two RACs to have one functioning RAC (assuming the merger results in the minimum quorum to make recommendations).

Response: The subcommittee option was not approved by the Department of Agriculture, so that is not an option that we can pursue.

As for merging the RACs, that option was provided last year during the SRS RAC Charter Renewal in 2014. Only 3 committees, all from Region 2 took advantage of that option last year: the Custer County RAC, Lawrence RAC, and Pennington RAC merged to create the Black Hills RAC.

This option is not utilized for a quick fix, such as just to get RACs a quorum. Regional SRS coordinators need to justify the need to merge the RACs. Furthermore, it is not done on a regular basis. The option is given during optimal times to merge committees, for example, when the charter package is submitted for renewal. With the reauthorization of SRS, the National Program Coordinator sent out a request to gauge interest in potential mergers on 5/7/15 with a reply due of 5/21/15.

Question: Question for you regarding Title II, how do we find out what counties in northern NM have opted to receive Title II funds?

Response: In the pending SRS reauthorization, the county SRS Title elections roll over from the last year's elections. That is counties will not have an opportunity to change their elections from prior years. You can look at which counties elected to receive Title II funds in FY 14 and those same counties will receive Title II funds in FY 15.

One way to look up the prior year Title II county funds is in the report ASR-18-01, posted on the website found here: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/pts/securepayments/projectedpayments>

Question: Is the re-chartering something we need to be doing for our individual RACs, or does that happen at the WO?

Response: There is one charter for all of the RACs. Individual RAC coordinators only need to work on member nominations or other changes to individual RAC structure.

Question: Can we submit our vetted nominees before the RAC is re-chartered, or do we have to wait for the RACs to be active?

Response: The RACs will continue to function under the reauthorization, so you should start submitting vetted nominees at your earliest convenience.

Question: Are we going to be expected to obligate Title II funds this fiscal year?

Response: As stated above, the deadline to initiate a title II or title III project has been extended to September 30, 2017. The deadline for the Forest Service or BLM to obligate title II funds and for the county to obligate title III funds has been extended to September 30, 2018.

Question: If so, is there any way to estimate how much we might receive?

Response: A good estimate is to use 95% of the prior year funding, per the SRS payment formula initiated with the reauthorization in 2012 and continuing through the most recent authorization per P.L. 114-10.

Question: Are the county reductions for the 25% payments reflected in the ASR 18-1 FY 2014 report?

Response: No, the reports reflect the total amounts. These ASR reports are standardized reports and are not adjusted for anomalous events like 1908 Act payments before reauthorization, sequestration, etc. If you add the totals for the three SRS titles and the 25% payments (for counties that use that election), you will find that they equal the \$285 million cited in the press release.

Question: Do you know if sequester will be applied to the FY14 payments that were retroactively reauthorized? If so, do you know by what percentage funds will be reduced/sequestered?

Response: The SRS reauthorization by P.L. 114-10 was signed after the President issued sequestration orders for FY 2015 and FY 2016. So, it is our Agency's position that sequestration will not apply to payments made under the SRS reauthorization by P.L. 114-10. This situation is similar to the last SRS reauthorization under P.L. 113-40 for the FY 2013 receipts year (FY 2014 payment year).

Question: My reading of the SRS reauthorization language is that the FY14 payments are 95% that of the FY13 payments. Is that correct?

Response: Section 524 of P.L. 114-10 does not amend the definition of "full funding amount" in section 3(11)(C) of the prior SRS authorization. Accordingly, the full funding amount for FY 2014 (FY 2015 payment year) will be 95% of the amount for FY 2013, and the full funding amount for FY 2015 (FY 2016 payment year) will be 95% of the amount for FY 2014.

Question: When will the Forest Service release the funds to states/counties/schools?

Response: We are working hard to meet the required payment deadline, which is 45 days from enactment or by May 31. There are a number of steps involved in making these payments and it is not simply a matter of the FS sending out the payments. We still anticipate meeting the legislated deadline for SRS payments of May 31.