



National Forest Counties and Schools Coalition

News Bulletin

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Secure Rural Schools and Communities Act 2009 Payments Made

Over the last two months local forest counties and school districts have received their 2009 Secure Rural Schools and Communities Act payments. Nationwide over \$450 million has been dispensed. The 2009 payments reflected a 10% reduction from the \$500 million payment received in 2008.

Next year (2010) counties and schools nationwide will share a \$405 million payment and in 2011 the payment will decline to \$364.5 million. By contrast, if the SRSCA is not reauthorized by the time it expires in September 2011 all counties will revert to receiving 25% forest reserve payments under the new 7 year rolling average. At this time, those 7 year rolling average payments would yield a substantially reduced nationwide revenue of \$66.1 million. This would represent an 87% decrease from the funding received by counties and schools in 2008, the first year of our current 4 year reauthorization. Clearly most forest counties and school districts are not in a financial position to survive such a massive reduction in revenue. This would provide revenues that would be 17% lower than counties and schools were receiving in 1999 – when the original SRSCA Act was developed and passed.

NFCSC Board Launches Partnership for Rural America Campaign

Over six months in the planning process, the NFCSC Board has approved the design and structure of the “Partnership For Rural America Campaign”. The purpose of the Campaign is to achieve a longer term (8-10 yrs.) reauthorization or extension of the Secure Rural Schools and Communities Act prior to its expiration in September 2011. If possible the Campaign would clearly prefer to achieve this goal in 2010 if the correct legislative opportunity presents itself.

The Campaign will be an orchestrated grassroots campaign utilizing Coalition Action Teams (CAT) in key regions of the country. The regions will include the south, southeast, southwest, mountain states, and the Pacific West. The Campaign is being managed by an experienced campaign management team with a successful record of statewide and national campaign management.

A Campaign Steering Committee composed of selected members of the NFCSC Board of Directors will work with the Campaign Management team to plan and execute the campaign. As in previous campaigns this effort will fully utilize the advocacy resources and tools available through NFCSC Coalition member organizations and will also utilize contract advocate specialists as the need arises.

Campaign staff and members of the Campaign Steering Committee have been making presentations to county and school groups in the sixteen highest receiving SRSCA payment states over the past two months, in an effort to inform county and school personnel and enlist their assistance.

State and Congressional specific campaign newsletters and talking points are in the process of being developed. These materials represent a huge step forward in effectively presenting our message in key states and to their congressional delegations.

Needless to say, a campaign of this magnitude and sophistication will take resources to achieve. The Board has developed a budget for the campaign and we estimate that it will cost approximately \$500,000 per year for each of the next two years to fund this effort and achieve this goal. If every county and school district that

benefits from SRSCA funding makes a proportionate contribution, we will raise the required revenue. So, in addition to our usual NFCSC dues, the NFCSC Board is encouraging school districts and county governments to send a campaign contribution for each of the next two years – 2010 and 2011.

The simple way to calculate the recommended campaign contribution is to multiply the campaign factor of (.001) times your 2010 SRSCA receipts. Contributions should be sent to NFCSC and it should be noted on the check “Partnership For Rural America Campaign”.

Keeping this in perspective, an investment of \$1 million over the next two years, will hopefully allow us to acquire 8-10 years of funding at the current 2009 or 2010 level. That would represent a \$5 billion dollar return on our investment. The cost/benefit ratio is quite clear. However, the only way this will work is if counties and school districts, which benefit from SRSCA, join together and raise the necessary funds to support the campaign. Contribution request letters will be mailed to all participating counties and schools in early April.

The Campaign has just developed a new website and you may access it at the following address:

www.PartnershipForRuralAmerica.org

Early Campaign Supporters Applauded by NFCSC Board

Certain aspects of the campaign had to be launched starting October 1, 2009. Initial funding to support the campaign had to be raised, and in their usual fashion, long-time county and school supporters of NFCSC stepped forward to help. The following entities should be thanked by all of us for stepping up and shouldering the financial burden of the first four months of the campaign – an amount in excess of \$100,000 to date has been contributed.

- California Forest Counties School Coalition
- Association of O & C Counties
- Association of Oregon Counties (AOC)
- Douglas County – Oregon
- Skamania County – Washington
- Skamania County School District – Washington

Our heartfelt thanks to all of you that made this happen. Now we need all of the other counties and schools to join the campaign!

