

WYDEN, CRAPO, MERKLEY, RISCH REINTRODUCE LEGISLATION TO PROVIDE LONG-TERM STABILITY FOR SECURE RURAL SCHOOLS PROGRAM

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Washington, D.C. – U.S. Senators Ron Wyden, D-Ore., Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., and Jim Risch, R-Idaho, today reintroduced legislation to provide much-needed financial certainty for rural counties to ensure they have the long-term funding needed for schools, road maintenance, law enforcement and other essential services.

The bipartisan *Forest Management for Rural Stability Act*, which the senators first introduced in December 2018, makes the Secure Rural Schools program—which expired at the end of FY 2018—permanent by creating an endowment fund to provide stable, increasing and reliable funding for county services.

“This is a matter of making sure Oregonians living and working in rural counties have the financial certainty they need and deserve,” Wyden said. “It’s time to put an end to the financial roller coaster in forested counties in Oregon and permanently invest in our teachers, law enforcement officers, bridges and roads.”

“It is time to create a permanent, lasting program for Idaho counties and schools surrounded by tax-exempt federal lands,” Crapo said. “A long-term endowment assisted by forest products receipts would ensure certainty for parents, students and those traveling Idaho’s roads and bridges.”

“One of Oregon’s many treasures is our vast swaths of public lands,” Merkley said. “Since they’re not part of the local tax base, the counties that contain those lands deserve permanent, consistent support from the federal government to fund basic necessities like schools, law enforcement, and infrastructure. I’m urging my colleagues to fulfill this essential commitment to every family in our rural communities without delay.”

“For too long, active forest management has not been made a priority, SRS payments have been unreliable, and Idaho's rural counties have paid the price,” Risch said. "These communities deserve a long-term solution that enables them to provide critical county services, and this legislation helps restore predictability while investing in county projects and timber management.”

The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (SRS)—originally co-authored by Wyden—was enacted in 2000 to financially assist counties with public, tax-exempt forestlands. Since

then, Wyden, Crapo, Merkley and Risch have worked to give SRS a more permanent role in assisting rural counties with large tracts of federal lands.

Critical services at the county level have historically been funded in part with a 25 percent share of timber receipts from federal U.S. Forest Service lands and a 50 percent share of timber receipts from federal Oregon and California Grant Lands managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. As those revenues have fallen or fluctuated due to reduced timber harvest and market forces, SRS payments helped bridge the gap to keep rural schools open, provide road maintenance, support search and rescue efforts and other essential county services. Since enacted in 2000, SRS has provided a total of \$7 billion in payments to more than 700 counties and 4,400 school districts in more than 40 states to fund schools and essential services like roads and public safety.

In recent years, however, Congress has allowed SRS funding to lapse and decrease, creating massive uncertainty for counties as they budget for basic county services. The senators' *Forest Management for Rural Stability Act* ends the uncertainty and provides rural counties financial security.

Legislative text can be found [here](#). A one-page summary of the bill can be found [here](#) and a longer summary of the bill can be found [here](#).

Association of Oregon County President and Clackamas County, Oregon Chair Martha Schrader: “This is an important bill for all of Oregon’s counties. AOC strongly supports this legislation. Senators Wyden and Crapo have been working diligently on this bill for over a year with input from many interest groups, including AOC. The result is a well thought out bill that will help stabilize funding for counties and schools.”

Valley County, Idaho Commissioner and National Association of Counties’ West region representative Gordon Cruickshank: “The Secure Rural Schools program helps counties and school districts deliver essential services like education, roads and bridges, wildfire prevention and environmental stewardship. Federal policies have resulted in significant declines in timber revenue, leaving hundreds of counties susceptible to dramatic budgetary shortfalls. We applaud Senators Crapo and Wyden for their efforts to fulfill the federal government’s long-standing commitment to forest counties and provide the long-term certainty we need to serve our residents.”

Association of Oregon and California Counties President and Douglas County, Oregon Commissioner Tim Freeman: “We are truly grateful to Senator Wyden for his continuing efforts to stabilize county funding for essential public services. For counties in western Oregon that had the rug pulled out from under them by loss of shared federal timber receipts, this bill will be a lifesaver.”

Harney County, Oregon Commissioner and Co-Chair, Association of Oregon Counties Natural Resources Steering Committee Mark Owens: “Counties need some certainty when we do our budgeting. The bill would give us more certainty and would also give us a broader latitude in how to spend the money

we receive. For counties with National Forests, 85% of the payments would be used for traditional purposes of funding for roads and schools; 15% would be chosen from a list broad enough that every county would have local needs that could be addressed with those funds. Congress should move quickly to make Senator Wyden's vision a reality."

