

County of Lassen
ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES



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March 11, 2020

TO: Board of Supervisors
Agenda Date: March 17, 2020

FROM: Richard Egan, County Administrative Officer 

SUBJECT: Federal Title III Funding (Secure Rural Schools Program)

RECOMMENDATION: Provide direction to staff.

PRIOR BOARD ACTIONS: Several. Since at least 2005, the Board of Supervisors has allocated a portion of federal Title III funding for fire safe planning and related activities provided by the Lassen County Fire Safe Council, Inc. The Board has also allocated Title III revenue to for reimbursing County costs for conducting Search and Rescue patrols, recoveries, training and equipment costs.

The Board has sent many letters supporting legislation calling for our federal Representatives and Senators in Congress to reauthorize Title III funding. Organizations such as Rural Counties Representatives of California (RCRC) and National Association of Counties (NACO) are also involved. I have attached background and status information from the National Association of Counties (NACO) for your information.

DISCUSSION: The Lassen County Fire Safe Council Inc. is requesting that the County provide \$51,000.00 in Title III funding for the Council to provide Fire Wise Community Events (Green Waste Days), Fire Wise Community Recertification's, and Community Wildfire Protection Plan updates. The Scope of Services (Exhibit 1, one page) is attached for showing the amount requested and deliverables.

A 45-day public notice and comment period must be completed prior to the allocation. In addition, a professional services agreement by and between the County and the Fire Safe Council is necessary. An unknown amount of Title III funding will be made available to the County in 2020; the federal government has not announced a date certain to distribute those funds.

FISCAL IMPACT: It is unknown if the federal government will reauthorize Title III funding or provide an alternative source of funding to Counties for fire safe activities and/or for search and rescue programs beyond 2020. The Board has allocated Title III funding to fund Sheriff related Search and Rescue services, patrol, training and equipment purchases, which if not for Title III funding being available, are costs that may have had a negative fiscal impact on the General Fund.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT: None.

ALTERNATIVES: Federally authorized uses of Title III funds includes reimbursements to Counties for participating in search and rescue and other emergency services, and to cover training costs and equipment purchases directly related to those services. The Board may allocate any or all Title III funding to those uses.

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EXHIBIT 1

All Projects

POLICY BRIEF

Continue Revenue Sharing Payments to Forest Counties: Support the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) Program

By JONATHAN SHUFFIELD Feb. 19, 2020

Tags: Public Lands

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ACTION NEEDED:

Urge your members of Congress to enact a long-term legislative solution for continued revenue sharing payments to forest counties through the U.S. Forest Service's Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program. Congress reauthorized SRS for FY 2019 and FY 2020 in the minibuss spending package enacted December 20, 2019. Counties rely on SRS payments to provide numerous critical services including infrastructure, conservation projects, search and rescue missions and fire prevention programs. Absent Congressional action, the last authorized SRS payments will be made to counties in spring 2021.

Further, Congress should reform forest management practices to improve forest health, increase production and ensure robust revenue sharing to all forest counties.

If Congress fails to renew its long-standing federal obligation to forest counties and to the lands managed by the federal government by not improving forest management and reauthorizing the SRS program, counties across the United States could face dramatic budgetary shortfalls. The last time authorization for SRS lapsed in FY 2016, federal forest payments to counties decreased by over 80 percent on average.

BACKGROUND:

The SRS program provides assistance to rural counties and school districts affected by the decline in revenue from timber harvests on federal lands. Historically, rural communities and schools have relied on a share of receipts from timber harvests to supplement local funding for education services and roads. During the 1980s, national policies substantially diminished the revenue-generating activity permitted in these forests. The resulting steep decline in timber sales decreased the revenues that rural counties and school districts received from forest management activities.

In response to this decline, SRS was enacted in 2000 (P.L. 106-393) to stabilize payments to counties and to compensate for lost revenues. In October 2008, SRS was reauthorized (P.L. 110-343) and amended to continue on a sliding payment scale. SRS was reauthorized retroactively on March 23, 2018 for FYs 2017 and 2018. For FY 2017 and 2018, SRS provided \$282 million and \$262 million, respectively, to approximately 700 rural counties, parishes and boroughs across the nation. SRS will expire at the end of FY 2020.

The expiration of SRS will create dramatic budgetary shortfalls if Congress fails to renew this long-standing federal obligation to county governments. Enactment of a sustainable long-term program to share revenues generated from the management of designated federal lands with forest counties and schools will ensure that students receive essential education services and rural communities have critical funding for roads, conservation projects, search and rescue missions and fire prevention programs.

KEY TALKING POINTS

If not reauthorized for FY 2021 and beyond, the expiration of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination (SRS) Act at the end of FY 2018 will create dramatic budgetary shortfalls for over 700 rural counties across the United States. When the authorization for SRS lapsed in FY 2016, federal forest payments to counties decreased by over 80 percent on average.

New legislation should be enacted that provides forest revenue sharing payments to counties and promotes active natural resource management for the stability and well-being of forest counties and communities. NACo will continue to urge leadership in both chambers and on both sides of the aisle to work together to enact a long-term, sustainable solution.

For further information, contact: Jonathan Shuffield at 202.942.4207 or jshuffield@naco.org.