New USFS Planning Regulations being Developed

In December 2009, the USFS announced that it was embarking for the fifth time in the last decade to once again develop a new set of forest planning regulations. Both the Secretary of Agriculture and the Chief of the USFS have stated that the purpose is to revise the planning rules to make it simpler and more effective for the Forest Service to accomplish its forest restoration mission. Comments from interested persons and organization were due on February 16th.

The NFCSC, on behalf of the forest counties and school districts they represent, submitted comments focused on three areas of interest: Cooperating Agency Status for local government, Coordinated Planning Processes, and the incorporation at every level of the process of local collaboration. More specifically, NFCSC requested that the new planning rule:

1. Clearly state that the USFS will actively encourage and support local agencies and entities of local government in applying for Cooperating Agency Status and provide technical support and assistance to such agencies and the USFS staff in carrying out this mandate effectively. The elevated status afforded Cooperating Agencies of local government should be maintained and/or strengthened in the new regulations.
2. The new planning rules should clarify the requirements in NEPA and NFMS for the USFS to coordinate their decision making and planning processes with that of state and local governments. We recommend that the step-by-step process outlined in Section 219.7 of the 1982 planning rule be included in the new regulations.
3. The new planning rule should incorporate collaborative planning processes at all levels. The rule should specify that plan development be accomplished through broad participation of concerned

stakeholders including local government, public schools, and local, state and federal land management agencies. Further, that those who participate must commit in writing to seek positive solutions to common problems and goal setting with respect to the management of federal lands. Finally, we recommend that these stakeholder groups be developed at a size and scale so as to ensure that local participation is maximized and a high level of local landscape knowledge and expertise is therefore reflected in the planning process.

At this point, our input will be considered along with that of other stakeholders. Additional opportunities for input will be available as the process proceeds.

Resource Advisory Committee Appointment Process Finally Starting to Move – But Slowly

As most of you know, the Obama Administration has moved very slowly and deliberately to re-charter the old and new RAC's authorized under the SRSCA 2008 Act. At this point, two years into the Act all of the old and new Resource Advisory Committees (RAC's) have been issued new four year charters by the USFS and Secretary of Agriculture. The major problem has been the appointment of new RAC members to fill vacancies on existing RAC's and the appointment of members to serve on the over 50 new RAC's authorized by the 2008 SRSCA extension.

After receiving letters from NFCSC, NACo, and 18 Senators, the Administration and the Department of Agriculture seem to be making an effort to get things moving. A number of old RAC vacancies have been filled since Christmas, but not all are yet completed. To date none of the newly authorized RAC's have been filled with appointees. This week county commissioners from across the nation delivered a clear message to the USFS and USDA that this delay needs to be resolved and appointments made as soon as possible. Over \$75 million is being held up because RAC's cannot approve projects and start shovel ready projects that would both improve the forests and the employment outlook in rural counties.

NFCSC Board of Directors – Welcome New Members

In recent months, four new Directors have been appointed to the NFCSC Board of Directors. **Tim Josi**, Commissioner from Tillamook County, Oregon has been recently appointed to the Board. Mr. Josi currently serves as the Chairman of the Western Interstate Region (WIR) of NACo Board of Directors and as Chairman of the NACo Public Lands Steering Committee for 2010.

Faye Stewart, Commissioner from Lane County, Oregon has been appointed to replace Mike Propes, long serving Oregon Commissioner on the NFCSC Board. Mr. Stewart is a veteran Commissioner in Lane County, Oregon – one of the largest SRSCA receipt receiving counties in the country. He actively participated in the 2008 extension of SRSCA.

Paul Gutierrez, Executive Director of the New Mexico Association of Counties has been appointed to the Board of NFCSC representing New Mexico Counties and School Districts. As a former State Director of the Farm Service Agencies and Rural Development agencies in New Mexico, and as the Executive of a key State Association of Counties, Mr. Gutierrez brings both knowledge and political understanding to the Board.

Ken Allen is the Executive Director of the Oregon Council #75 of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). He has been a leader in organized labor for over 35 years and currently serves as an AFSCME International Vice-President representing the Northwest Region.

The National Forest Counties and Schools Coalition is pleased to welcome these extraordinary gentlemen as Directors on the NFCSC Board.