

Partnership for Rural America Campaign

Campaign Talking Points

The dollars provided by the *Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (Contract)* are not part of an entitlement program. Rather they are a demonstration of the commitment that this nation made to rural communities when they determined that lands should be set aside for the entire nation to enjoy. Indeed the Contract has its foundation in the creation and expansion of our National Forests. Teddy Roosevelt understood the value of conserving land and placing it in public trust. He also understood the economic burden the program placed on rural communities. In 1906, President Roosevelt proposed, and Congress approved, a bill that specified 10% of all revenues from National Forests would be sent to communities that housed these forests. The money was used to support county services and schools. In 1908, the Congress increased the revenue to be shared to 25%. This law worked well for nearly a century. In the late 1980's national policies substantially diminished the revenue generating activity in the forests, and by 1998 revenues for these communities declined by over 70%.

These rural communities have no ability to re-make themselves, because in fact, the primary resource they depend upon for economic and social health are the lands now restricted in terms of revenue generation. That is why in 2000 Congress passed the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (Contract) to remediate this inequity and its impacts on rural communities.

A remarkable success of the Contract has been the creation of Resource Advisory Committees (RACs). Across the nation, these committees serve as a mechanism for community-based collaboration with federal land managers. The result has been the completion of thousands of conservation and ecosystem restoration projects on federal lands **without a single lawsuit or appeal!** We are proud of this accomplishment. The long term reauthorization of the Contract is vital if any new planning rule is to reach its potential. As an example, the Contract that passed the 110th Congress states that at a minimum, 50% of dollars in Title II of the Contract are to be spent on road maintenance, decommissioning or obliteration, and restoration of streams and watersheds.

Dollars provided by the Act are critical to restoration and conservation actions required to protect and enhance the resilience of forest and grass land ecosystems. As stated by the Forest Service, the new planning rule must "provide for a transparent, collaborative process that allows for effective public participation." Currently, the Resource Advisory Committees are this nation's premier example of a collaborative process that furthers the principles of this proposed Rule.

- The Contract fostered the creation of 49 Resource Advisory Committees that promote effective and proactive collaboration with the public, the sustainability of NFS lands contributing to job creation and the health of rural economies in 13 States;
- The Contract provides funds for the restoration and enhancement of habitat that protects the diversity of species. From 2000 to 2008 more than \$260 million has been spent on 5,100 RAC approved projects;
- The Contract provides funds for programs that restore ecosystem resiliency: many of which factor adaptation and mitigation strategies into planning and implementation; and
- The Contract provides funds for programs that ensure healthy forests and watersheds: both of which support the entirety of the nation's population.

Currently 69 new RACs in an additional 16 states are in the process of approval. By year end there will be 118 RACs in 29 states contributing Title II dollars to the health of forest lands. These dollars can be used to leverage additional dollars from a variety of sources, both public and private, to include conservation groups, State Fish and Game departments, Watershed Councils and NGOs, to name just a few. **THE LONG TERM REAUTHORIZATION OF SECURE RURAL SCHOOLS SUPPORTS THE PRINCIPLES OF THIS RULE.** This Rule should support the long-term reauthorization of the Contract.