Curry County, Oregon Commissioner Court Boice: "I fully support this bill—the stable funding it provides will help keep my county in business and allow us to focus more on forest management issues. We must have stable funding before we can give full attention to management problems contributing to the catastrophic wildfires that plague us almost every summer. Senator Wyden and his staff have worked long and hard on this bill and they can count on my help to get it through the legislative process."

Coos County, Oregon Commissioner Bob Main: "Senators Wyden and Crapo and their staffs have worked for many months on this bill and the results have been worth the effort—this bill would help solve one of the problems we have struggled with for over 20 years. At the same time, it maintains important ties between counties and the federal forests within county borders. Maintaining the connection between counties and forest management is an essential element of this bill."

Baker County, Oregon Commissioner Mark Bennett: "Senators Wyden and Crapo have demonstrated longstanding bipartisan leadership in the support for the Secure Rural Schools funding. This federal program is critical to the schools, counties and our communities providing direct funds for roads, law enforcement, search and rescue and fire operations on federal lands performed

by the counties. Without this funding, these critical activities would be curtailed or the financial burden borne by the financially strapped counties.”

Umatilla School District Superintendent Heidi Sipe: “I am thankful to Senators Wyden and Crapo for working to stabilize funding for schools in Eastern Oregon with their Forest Management for Rural Stability Act. The permanent endowment created by their bill will help rural students and their families by allowing school districts to make long-term plans that avoid the ups and downs of uncertain revenues. That’s a winning equation for rural communities operating often on narrow budget margins, and I am excited for a future of consistent, reliable, funding mechanisms that create the best opportunity for good student outcomes.”

Oregon State Sheriffs’ Association Executive Director, Sheriff John Bishop: “The Sheriffs of Oregon particularly in the O & C counties understand the importance of forest management and the resources in which these industries bring to the overall budgets. Due to the steep decline of these industries, the federal SRS program is vital to keep local governments viable and to help Public Safety keep our communities safe. I very much appreciate the attention that Senators Wyden and Merkley are giving to this issues.”

National Association of Counties Executive Director Matthew Chase: “The Secure Rural Schools program helps counties and school districts deliver essential services in much of rural America. Counties appreciate Senators Wyden and Crapo’s efforts to ensure stable payments to local governments and support robust economies in rural areas with large tracts of federal forest lands. For years, forest counties have faced fiscal

uncertainty due to federal regulations that reduce timber harvests on federal lands and the unpredictable annual appropriations process. The Forest Management for Rural Stability Act will create greater revenue stability for counties and new tools for forest management. Counties urge Congress to act quickly on this legislation.”

Idaho Forest Group Chairman & CEO Marc Brinkmeyer: “I appreciate the efforts of both Senator Crapo and Senator Wyden to provide increased certainty to counties that rely on Secure Rural Schools funding. Active forest management is critical to providing both economic and ecologic vitality to rural communities in the West, and the endowment is one way that a thriving timber industry directly and positively impacts these communities.”

American Forest Resource Council President and CEO Travis Joseph: “We are passionate about and committed to the health and safety of the rural communities in which we live and work. We share the goal of Senators Wyden and Crapo to generate permanent, reliable financial support to forested counties in order to provide essential services to all community members - a goal the forest products industry contributes to every day. We appreciate the opportunity to continue working on the bipartisan concept - an endangered species in the Congress - while preserving the critical link between sustainable forest management, jobs, timber volume, and robust local economies.”

National Education Association Director of Government Relations Marc Egan: “Nine million students—nearly 19 percent of all K-12 students in our nation—attend rural schools. Despite this fact, many rural schools, especially those in counties with substantial forested lands, face extreme funding

challenges that adversely impact their ability to provide a quality education to students. The Rural Stability Act introduced by Senators Crapo and Wyden recognizes that these schools are crucial educational institutions, and also the anchors of their communities. This legislation would provide reliable funding for forested counties, giving them the certainty and stability they need to invest in schools, infrastructure, law enforcement and other essential services. For students in these areas, it would mean better educational opportunities that all students deserve, no matter where they live.”

National Forest Counties and School Coalition President Kermith Walters: “The National Forest Counties and Schools Coalition wants to again thank Senators Crapo and Wyden for their reintroduction of Forest Management for Rural Stability Act making permanent the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program by creating an endowment fund to ensure forest counties receive stable, long-term Secure Rural School Funding payments. Rural counties and schools for too long have had to hold their breath every year while waiting for Congress to act on funding for rural counties and schools. Every year local people providing critical services are laid off when there is no SRS funding and then rehired when Congress funds SRS. Our rural schools and counties are dependent on these funds to provide essential services to our communities, schools and students.”