Secure Rural Schools Program, 2008-2011

Title III – County Funds

Counties shall notify the Secretary of Agriculture of its election of funds in Title III no later than September 30 of each fiscal year. Title III projects are developed and selected by the counties. Projects should be advertised for 45 days to allow public comment. Proposed projects should also be sent to the Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) if one exists in the county.

Compared to the previous Act (Public Law 106-393) the reauthorized Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (Public Law 110-343) significantly narrows the activities that can be funded under title III.

Title III funds may be used to:

(1) carry out activities under the Firewise Communities Program to provide homeowners in fire sensitive ecosystems education and assistance with implementing, techniques in home siting, home construction, and home landscaping that can increase the protection of people and property from wildfires;

(2) reimburse the participating county for search and rescue and other emergency services, including firefighting that are performed on Federal land after the date on which the use was approved and paid for by the participating county; and

(3) develop community wildfire protection plans in coordination with the Secretary of Agriculture.

The Firewise Communities program (www.firewise.org) is a cooperative, non-regulatory program administered by the National Fire Protection Association and sponsored by the USDA Forest Service, the US Department of the Interior, and state forestry organizations. It is designed to involve homeowners, community leaders, planners, developers, and others in the effort to protect people, property, and natural resources from the risk of wildland fire - before a fire starts. The Firewise Communities approach emphasizes community responsibility for planning in the design of a safe community as well as effective emergency response, and individual responsibility for safer home construction and design, landscaping, and maintenance.

A community wildfire protection plan is defined in section 101(3) of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (Public Law No. 108-148, December 3, 2003), with specific content and a process for development.

Under the new Secure Rural Schools Act, counties receiving more than $350,000 total payment cannot allocate more than seven percent to Title III projects, with the balance allocated to Title II or returned to the U.S. Treasury.

Counties allocating funds for Title III projects must submit certification that the funds were used in accordance with Title III to the Secretary of Agriculture no later than February 1 of the year after county funds were expended. The Forest Service will notify participating counties of the process and format the Secretary will use for certification before the end of fiscal year 2009.

The authority to initiate Title III projects terminates on September 30, 2011. Funds not spent or obligated by September 30, 2012, will be returned to the U.S. Treasury.