



1100 K Street
Suite 101
Sacramento
California
95814

Telephone
916.327-7500

Facsimile
916.441.5507

REAUTHORIZATION OF THE SECURE RURAL SCHOOLS ACT

REQUESTED ACTION: Approve a long-term reauthorization of the *Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act* (SRS). In the absence of a long-term reauthorization, seek approval of a short-term extension of SRS funding for rural, forested counties and schools.

BACKGROUND: In 1908, Congress passed legislation that created a funding mechanism to offset the effects of removing National Forest System lands from economic development. The Act specified that 25 percent of all revenues generated from the multiple-use management of the National Forests be shared with counties to support public roads and schools.

The initial revenue sharing mechanism worked well from 1908 to about 1986. After 1986, however, the multiple-use management of the National Forests sharply dropped, followed by a commensurate drop in revenues. Largely as a result of county and school officials banding together, Congress approved in 2000 the *Secure Rural Schools and Self-Determination Act*. The law stabilized the share of forest receipts for counties by allowing jurisdictions to collect 25 percent of the current year's receipts or the average of the highest three years since 1986, whichever was greater.

The SRS program expired at the end of fiscal year 2011; however, Congress provided a one-year extension of the program (through fiscal year 2012) as part of the nation's surface transportation law (MAP-21), and for an additional year (through fiscal year 2013) as part the *Helium Stewardship Act*. These short-term extensions have helped forest counties and schools avert a major budgetary crisis that would have resulted in massive cuts to education programs and huge reductions in various county services. Unfortunately, the program is once again set to expire.

Counties in California – which received nearly \$36 million in SRS funding last year – rely on the SRS program to maintain local roads and other public infrastructure, operate search and rescue missions, and provide many other essential local services. If Congress does not act to reauthorize the SRS program, counties will begin the process of laying off employees, cancelling contracts, and reducing services.

For its part, the House has approved legislation - the *Restoring Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities Act* (HR 1526) - that would reauthorize SRS. However, the bill also incorporates a number of forest management reforms that do not have bipartisan support, and as such, the measure is unlikely to be considered by the Senate. CSAC urges Congress to develop bipartisan legislation that would address active forest management, streamline environmental reviews, and revise the Forest Service's day-to-day approach to managing the nation's federal forests. In addition, Congress should ensure that counties are appropriately compensated should they fail to reach intended revenue targets under a potential new payment system.

Contacts: Hasan Sarsour, Waterman & Associates, (202) 898-1444
Karen Keene, CSAC, (916) 327-7500, Ext. 511