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Representing the Forest Counties Payments Committee
August 31, 2005
Oversight Hearing on
Forest Health Conditions and
Forest Management Practices on the Black Hills National Forest
Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
Committee on Resources, United States House of Representatives

Statement of Dr. Timothy Creal
Forest Counties Payments Committee
Before
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and discuss important forest management issues in the Black Hills National Forest of South Dakota. I am Timothy Creal and I am here today representing the Forest Counties Payments Committee. I am also the Superintendent of Schools for the Custer School District in South Dakota. I want to thank the House Committee on Resources, and especially my Congresswoman, the Honorable Stephanie Herseth, for their efforts in addressing the management of our national forests in South Dakota. Like many people in the West, I have had a close association with our public lands for much of my adult life. I worked for the U.S.D.A Forest Service for a number of years, I have worked as a logger on the national forest, and during the past four years I have had the honor of representing the people of South Dakota as one of four officials appointed by Congress to the Forest Counties Payments Committee. The Payments Committee was created by Congress to provide recommendations for a long-term solution for making payments to states and counties where national forest and certain Bureau of Land Management lands exist. The Committee is also charged with evaluating payments made under the current Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-determination Act, and to make other evaluations related to impacts to communities. The Payments Committee testified before the Sub-committee on Forests and Forest Health in May of this year, so I will not reiterate what we have already provided to Congress. Instead, I would like to

provide you with some perspectives about the management of our public lands, beliefs that I feel confident to say are shared by most members of the Payments Committee.

The creation of the Forest Reserves, and later the National Forests, was not popular among many people in the West. A review of the congressional record and newspaper reports at that time reveal the intense controversy associated with bringing the public domain under management. In fact, it was reported that as many as 30,000 people gathered in Rapid City, not too far from here, to demonstrate against the creation of these federal forests. However, today I believe most people would agree establishing these national forests was the right decision. The Payments Committee conducted numerous public listening sessions around the Country during the past three years, and no one recommended these lands be placed in private ownership. We have heard overwhelming input about the need to actively manage these public lands where appropriate, and to fulfill the intent Congress when it set these lands aside.

Other people commenting to this Committee are more qualified to speak about the science of forest management better than I am, so I would like to discuss the relationship between communities and forests.

When Congress established the National Forests it was recognized there could be certain impacts to communities. The inability to collect taxes was perceived to limit the ability to fund public roads and schools. It was also recognized that public lands communities could be limited in economic development potential. Therefore, Congress created

revenue sharing laws to make payments to communities for schools and roads. More important were the industries and jobs that developed around the management activities on these forests. I believe there has existed a certain interdependence between public forests and people. Forests depend on a certain level of management to sustain their health, and people depend on forests to provide goods and services and jobs.

During the past three years the Forest Counties Payments Committee conducted studies that reveal the costs and benefits to communities from the presence of these public lands, the tax value of the national forests, and the effects to schools and roads when natural resource policies result in significant changes in management activities. We find direct effects to school enrollment when communities experience a sharp drop in forest management projects that provide good paying jobs. This results in less money allocated to these schools by the State. Many school officials have provided our Payments Committee with numerous accounts of dropping many education programs, including advanced programs, and extracurricular activities because of reduced education allocations. These are the very programs that help our rural students compete on the same level with their urban counterparts for admission to college. In my school district alone, the loss of these funds, nearly \$300,000 would mean the loss of staff and programs which would ultimately hurt the students. Congress has provided much needed assistance to these schools by passing the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-determination Act of 2000. Our Committee has recommended that it be reauthorized before it expires in 2006.

Title II

I want to take the opportunity to comment on a feature of the Secure Rural Schools Act I believe is extraordinary. The ability to create resource advisory committee comprised of citizens interested in the management of the national forests could become a new model for managing our public lands. The Payments Committee has looked extensively at these resource advisory committees and their success is remarkable. There are currently 59 active resource advisory committees, and an additional 29 that have been chartered. In 2004, approximately \$41.8 million were set aside by counties to accomplish projects on the National Forests and O&C Lands. I am happy to hear we may soon have one of these resource advisory committees here in the Black Hills in South Dakota. I also would like to note that reports of the collaborations within the resource advisory committees have been very positive and that, to date, we are not aware of the appeal of any projects.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my comments. However, I would be happy to answer any questions you, or other members of the subcommittee may have.