

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 14, 2010

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We respectfully request that you include a long-term reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Communities Self-Determination Act (SRSCA), and the concomitant funding, in your Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 budget request to Congress.

The SRSCA is not an entitlement program, but rather a demonstration of the commitment that this nation made to rural forest counties when it determined that large blocks (193 million acres in total) of our forest lands should be set aside for the benefit of the entire nation. Indeed this “contract” between the federal government and rural America is part of the very foundation of our national forest system. President Theodore Roosevelt understood the value of conserving our forest lands and placing them in public trust. He likewise understood the economic burden this placed on rural counties to provide essential infrastructure like roads and public schools with their tax revenues reduced by the presence of federal lands in these counties.

To mitigate these economic effects, President Roosevelt and Forest Service Chief Gifford Pinchot supported a revenue sharing concept that made forest counties a contracted business partner with the federal government. In 1908, Congress approved a revenue sharing plan specifying 25 percent of all revenues from National Forests would be returned to forested counties. This law worked well for nearly a century. However, by the late 1980’s national policies and court rulings substantially diminished revenue generating activity in our national forests. By 1998, revenues for national forest counties had declined by over 70 percent. The decline had a devastating impact on 780 counties nationwide and over nine million school children.

Recognizing its obligation to rural America, Congress passed the Secure Rural Schools and Communities Self-Determination Act of 2000, and President Bill Clinton signed the bill. It provided six years of funding. In 2007, Congress extended the SRSCA for one year. In 2008, Congress once again provided a four year extension of the SRSCA from 2008-2011.

Timber harvests have not rebounded, so both the logic and the need for this program remain as strong today as when President Roosevelt first supported revenue sharing. The vast majority of the funds provided through the SRSCA are used to directly fund jobs in road maintenance and public works and positions within the public school system. These are essential services for the citizens of these rural communities and constitute family-wage jobs.

Failure to extend the SRSCA in 2012 would have a devastating impact on the economies of over 780 of our most rural and most economically depressed counties and school districts across the nation. In these counties, unemployment is higher than in other regions of the country with rates approaching those experienced in the Great Depression.

Failure to extend the SRSCA would lead to an annual payment loss of \$468 million starting in 2012-13. The economic impacts will be ongoing without an extension. This includes support for construction, roads, education, conservation, and various other government funded services and projects. The loss of the funding leads to various businesses throughout the United States, mainly in rural America, losing on an annual basis almost \$1.37 billion in revenues, government at all levels losing over \$188 million in tax receipts and over 11,000 people losing their jobs in 2012-13.

In addition, Title II of the SRSCA has proven to be a substantial asset to rural communities and our forested public lands. Since 2000, in a very collaborative process, over \$350 million has been invested in watershed restoration and forest health projects by Resource Advisory Committees (RACs). Not one project has been appealed or litigated. In fact, based on changes in the 2008 Act, the number of RACs has grown from 55 to 116.

We are grateful that you appreciate the importance of the Secure Rural Schools and Communities Self-Determination Act. In May 2008, you stated in an interview with the Eugene Register-Guard, "I completely agree that it's [SRSCA] an obligation we have to meet. I think that we're not meeting it well right now because we're doing it piecemeal year after year by year. . . ." Those words send a strong message about the need to support this ongoing commitment to rural America.

We look forward to meeting with you and your administration to continue this historic partnership with rural America.

