



The History ...

Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act History...

A Tradition of Conservation and Commitment

On March 3, 1891 the President of the United States, Benjamin Harrison, was given the authority to create Forest Reserves. Passage of the Forest Reserve Act created concern in many rural communities, as large blocks of land originally intended for settlement and economic development were no longer available for that use. In 1891, Western and Southern communities were highly dependent upon these lands for grazing, timber, and water. In addition to concerns over the potential economic impacts of this action, especially to schools and roads, many citizens were apprehensive about the federal, rather than local, management of these lands.

These concerns provided the impetus for Congress, in 1897, to specify the purpose of the Forest Reserves:

- 1) The lands placed in the Reserves would be improved and protected;
- 2) The lands placed in the Reserves would secure favorable conditions for water flow;
- 3) The lands placed in the Reserves would furnish a continual supply of timber to meet the needs of the citizens of the United States.

This additional specificity did little to assuage concerns in the West and protests soon erupted. In Rapid City, South Dakota, over 30,000 people gathered to object to the establishment of the Black Hills Forest Reserve on the grounds that it would be disastrous to the economy of South Dakota.

In 1905, the Forest Reserves were renamed the U.S. National Forest, and the U.S. Forest Service was founded to manage the set-aside lands. Subsequent Presidents continued to set aside lands, even as concern and opposition continued to grow.

President Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot, Chief of the Forest Service, were so concerned about the growing opposition, and feared that it would jeopardize the future of the U.S. National Forests, that they proposed a new concept - revenue sharing. In 1906, they proposed - and Congress approved - a bill that specified that 10% of all revenues generated on National Forests would be returned to the counties that housed these forests. The dollars were to be used for the maintenance of county roads and public schools.

In a classic showdown, county officials finally said, "no deal" and in 1908, Congress increased the revenue to be shared with counties and schools to 25%.

For 100 years... this 1908 revenue sharing program has been the law. Since 1908, this program has protected our National Forests for the enjoyment of all citizens, provided a clean and safe drinking water supply (both urban and rural) across the nation, and supported services in rural counties and schools.

From 1908 until the 1980's this revenue sharing system worked well for the forest counties and schools. Management of the lands provided a steady and significant income stream. By the late 1980's, however, national policy caused a precipitous decline in the use of these lands for grazing, timber management, and mining. As a result, U.S. Forest Service revenues dramatically declined, as did the receipts to support rural communities and schools. By 1998, these revenues had declined by over 70%, creating financial crisis for rural communities!

National Forest Counties & Schools Coalition Created

In response to this crisis, county commissioners, school leaders, and concerned citizens from forest counties nationwide formed the National Forest Counties & Schools Coalition (NFCSC) in 1998.

The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (SRSCA)

In October of 2000, the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (SRSCA) was signed into law. This bill provided payments to rural counties for services and to fund public schools. Furthermore, it provided dollars for counties to invest in the restoration and enhancement of National Forests. To identify worthy restoration projects, local communities formed Resource Advisory Committees (RACs) composed of a broad spectrum of stakeholders. Resource Advisory Committees are truly a success story, completing thousands of projects on National Forest lands without a single lawsuit or appeal. Additionally, SRSCA funds emergency and search and rescue operations on National Forest lands.

Today, the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act is a national success story. Dollars from SRSCA:

- Provides tens of thousands of jobs in 41 States
- Support school programs for over 9,000,000 children
- Fund county programs for health care, search and rescue operations, and maintenance of roads and bridges
- Restore and enhance National Forests through enhancement projects and