

SECURE RURAL SCHOOLS AND COUNTIES

POSITION: Federated Women in Timber urges you to support by co-sponsoring HR 517 or S 267 that will honor the long-standing compact between communities with federal forest reserves and the federal government. Without extension of safety net payments as proposed in HR 517 and S 267, support for schools, roads and local government in timber-rich counties will drop precipitously (as much as a 95% cut) by FY '07. We support the principles articulated in the National Forest Counties and Schools Coalition's March 8, 1999 statement of Joint Principles.

These principles are:

- No decoupling of county payments from the revenue producing programs and capacity of the federal agencies.
- A requirement that the agencies pay either the higher of the safety-net payment or the actual receipts based on revenues produced, with the agency's non-revenue producing programs covering the difference between actual receipts and the safety-net payment if receipts fall below the safety-net trigger level.
- A call for a long-term solution to federal land management that: (1) promotes local government coordination; (2) recognizes the need for sustainable economic self-sufficiency of rural communities; and (3) requires ecological and social considerations, with social factors having co-equal status and consideration of federal lands.

The best way for federal government to honor its long-standing compact of forest reserve communities is to quickly recover the capacity to actively manage these resources in a way that promotes forest health and creates sustainable, healthy forest communities that are not dependent on subsidies from the U.S. Treasury.

BACKGROUND: The existence of federal lands in a county reduces the county's ability to develop/generate economic wealth from those lands, as well as general tax revenue, which pays for vital transportation, education and public safety capacity. Over the past 100 years, Congress has developed a number of laws to compensate counties for their lost economic development opportunities as well as lost tax base. Counties face dramatic reductions in these payments if the federal agencies do not sell timber or engage in other economic activities and revenue development (i.e. extraction of minerals). Many non-spotted owl counties have never received compensation, even though they sustained the same financial hardship since the implementation of the spotted owl legislation.

Now many states, and especially northern spotted owl impacted counties, stand to lose tens of millions of dollars more annually beginning in the year 2007 if the Secure Rural Schools payments sunset.

RATIONALE: In addition to the principles set forth in the National Forest Counties and Schools Coalition, Federated Women in Timber submits the following support of the principles:

- That it is imperative that forest resources are managed in a responsible manner. "No Action" has yielded an economic hardship, overgrown, bug-infested, fire-prone and disease-prone federal forest.
- That overall health of the forest be a key factor in forest management on public lands.
That sustainable forestry be practiced at every level of forest management: local, regional and national.
- That healthy, managed forests provide economically stable and independent rural communities, recreational opportunities, and plentiful clean water for urban and agricultural uses.
- That on-the-ground land managers have the authority and obligation to carry out these policies in cooperation with local government and local interests.

CONCLUSION: Our country's heritage is based on a principle of fairness. It is important that our children understand that the forest is a place of many activities. We have an aging population that is unable to do many of the outdoor activities of their youth but maintain an interest in those activities. It is important that forest roads be maintained for recreational purposes and the prevention of catastrophic fire. Good stewards take care of the land. The wise use of our natural resources is extremely important if we are to be good stewards of the land. Good stewardship and economical, sustainable outcomes are compatible if not one and the same thing!

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