Sincerely,



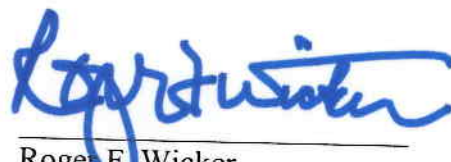
Ron Wyden
United States Senator



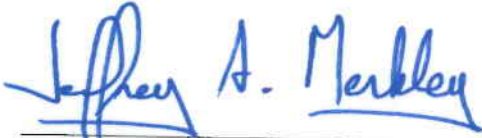
Mike Crapo
United States Senator



Blanche L. Lincoln
United States Senator



Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator



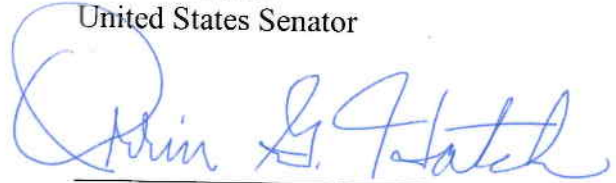
Jeff Merkley
United States Senator



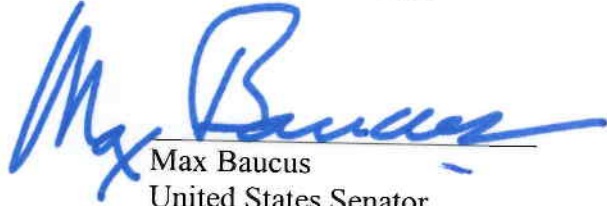
James E. Risch
United States Senator



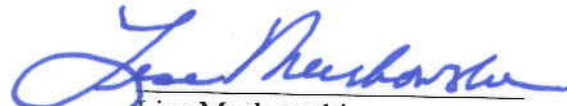
Claire McCaskill
United States Senator



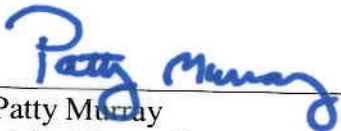
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Lisa Murkowski
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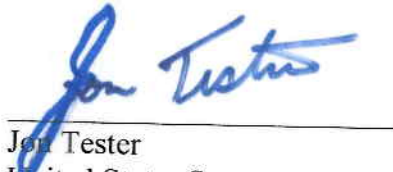
John Ensign
United States Senator



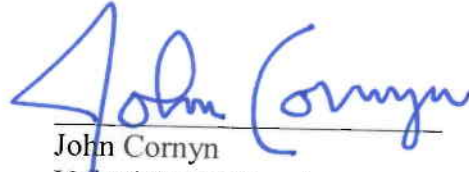
John D. Rockefeller IV
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Christopher S. Bond
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Jon Tester
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Robert P. Casey, Jr.
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Robert F. Bennett
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United States Senator



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United States Senator



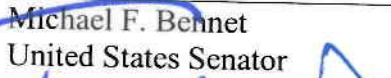
Mark Udall
United States Senator



Barbara Boxer
United States Senator



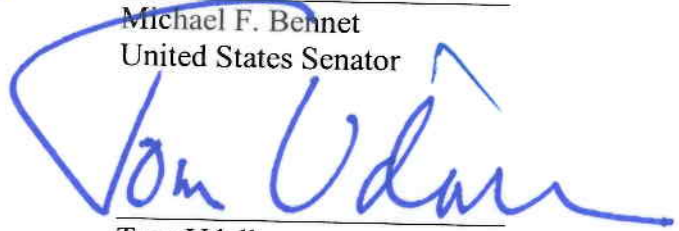
Russell D. Feingold
United States Senator



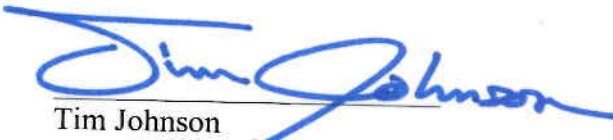
Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



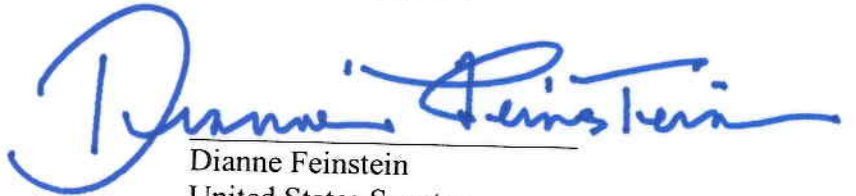
Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



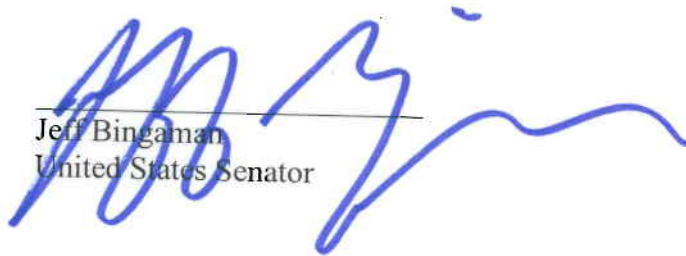
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United States Senator



Tim Johnson
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Jeff Bingaman
United States Senator