

Secure Rural Schools Resource Advisory Committee

What is a Secure Rural Schools RAC?

A Secure Rural Schools Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) provides advice and recommendations to the Forest Service on the development and implementation of special projects on federal lands as authorized under the Secure Rural Schools Act and Community Self-Determination Act, Public Law 110-343. Each RAC consists of 15 people representing varied interests and areas of expertise, who work collaboratively to improve working relationships among community members and national forest personnel.

The Secretary of Agriculture may establish a RAC for part of a national forest or for one or more national forests to ensure that each national forest on which special projects are proposed has access to a RAC.

Secure Rural Schools RACs were first established under the “Secure Rural School and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-393). Authorization for those committees expired September 30, 2006. In 2007, to keep these committees operable, the Act was amended and re-authorized by additional legislation.

In October 2008 the “Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008, Energy Improvement and Extension Act of 2008, and Tax Extenders and Alternative Minimum Tax Relief Act of 2008 (P. L. 110-343) reauthorized the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act for four years, 2008-2012. P.L.110-343 authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to renew the Secure Rural Schools Resource Advisory Committees in place prior to September 29, 2006. Generally, Public Law 110-343 allows the Secretary to reauthorize previously existing RACs or to establish new RACs as appropriate.

Composition of RACs

Each RAC shall have 15 members with balanced and broad representation of interests in 3 categories, described in Section 205 (d)(2) of the Act. Members shall reside within the State in which the committee has jurisdiction and, to the extent practicable, provide local representation in each category.

Operations of RACs

A quorum of RAC members is considered to be at least 3 persons in each category. Each meeting shall be convened and conducted in accordance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) and USDA Departmental Regulations. FACA rules require the Designated Federal Official (DFO) to publish notice of a meeting in Federal Register at least 15 days in advance. The Secure Rural Schools Act requires announcement of a RAC meeting at least one week in advance in a local newspaper of record. Meetings are open to the public and the DFO is responsible for keeping minutes and other records related to the meetings.

RAC Charters

The charters for RACs in existence on September 29, 2006 generally covered a Forest Service Region or a state and included one or more RACs in that geographic area.

RACs may advise more than one national forest and may review and recommend projects in more than one county. The DFO will work with counties and stakeholders to form RACs to serve appropriate geographic and administrative jurisdictions. Considerations for determining the geographic scope of RAC activities include the Forest Service’s capacity to support the RAC operations and related efficiencies as well as fostering collaboration within and among communities.

The Washington Office (WO) Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) Office will confer with the Secure Rural Schools Regional coordinators to amend charters for Secure Rural Schools RACs that existed on September 29, 2006. Charters will be amended to reflect additional duties and composition of RACs (See Act section 205 (b) and (d).) They may be amended to modify the geographic area of existing RACs or to add new RACs.

What are the duties of Secure Rural Schools RACs?

RACs duties include the following, as described in section 205(b) of the Act:

- review projects proposed under title II by participating counties and other persons;
- propose projects and funding to the Secretary through the Designated Federal Official (DFO);
- provide early and continuous coordination with the DFO in recommending title II projects;
- provide frequent opportunities for citizens, organizations, tribes, land management agencies, and other interested parties to participate openly and meaningfully, beginning at the early stages of developing title II projects;
- monitor implementation of approved title II and advise the DFO on the progress of the monitoring;
- make recommendations to the DFO for any appropriate changes or adjustments to the projects being monitored by the resource advisory committee.