



August 15, 2013

The Honorable Doc Hastings
Chairman
House Natural Resources Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
Ranking Member
House Natural Resources Committee
1329 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Hastings and Ranking Member DeFazio –

On behalf of the National Association of Counties (NACo), I am writing to thank you for your continued support for county governments and express our support of H.R. 1526, the Restoring Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities Act. This proposal would renew the federal government's commitment to manage federal forests for the benefit of counties impacted by federal forestland, improve forest health, and help prevent catastrophic wildfires.

Specifically, H.R. 1526, as amended, would reestablish the priority of actively managing our forests and promotes responsible timber production on Forest Service commercial timber land; would improve forest health and prevent catastrophic wildfires by allowing significant state and local involvement; would improve forest management by allowing counties to actively manage portions of National Forest land; would address the forest lands currently managed by the Bureau of Land Management in Western Oregon, known as "O&C Lands;" and would allow for a short-term extension of Secure Rural Schools payments.

The legislation would also include a five-year extension of Stewardship End Result Contracting and extend the length of individual contracts to twenty years. Also of note is the measure's inclusion of Good Neighbor Authority – which allows state and federal authorities to work together on fire mitigation efforts even when project areas cross ownership boundaries. Currently the program exists only in Colorado and Utah.

The expiration of the Secure Rural Schools program in 2012 will create dramatic budgetary shortfalls if Congress fails to renew the longstanding federal obligation to county governments. The enactment of a modern revenue sharing program, as included in H.R. 1526, to allocate revenues generated from the management of designated federal lands to forest counties and schools would 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. NACo supports the Restoring Healthy Forest for Healthy Communities Act as amended, and urges the House of Representatives to promptly consider final passage of the bill.

NACo applauds the Committee's commitment to addressing job creation and enhancement of rural forest economies by addressing the Federal governments continued inability to effectively manage our federal lands. The management provisions in H.R. 1526 will provide a long term solution to ensuring sustainable revenue sharing with forested counties. NACo strongly believes that pursuing management and restoration of the nation's forests will generate tremendous environmental and social benefits and

create needed jobs and revenue for rural economies. While the United States Senate and the House of Representatives may approach legislative solutions to forest health and county payments' programs differently, NACo will continue to urge leadership on both sides of the isle to act in a spirit of bipartisan and bicameral cooperation and work together to move a final legislative solution to the President's desk.

Again, on behalf of the nation's 3,069 counties, I thank you for your continued support for programs critical to America's counties.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matthew D. Chase". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Matthew D. Chase
Executive Director
National Association of Counties