

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN DOC HASTINGS

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Witnesses: Forested Counties and Schools to Gain Stable Revenue Stream, Jobs Through Active Forest Management

Washington, D.C. – Today, the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands held an [oversight hearing](#) on draft legislation to provide vital funding for education, roads and infrastructure in rural counties with large portions of National Forest Service land. H.R. __, the [National Forest County Revenue, Schools and Jobs Act of 2011](#), addresses the expiration of the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program and lays the framework for a long-term solution by restoring healthy forest management.

“Restoring active management of our national forests, as this draft proposal does, would provide a stable revenue stream for counties and schools. It would create new jobs, strengthen rural economies, promote healthier forests, reduce the risk of wildfires, and decrease our reliance on foreign countries for timber and related products,” said Chairman Doc Hastings (WA-04) *“The draft legislation encourages local federal forest managers to work with states, tribes and local governments to identify priority projects, increase revenues, and manage forests in an environmentally sensible and proactive way.”*

“This draft legislation is about giving the Forest Service a clear direction and the ability to actually manage a portion of its land for the benefit of rural communities while beginning to improve forest health in the process. For too long we have managed our national forests in a way that is completely devoid of the social and economic realities facing the counties and states that host the public’s lands,” said Subcommittee Chairman Rob Bishop (UT-01).

At the hearing, **Ron Walter, a County Commissioner from Chelan County**, expressed the National Association of Counties’ support of the draft proposal. *“This proposed legislation is a step in the right direction as it identifies a pathway to expedite projects on federal land while ensuring the federal government protects its commitment to sharing revenues with counties and rural schools.”*

Walter also commented on the jobs that would be created by restoring active management to the forests, along with the steady revenue stream that would be used to support forested counties and schools. *“Elected county officials would prefer to share in the revenue from production in healthy forests that are a part of our community fabric, whether those lands are generating biomass or timber products, mineral, energy production, recreation or grazing. Effective management of our federal forests will create much needed, family-wage jobs in our resource dependent communities while providing sufficient revenue sharing to county governments and schools through the historic 25% revenue sharing agreements.”*

Steve Swanson, President & CEO Swanson Group, a family owned forest products company, also addressed the job creation that would be spurred by the implementation of the *National Forest County Revenue, Schools and Jobs Act of 2011*. *“The SRS payments have helped maintain essential government services, but they do not make up for the lack of jobs and opportunity available to local residents of most rural, forested communities.”*

Swanson’s testimony also highlighted the vulnerability of our forests due to forest overgrowth. *“Unless action is taken to sustainably manage these forests I believe we will continue to see massive fire seasons like those experienced across the southwest this year. These catastrophic events threaten the old growth forests, water quality and wildlife habitat many advocates have spent their careers trying to save.”*

BACKGROUND

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.

[Click here for additional information on the bill and the Secure Rural Schools program.](#)

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