

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 29, 2016

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
U.S. Capitol Building, Room: S-230
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harry Reid
Minority Leader
United States Senate
U.S. Capitol Building, Room: S-221
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Reid,

In March of 2016, the last authorized payments to forest counties and schools under the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act (SRS) were distributed by the federal government. Today, we write to express our concern that SRS was not reauthorized for Fiscal Year 2016. The SRS program provides crucial support to forest counties, local schools, transportation infrastructure, law enforcement and other county services in more than 720 counties and 4,000 school districts, impacting nine million students across 41 states. Unfortunately, the SRS program expired on September 30, 2015 and has yet to be reauthorized.

For almost 100 years, the federal government has shared 25 percent of federal forest revenues with counties to compensate them for federal ownership of forests that cannot be taxed at the local level. Although these lands are exempt from property taxes, county governments must still provide many essential services to millions of national forest visitors each year.

SRS was first enacted in 2000 as local governments faced steep reductions in timber revenue sharing. Current revenue sharing payments are no longer sufficient to support the services forest counties must provide.

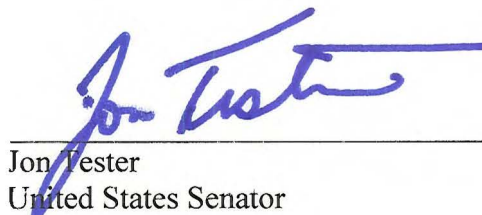
According to the National Association of Counties, when the authorization for SRS lapsed in FY 2014, forest payments to counties decreased by over 80 percent. As a result of the sudden decrease in forest payments, counties and school districts nationwide faced dramatic budgetary shortfalls. Many began preparations to halt infrastructure projects, terminate employees, cancel teacher contracts, and reduce numerous other critical local services. In that instance, Congress reauthorized the SRS program retroactively and provided full SRS payments to counties. However, in many cases services had already been impacted in counties and school districts.

The SRS program continues to be a critical safety-net for forest counties as we work to diversify rural economies, improve forest health, strengthen historic forest revenue sharing with local governments and ensure that our forests provide a range of values such as clean water, jobs, and wood fiber for local economies. We urge you to work in a bipartisan fashion to reauthorize the SRS program for FY 2016 and into the future and we stand ready to work with you in support of this important program.

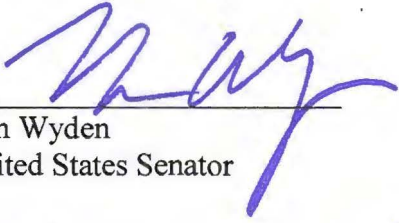
Sincerely,



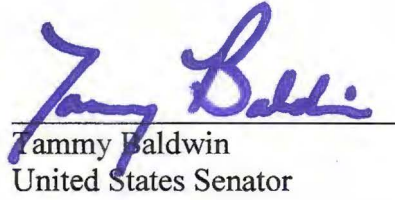
Mike Crapo
United States Senator



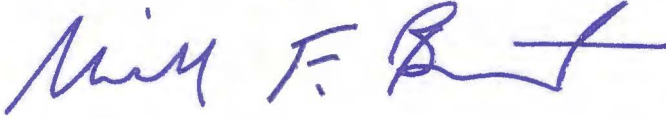
Jon Tester
United States Senator



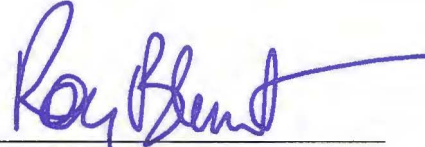
Ron Wyden
United States Senator



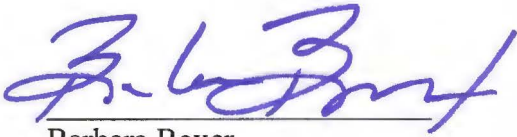
Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator




Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



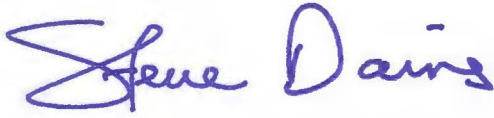
Roy Blunt
United States Senator



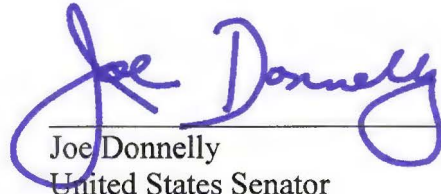
Barbara Boxer
United States Senator



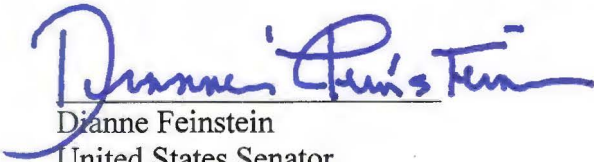
Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Steve Daines
United States Senator



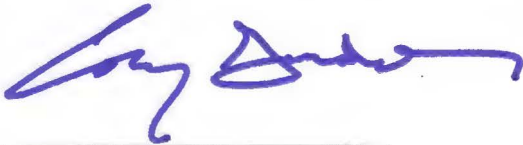
Joe Donnelly
United States Senator



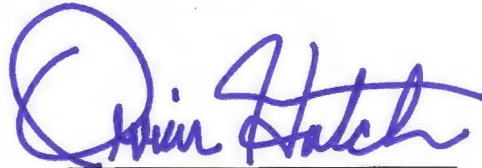
Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



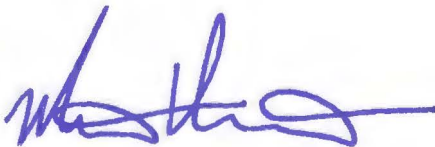
Al Franken
United States Senator



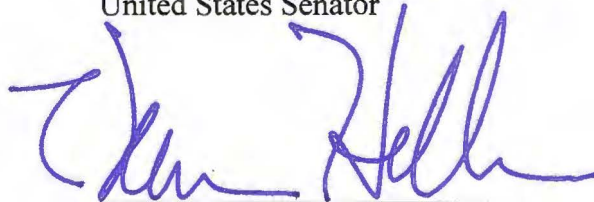
Cory Gardner
United States Senator



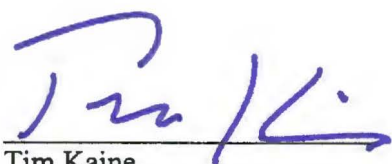
Orrin Hatch
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



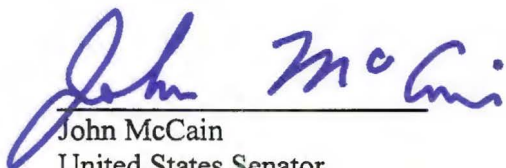
Dean Heller
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



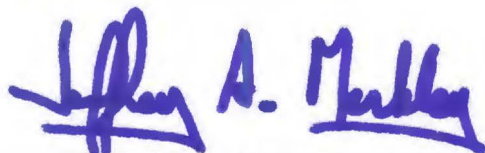
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



John McCain
United States Senator



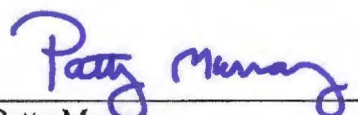
Claire McCaskill
United States Senator



Jeff Merkley
United States Senator



Shelley Moore Capito
United States Senator



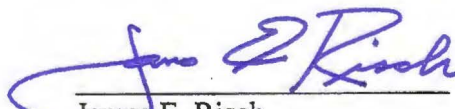
Patty Murray
United States Senator



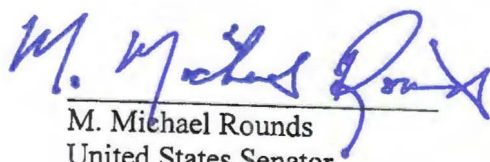
Bill Nelson
United States Senator



Gary Peters
United States Senator



James E. Risch
United States Senator



M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



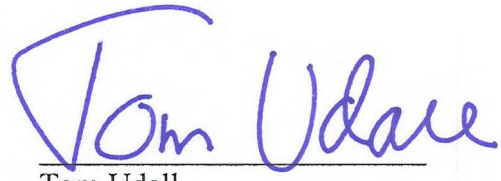
Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



Dan Sullivan
United States Senator



John Thune
United States Senator



Tom Udall
United States Senator



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Roger Wicker
United States Senator