

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN DOC HASTINGS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, July 14, 2011

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202-226-9019

Subcommittee Holds Hearing on Reauthorization of Secure Rural Schools

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands held an oversight hearing on the “Secure Rural Schools Reauthorization and Forest Management Options for a Viable County Payments Program.” The hearing focused on solutions to ensure forest counties and schools receive sufficient funds while increasing timber harvests and forest management on federal land to create jobs and boost forest county revenues.

“Over the years, federal policies, court rulings, and a general lack of understanding about the impact of public lands on schools and education have drastically eroded a once viable timber industry. Increasing management and multiple-use of our forest resources is the only practical option to ensure that the federal government can meet its obligations and provide certainty to our rural schools and communities. Today’s hearing was the first of many steps that will be taken in Congress to address this problem. In an effort to address the challenges many timber-dependent communities are currently facing, Congress must examine the policies currently hindering production and multiple use of our forest resources. Secure Rural Schools funds are essentially hush monies paid to communities in exchange for not being able to use their lands,” **said Subcommittee Chairman Rob Bishop (UT-01).**

“As we discuss the importance of revenue to these counties, timber sales--what should be the primary source of those revenues—have steeply declined from a high in the late 1980’s of over \$1.5 billion to just \$186 million last year—an 88% drop. The result has been a staggering loss of jobs and economic productivity in rural forest communities,” **said Committee Chairman Doc Hastings (WA-04).** *“More federal land acquisition, wilderness designations and other restrictive management of existing lands have resulted in billions of dollars in federal maintenance backlogs, an increasing risk of catastrophic wildfires that emit tons of carbon into the atmosphere and sediment into streams and rivers, and more diseased and dying trees. Rather than maintain a status quo program that yields less revenue for counties, current statutory authorities should be reviewed to allow harvesting of more timber to make forests healthier and more economically viable for state and local governments to use for schools and other local needs.”*

Background:

The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 was passed by

Congress and signed into law by President Clinton to address steeply declining forest revenues caused by increased federal environmental regulations and land acquisition. The program is set to expire on September 30th, 2011 unless it is reauthorized by Congress.

The Secure Rural Schools legislation was originally intended to serve as a temporary program until policy changes could be made to restore county payments derived from timber receipts. However, federal lands continue to remain under lock and key by the Obama Administration, limiting economic development in local communities and prohibiting proper forest management. The lack of forest management has resulted in billions of dollars in federal maintenance backlogs, an increased risk of catastrophic wildfires, and more diseased and dying trees. The reauthorization of Secure Rural Schools therefore must promote active forest management as well as include incentives for increasing multiple-use and revenues from federal lands while ensuring forest counties and schools receive necessary funds.

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