



NSBA Advocacy Institute 2017 CALIFORNIA BACKGROUND

Secure Rural Schools Act

In establishing the country's national forest system, it was the intent of Congress that the system be managed in a sustained multiple-use manner in perpetuity. Further, it was intended to provide revenues for local counties and the federal treasury in perpetuity as well, known as the Twenty-Five Percent Act of 1908.

From 1908 until about 1986, this revenue sharing mechanism worked extremely well. However, from 1986 to the present, for a variety of reasons, the sustained active multiple-use management of the National Forests and the revenues have swiftly declined. Most counties have seen a decline of more than 85 percent in actual revenues generated by National Forests, largely as a result of the decline in timber sales.

To help counties and school districts in rural communities recover revenues lost since the mid-1980s, Congress passed HR 2389 in 2000, otherwise known as the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (SRS) (PL 106-393), to provide funding to counties and school districts. It was intended to stabilize income for the rural regions which rely heavily on receipts from timber sales and other programs.

When first enacted, SRS provided nearly \$60 million annually to California's forest counties, with half of the funding allocated to school districts, and half of the funding allocated to counties for county roads. SRS initially expired in 2006 and has since been reauthorized multiple times, but each reauthorization has reduced the amount of funding for the program. In total, California has received \$38 million in funding since the 2012 reauthorization.

For schools in forest counties, the SRS has restored programs for students in rural schools and has prevented the closure of numerous isolated rural schools. It has been a primary funding mechanism to provide rural school students with educational opportunities comparable to suburban and urban students. Nationally, more than 4,400 rural schools receive SRS Title I funds. In California, school districts and county offices of education in 39 counties receive SRS funding.

Congress has also enacted the Federal Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) Act. Federal PILT provides federal payments to local governments in order to help offset losses in property taxes due to nontaxable federal lands within local governments' boundaries. Federal PILT helps local governments provide firefighting and police protection, construction of public schools and roads and search and rescue operations. For schools, these funds can only be used for construction, whereas SRS funds can be used for any educational purpose.

In early 2015, Congress passed and the President signed into law HR 2, commonly referred to as the “Doc Fix.” The primary purpose of the “Doc Fix” was to restructure Medicare reimbursements; however, attached to the measure were provisions which provided a two-year extension of SRS. The SRS extension provided an estimated \$27.3 million in 2014 and \$25.9 million in 2015 to California counties and schools.

In order to ensure that students in schools impacted by federal forest lands receive an adequate and appropriate education, the 115th Congress must address the issue of either reauthorizing the Secure Rural School Act or providing specific funding to address local funding inequities due to decreased taxes within federal forest lands.

TALKING POINTS:

- **The Secure Rural Schools Act and PILT funding are vital for the nation's forested counties and schools to continue providing critical education programs and services, so that all students in California receive an appropriate and equitable education equal to all other students throughout the state.**
- **CSBA strongly supports a multi-year reauthorization and full funding of the Federal Secure Rural Schools Act and the PILT programs.**
- **CSBA supports long-term forestry reform that would include appropriate funding for schools in areas of California that are heavily impacted by federal forest land.**

INFORMATION POINT:

- **If you have federal forest lands in your county, check with your fiscal office to determine if your district/county office of education receives Secure Rural Schools funding and what those funding amounts have been.**
- **Bring an example or two of how your district and/or county office of education has used SRS funds to expand its educational programs.**
- **Bring information regarding the impact on your schools and programs if SRS funding is not continued.**

Note: If your district or county office of education does not receive SRS funds, please let your Representative know that SRS funding is important to 39 California counties serving many low-income communities.