



July 25, 2007

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The Honorable Nick Rahall, Chairman  
House Natural Resources Committee  
2307 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Don Young, Ranking Member  
House Natural Resources Committee  
2111 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rahall and Ranking Member Young:

The Council of Western State Foresters (Council) is comprised of the seventeen State Foresters and six Territorial Foresters in the West. The mission of the Council is to promote science-based forest management that serves the values of society and ensures the health and sustainability of western forests. We respectfully ask for your support in reauthorizing the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination (SRS) Act (PL-106-393) and in fully funding the Payment in Lieu of Taxes program (PILT).

Changes in federal forest management led to a reduction in revenue-sharing payments to forest-based communities throughout the country. This created economic hardships for communities that relied on payments based on revenues generated from management of the National Forests. The SRS Act, which expired in September 2006, addressed this by providing funding for these counties. The Act received a one-year extension through the FY07 Emergency Supplemental (PL-110-28). However, once this reauthorization expires, over 600 counties and 4,400 school districts in 39 states will no longer receive support via this program.

Rural communities depend on this Act to maintain their strength and economic vibrancy. Many of today's forest health issues are best handled through an engaged community with the capacity to manage forests. We support sustainable forest management on the National Forests, which also ensures vibrant rural forest-dependent communities by providing jobs and resilient forests for the future. For these reasons, the impact of the expiration of the SRS Act on forested counties and rural areas is of great concern to the Council.

The PILT program seeks to provide general funds to 49 states, but has never been fully funded. This program supports counties that have public lands within their boundaries for which they do not receive local property tax receipts. Funding the PILT program at the intended, and needed, levels is very important to areas that have large swaths of public lands within their boundaries.

These two programs provide funds to communities throughout the country; however, they are especially important in the western United States due to the significant amount of public lands and forest-based communities. These payments will help to keep our country's rural communities and families strong and economically stable. We ask that you support legislation that reauthorizes the SRS Act and fully funds the PILT program.

We appreciate your attention to this issue. Please contact Caitlyn Peel at 303-445-4363, [cpeel@colostate.edu](mailto:cpeel@colostate.edu), for further information on this issue.

Sincerely,

Bob Harrington  
Chair, Council of Western State Foresters

cc: House Natural Resources Committee Members