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Thursday, September 15, 2011  
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## Draft Secure Rural Schools Proposal Will Create Jobs and Restore Healthy, Active Forest Management

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – The House Natural Resources Committee will hold a hearing next week on a draft proposal to address the expiration of the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program. The draft proposal, the [National Forest County Revenue, Schools and Jobs Act of 2011](#), is a long-term solution that would provide rural counties with a stable revenue stream, create jobs, grow rural economies, and restore active, healthy forest management.

The Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands will hold a [legislative hearing on the draft bill on Thursday, September 22<sup>nd</sup> at 10:00AM.](#)

*“This draft proposal takes action to address the decades-long problem of declining federal timber sales and the need to restore this stable source of revenue to rural communities and schools,” said Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings. “In these tough economic times, the federal government cannot afford to forever finance a program that was a short-term solution to a long-term problem. This draft proposal establishes a sustainable plan to increase timber sales through the active management of our forests. Doing so will generate new revenue for counties that is vitally needed to fund schools and roads, create new jobs in rural areas suffering from high unemployment, and keep our forests healthy by helping to prevent wildfires and insect infestations.*

*“This draft bill is a starting point and we’ll continue to work with local communities and Representatives from impacted states to review and discuss specific details as we move forward.”*

Specifically, the [National Forest County Revenue, Schools and Jobs Act of 2011](#):

- Creates a County, Schools and Revenue Trust to provide a dependable source of revenue for rural counties that currently depend on SRS.
- Establishes an Annual Revenue Requirement (ARR) for each National Forest System unit, based on an average of gross receipts from 1980-2000. Of the ARR, 75% is shared with the counties through the County Revenue and Schools Trust, 20% goes to the Forest Service and 5% is directed to the federal Treasury.
- Provides the Forest Service authority to carry out County Revenue and Schools

Trust Projects in order to meet the required Annual Revenue Requirement (ARR). Trust Projects may include timber sales; issuance of grazing permits; issuance of special permits involving land use, minerals, power, or recreation; and projects implementing a community wildfire protection plan.

- Requires that each federally approved Trust Project be subjected to a public comment period and administrative appeal, and required to undergo an “environmental report” that identifies and mitigates potential environmental impacts.
- Authorizes a transition period to continue making payments to counties and schools while the Forest Service begins the process of identifying and implementing Trust Projects.
- Provides for future inclusion of proposals to address other federal forest lands affected by declining timber production. A number of counties in Western Oregon that contain the Oregon and California Railroad Grant lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management also received funding from Secure Rural Schools.

### **Background:**

Under federal law passed in 1908, the U.S. Forest Service has historically shared 25% of all timber revenues with rural counties containing National Forest land to compensate them for large amounts of federal land that cannot be taxed. Since that time, these “25% payments” have provided counties with much-needed funding for essential services such as education and infrastructure. However, by the late 1990s timber harvests dramatically declined due to federal overregulation and harmful lawsuits, prompting Congress in 2000 to pass the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (SRS). SRS was created to provide “transition payments” over a six year period while Congress worked to increase timber production, or rural counties found an alternative source of revenue. It has been extended through 2011.

However, since the passage of SRS the federal government has failed to oversee a transition into increased timber production yet continued to provide money to these counties without ensuring the public land is properly managed. Lack of active forest management inhibits job creation, deprives counties of revenue to fund schools and roads, and makes our National Forests increasingly susceptible to wildfires and invasive species. As a result, many rural counties are suffering double-digit unemployment with little hope of creating meaningful jobs without access to common sense management of the public lands. Payments to counties will end this year unless Congress takes action.

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