

## Secure Rural Schools and Communities Act (SRS) – Remembering the History

The President of the United States was given the authority to create Forest Reserves in 1891. In the next six years over 40 million acres of forest land was placed in Forest Reserves. Across the west, rural county commissioners and school leaders expressed grave concerns over the withdrawal of large blocks of land from settlement, economic development, and taxation within their counties. Many communities were also highly dependent on these lands for grazing, timber, and water. Rural public concern was growing about:

- a) the purpose of these lands and how they would be managed; and
- b) the economic impacts of locking up these lands – especially the impacts on roads and schools.

In 1897, Congress finally specified that the Forest Reserves would be used for three purposes:

1. Improve and protect the forests in the Reserve.
2. Secure favorable conditions of water flows.
3. Furnish a continual supply of timber for the use and necessities of citizens of the United States.

In 1905, the Forest Reserves were renamed National Forests and Forest Service was founded to manage the lands. Presidents continued to set aside more lands by proclamation. Rural county commissioners and school superintendents voiced concern. By the mid 1900's over 153 million acres had been set aside as National Forests.

President Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot, Chief of the Forest Service were so concerned that rural county opposition would politically compromise the future of the U.S. National Forests, that they proposed a new concept – revenue sharing. In 1908 Congress approved a bill that specified that 25% of all revenues raised on National Forests would be sent to counties which contained these forests to be used for county roads and public schools. For over 100 years, this 1908 revenue sharing act has provided critical revenues for rural counties and schools.

### ***“The Compact”***

*It is important to remember that these funds are to mitigate for the removal of these lands from economic development and settlement – in order to form our National Forest system. This was a compact with the rural citizens of America to make possible the establishment of our National Forests.*

From 1908 until the late 1980's this “Revenue Sharing” system worked well for forest counties and schools by providing a steady and significant income stream. By the late 1980's national environmental laws and aggressive environmental organizations caused most national forests to discontinue or drastically cut grazing, timber management, and mining. As a result, U.S. Forest Service revenues declined very rapidly as did the 25% Forest Revenue receipts to counties and schools. By 1998 these revenues had declined by over 70%.

### **The Secure Rural Schools and Communities Act (SRS)**

In December 2000, with support from the National Forest Counties & Schools Coalition (NFCSC), the Secure Rural Schools and Communities Act was signed into law. This bill provided Title I payments to counties (for roads) and to public schools, it also provided payments to counties to invest in Title II Forest Improvement Projects on National Forests and Title III for specific projects and programs in counties. The Act also authorized the counties to create, in cooperation with the USFS, collaborative Resource Advisory Committees. This Act was enormously successful in that it restored county and school revenues to their 1980's and early 90's levels, resulting in restoration of public services and school programs. The 62 Resource Advisory Committees completed over 4000 projects on National Forest lands without a single lawsuit or appeal. The original SRS authorization expired in September 2006.

2007 – A one-year extension of SRS is approved

2008 – A five-year extension is approved with a new funding formula and a 10 percent reduction each year.

Due to the negative impact of the new formula, several states are designated as “transition states” and are allowed to use the old formula through 2010.

2012 – A one-year extension is approved with a 5 percent reduction in funding from 2011.

2013 – Another one-year extension is approved with an additional 5 percent reduction in funding.

2015 – A two-year extension is approved for FY 2014-2015 with additional 5 percent reduction each year.

2016 – Congress fails to act and SRS expires. NFCSC brings allies together to work for reauthorization.

2017 – Congress fails to act. NFCSC and allies including NEA & NACo intensify efforts and gain momentum.

2018 – Congress approves two-year reauthorization of SRS for FY-17 & FY-18 (no SRS funding for FY-16).