



Association of Arkansas Counties

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September 11, 2013

Congressman Doc Hastings
Chairman
Natural Resources Committee
United States House, Washington DC

Congressman Peter DeFazio
Ranking Member
Natural Resources Committee
United States House, Washington DC

Dear Chairman Hastings and Ranking Member DeFazio:

H.R. 1526 is currently awaiting a vote in the U.S. House of Representatives. This bill's short title is "Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities". The intent of the Legislation is to allow the Forest Service to have the tools necessary to achieve and maintain a sustainable timber harvest. One result will be the capacity to create family wage jobs in rural forested communities.

Since 2000, counties and schools in 41 states have been receiving payments in lieu of harvest receipts through the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act. While the payments have been very helpful to maintain county roads and help with basic education programs, they are not a substitute for the family wage jobs and the tax base those jobs create. A healthy forest products industry also returns a sense of pride to these communities that they are self-supporting and do not need a check from the federal government.

For most of the rural forested communities there is not a replacement for the family wage jobs provided by the forest products industry and the services that support that industry. Simply stated, too much of their land base is owned by the Federal Government and managed by the Forest Service.

Currently, many of these communities have serious double digit unemployment, an unacceptable number of grade school and high school students on free and reduced lunches and attendant social issues that simply do not allow for a healthy community. No one is suggesting we over harvest and damage the environment. To the contrary, this legislation allows for harvest that increases the forest's ability to exist in a healthier state and provides desperately needed family wage jobs. We respectfully ask that you support H.R. 1526 when it comes to the floor for a vote.

Sincerely,

Chris Villines
Executive Director

cc: Congressman Rick Crawford
Congressman Tim Griffin

Congressman Steve Womack
Congressman Tom Cotton

"Serving Arkansas' Counties Since 1968"