



Secure Rural Schools Program in Alaska

Key Message

Alaska received about \$22.2 million in 2009 and \$20.1 million in 2010 under the Secure Rural Schools Act. Alaska will have nine resource advisory committees; two on the Chugach National Forest and seven on the Tongass National Forest, formed to advise the Forest Service on expenditures of Title II funds.

Issue

The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (SRS Act) was amended and reauthorized in P.L. 110-343, October 3, 2008. This law ensures that for four years (2008 –2011), counties and boroughs across the country will receive funding for schools and roads, and investments in projects that enhance forest ecosystems. With some exceptions, the SRS Act, as amended, is similar to the original program. The structure and significant elements of Title I have been amended but Titles II and III remain intact with few changes.

Background

The SRS Act gives counties the option between two payment methods. The payment options are (1) a newly modified 25 percent seven year rolling average payment of receipts from national forest lands or (2) a share of the State payment as calculated under the new SRS Act.

Boroughs or counties electing to receive a share of the SRS State payment and receiving over \$100,000 must allocate between 80 to 85 percent of the total funds to Title I (roads and schools). The remaining 15 to 20 percent is designated for projects under Title II and/or Title III.

Counties and boroughs with funds for Title II projects work with the Forest Service to establish resource advisory committees (RACs). The RAC's duties include providing opportunities for interested parties to participate in the project development process, reviewing proposed forest management projects in accordance with the SRS Act, and making recommendations to the Forest Service. RAC duties have been expanded to include monitoring of project progress and making recommendations for appropriate changes to projects being monitored. It is the Forest Service's responsibility to ensure that RACs are balanced and diverse with equal representation from industry, environmental groups, elected officials and local people as outlined in the SRS Act, in addition to providing record keeping and other administrative duties.

Title II funds are used to make investments and create employment opportunities through projects that improve the maintenance of existing infrastructure, implement stewardship objectives that enhance forest ecosystems, and restore and improve land health and water quality. At least 50 percent of all Title II funds must be used for projects that are primarily dedicated to road maintenance, decommissioning, or obliteration; or restoration of streams and watersheds.

Title III funds may be used to carry out the Firewise Communities Program, develop community wildfire protection plans, and reimburse for emergency services paid for by counties and performed on Federal land (e.g. search and rescue, firefighting).

Current Situation

RACs established by the original SRS Act and in existence before September 29, 2006, have been reappointed by the Secretary of Agriculture to a new four-year term. The Alaska Region had three RACs on the Tongass National Forest under the original Act. Four RACs have been added on the Tongass and two on the Chugach National Forest, for a total of nine RACs in the Alaska Region. The existing RACs in Alaska have all had meetings, and include the Yakutat RAC, the Ketchikan RAC which had new members appointed in February 2010, and the Wrangell-Petersburg RAC which also had new members appointed in February 2010. New RACs whose members have been approved by the Secretary of Agriculture include the Prince of Wales RAC on the Tongass National Forest and the Kenai Peninsula-Anchorage RAC on the Chugach National Forest, both of which were approved in March 2010. New RACs whose members are waiting approval include the Lynn Canal-Icy Strait RAC, the Juneau RAC, and the Sitka RAC on the Tongass National Forest, and the Prince William Sound RAC on the Chugach National Forest.

The Alaska SRS Charter has been approved. The Alaska Civil Rights Impact Analysis has been submitted. Nominations for all Alaska RACs have been sent to the Chief of the Forest Service, who then sent them to the USDA Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment for concurrence and forwarding to the Secretary. The Secretary reviews the nominees and recommendations and then makes the selections. The entire process from submission to final clearance can potentially take weeks to months. Once this process is completed, a certificate and letter of appointment is prepared by the Forest Service, signed by the Secretary and sent to each newly appointed member with notification to the respective designated federal official.

More Information

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