

February 10, 2015

Dear:

The Amador County Board of Supervisors respectfully urges the 114th Congress to continue working on reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000. Rural Counties such as Amador County are in urgent need of a long-term, stable source of funding for vital programs in schools and roads. The 25% revenue sharing today is no more of an adequate, stable funding source than it was in 2000 when the Secure Rural Schools Act was originally passed. Therefore, we urge Congress to work to restore the 25% revenue sharing levels as it works to reduce the funding for the Secure Rural Schools and Communities Act.

Beginning with the 1891 Federal Forest Reserve Act, Congress began withholding lands that would have otherwise served the public through economic development and community stability. In 1897, Congress attempted to limit the impact to communities by restricting the lands that could be acquired in the Forest Reserve System to those lands that the Government could “improve and protect ... or for the purpose of securing favorable conditions of water flows, and to furnish a continuous supply of timber for the use and necessities of citizens of the United States” (Organic Act of 1897). The National Forest Revenue Acts of 1907 & 08 recognized that the Federal Government was now operating a business without paying its fair share of local services to the Counties within which it operated. From 1908 to 2000, the Government paid its fair share in the form of 25% of the revenues derived mostly from its charge to furnish a continuous supply of timber. In the 1990’s, that charge was supplanted with other non-revenue generating purposes, significantly reducing timber harvest levels, leaving itself unable to pay its share of local services from forest revenues. From 2000 to 2013, Congress met that obligation for the Forest Service with the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-determination Act. For many Counties such as Amador County, the Secure Rural Schools and Community Act significantly reduced payments, in our case from over \$859,000 to just over \$300,000. But 2014 was the first year in over a century, the government has not paid its fair share of local services. Without Congressional action, the Forest Service will revert to its original status of operating a business without paying its fair share of local services.

The Amador County Board of Supervisors understands Congress’s desire to reduce funding not supported by revenue generation. We support a reduction that follows a trend line similar to that of the past several years, but only upon the condition that Congress equally seek to phase in a restoration of the 25% revenue levels. Restoring the charge to furnish a continuous supply of timber would be one way, and could supplant the continuous devastation from wildfire which has escalated since the drop in timber production. To accomplish this, Congress could increase funding levels for project-related NEPA documents. It could include the gross revenues from Stewardship contracting in the calculations of the 25% revenue sharing. It could encourage more

collaborative groups that have proven ability to resolve forest issues and reduce forest costs. As it reduces Secure Rural Schools and Community Payments, Congress must invest in forest revenue generation if it expects the Forest Service to again meet its financial obligation to Counties from forest revenues.

Schools and roads are vital infrastructure to local communities. Our schools split this funding for both general education services and special needs education. California roads are in such desperate need of repair that the State of California is considering additional road taxes. The Secure Rural Schools Act provided additional benefits through the establishment of Resource Advisory Committees (RAC). Resource Advisory Committees work best with a long-term funding source. The last few years have been less effective because the late extension of the Act gave the RACs very little time to develop the best of projects. Still, the RACs were successful in unifying opposing sides on many forest issues and fund some very good forest improvement projects.

We urge Congress to reauthorize the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-determination Act of 2000 for multiple years and as that Act is phased out, Congress will equally phase in ways to restore forest revenues which together will provide long-term, stable funding for Communities and Schools.

Sincerely,

Brian Oneto, Chairman