

Partnership For Rural America

Restoring Economic Vitality to Rural Forested Communities

An Initiative of National Forest Counties & Schools Coalition

Honorable Doc Hastings
Chairman
Natural Resource Committee
House of Representatives
Washington, DC

Honorable Peter DeFazio
Ranking Member
Natural Resource Committee
House of Representatives
Washington, DC

We write to you in full support of H.R. 1526. The National Forest Counties and Schools Coalition represents 662 counties and school districts within them, in 41 states. It has long been our mission to return to sustainable forest management. The reality is that for most rural forested communities the only sustainable family wage jobs come from a healthy forest products industry.

We have supported the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act to help with basic school services and maintaining county roads. We appreciate that a temporary extension of the act is included in H.R. 1526. While the payments certainly maintain some employment and services they do nothing to create family wage jobs. With employment comes a strong tax base and secondary businesses supported by a healthy local economy. We are simply asking for an opportunity to sustain our local economies and have a healthier federal forest system. The status quo is broken. In far too many rural forested communities unemployment is in double digits, poverty is rampant, free and reduced lunch rates are staggeringly high, property crimes and domestic violence are out of proportion.

Today not only are rural forested economies being denied an opportunity for self-sufficiency, we have as a neighbor a federal forest land base that is becoming increasingly dangerous to our safety. Our federal forests are insect diseased and the overcrowded stands are creating a perfect storm for catastrophic wildfires. In a recent example, during the 395-square mile Rim Fire, the entire Tuolumne County education system was closed for a full week. It affected 6,500 students and 1,000 employees. The reason for the closure was that air quality was eight times worse than what is considered the upper limits of healthy

Healthy forests also lead to real opportunities for recreation, hunting, fishing, and overall enjoyment of the forest system. We absolutely believe in the multiple use doctrine for our federal forests. A healthy sustainable forest products industry goes a long way to guaranteeing we will again have healthy forests we can all enjoy. For the sake of our communities and our federal forests please support H.R. 1526

