

Resource Advisory Committee

Frequently Asked Questions

If you would like to learn more, please reach out to one of the NEOF RAC Coordinators at acacia.probert@usda.gov, amy.franklin1@usda.gov, and/or krystal.collins@usda.gov.

What is a Resource Advisory Committee (RAC)?

A RAC is a committee made up of citizens who represent specific interest groups. RACs consist of 9 to 15 members that meet one to four times a year to consider proposals for Title II spending. Projects generally fall into two categories: roads related projects and landscape/habitat restoration projects. RACs may also help Forests set rates and fees for use of selected recreation facilities and sites.

What is the purpose of a RAC?

The purpose of a RAC is to improve collaborative relationships among the people that use and care for the National Forests and to provide advice and recommendations to the Forest Service concerning projects and funding consistent with Title II of the Secure Rural Schools Act.

The Wenatchee-Okanogan RAC provides advice and recommendations to the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. The jurisdiction of the RAC includes U.S. Forest Service managed land in Okanogan, Chelan, Kittitas, and Yakima counties.

What is the purpose of the Secure Rural Schools Act (the Act) and Title II funds?

The Secure Rural Schools program provides critical funding for schools, roads, and other municipal services to more than 700 counties across the United States and Puerto Rico.

The purposes of the Act are as follows:

1. To stabilize payments to counties to provide funding for schools and roads that supplements other available funds.
2. To make additional investments in, and create additional 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. Such projects shall enjoy broad-based support with objectives that may include, but are not limited to—
 - a. road, trail, and infrastructure maintenance or obliteration
 - b. soil productivity improvement
 - c. improvements in forest ecosystem health
 - d. watershed restoration and maintenance
 - e. restoration, maintenance and improvement of wildlife and fish habitat
 - f. control of noxious and exotic weeds
 - g. reestablishment of native species

3. To improve cooperative relationships among the people that use and care for federal lands and the agencies that manage these lands.

Payments are divided into three categories, or Titles: Title I for roads and schools, Title II for projects on federal lands, and Title III for county projects.

Counties typically receive 20% or less of Secure Rural Schools funds under Title II, which are used by willing federal agencies, state and local governments, private and nonprofit entities, and landowners for protection, restoration and enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat, and other natural resource objectives on federal land and on non-federal land where projects would benefit these resources on federal land.

Rather than being distributed to the state, Title II funds are retained by the Forest Service and are allocated to specific projects that have been reviewed and recommended by a local RAC.

Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act Title II funds are appropriated by Congress and sent to Counties in lieu of the former 25% of payments from timber harvest sales to counties (essentially, to make up for the loss of property taxes in counties that have a lot of federal land). Counties can elect the amount of their payment that will be classified as Title II funds. Money is distributed through the federal government (the USDA Forest Service, in our case). When money is received and there is a functioning RAC, the Forest Service puts out a call for proposals. The Act defines a wide variety of activities that can be accomplished with Title II funds, many of which are restoration or maintenance of infrastructure. Most projects occur on federal land, but not all! Projects can be implemented on private land if they benefit federal lands. The RAC provides recommendations for how funds will be spent in each county.

When is Title II money distributed?

Title II money is typically distributed to eligible National Forests annually in the spring (pending reauthorization of the Act).

A requirement of the Act is for the RAC to have a quorum to vote on official business. A quorum is the minimum number of members to make proceedings of a meeting valid. In the case of a RAC, a quorum is nine members, comprised of three members from each category.

If National Forests have received their annual Title II money, or have money unspent from previous years, a meeting will be organized for the RAC to vote on proposed projects. The RAC reviews projects and determines which projects to recommend for funding. Recommendations by the RAC are shared with the Forest Supervisor; the Forest Supervisor makes the final decision for funding. When funding is approved, Forest Service project proponents can immediately begin the process of receiving the money. For projects proposed by external partners, a grant, agreement, or contract may need to be created. If so, the proponent will work with Forest Service counterparts to get the proper documentation in place before receiving funding.

Who benefits from Title II of the Secure Rural Schools Act (Act) and the decisions of the Resource Advisory Committee (RAC)?

You! Citizens of Okanogan, Chelan, Kittitas, and Yakima Counties, as well as others who visit public land from out of the area, benefit from Title II of the Act.

A requirement for projects is that they improve the maintenance of existing infrastructure, implement stewardship objectives that enhance forest ecosystems, and restore and improve land health and water quality. Projects involve road, trail, and infrastructure maintenance or obliteration, soil productivity improvement, improvements in forest ecosystem health, watershed restoration and maintenance, restoration, maintenance and improvement of wildlife and fish habitat, control of noxious and exotic weeds, and the reestablishment of native species.

Previous projects have included road and recreation site maintenance, fuel reduction to help protect communities from wildfire, invasive plant removal, and fish habitat improvement.

Where can SRS funds be utilized?

SRS funds can be utilized only within the county for which they were allocated. Counties receive different amounts of money annually (pending reauthorization of the Act), based on a specific calculation. In short, payments are calculated using a variety of factors including acres of federal land within an eligible county and an income adjustment based on the per capita personal income for each county. For detailed information on the calculation, please [click here](#).

Funds may be used for the purpose of entering and implementing cooperative agreements with willing federal agencies, state and local governments, private and nonprofit entities, and landowners for protection, restoration and enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat, and other resource objectives consistent with the purposes of this title on federal land *and* on non-federal land where projects would benefit these resources on federal land.

Why does having a functioning RAC matter?

The definition of a 'functioning' RAC; a functioning RAC consists of at least nine members, with three members representing each category. A full RAC consists of fifteen members, with five members representing each category.

A functioning RAC must be in place to vote to recommend projects for funding. Without a RAC in place, available money goes unspent. When the money goes unspent, the local communities and environment don't see a positive impact from projects.

Participation as a member of the RAC gives you the opportunity to represent a community and influence how money is spent to care for and protect public lands. Participation in this vital civic process allows you to help identify common ground among stakeholders and be a part of the solution.

Who can become a member of the RAC?

You! Citizens of Okanogan, Chelan, Kittitas, and Yakima Counties are eligible to apply to become a member of the RAC. Members of the RAC are required to live within the state in which the Committee has jurisdiction and to the extent practicable, live in the counties the RAC covers.

Members are appointed to four-year terms and may be reappointed for additional terms. Members serve without compensation but may be allowed travel expenses and per diem for attendance at committee meetings.

Each local Resource Advisory Committee has nine to 15 members representing a diverse cross section of land management and community interests. The members work collaboratively to improve working relationships among community members and National Forest employees.

Committees are balanced and diverse with equal representation from industry, environmental groups, elected officials, and local people. Specifically, the composition of each RAC is balanced according to the following three interest categories identified in the Act.

The RAC is comprised of three categories; each category is made up of three to five members. Within each category a member must represent a specified interest group. Only one person will be selected to represent each interest group (unless no applications are received to cover all categories).

Category A contains three to five persons that:

- represent organized labor or non-timber forest product harvester groups
- represent developed outdoor recreation, off highway vehicle users, or commercial recreation activities
- represent energy and mineral development interests or commercial or recreational fishing interests
- represent the commercial timber industry; or
- hold federal grazing or other land use permits, or represent nonindustrial private forest landowners, within the area for which the committee is organized

Category B contains three to five persons that:

- nationally recognized environmental organizations
- regionally or locally recognized environmental organizations
- dispersed recreational activities
- archaeological and historical interests
- nationally or regionally recognized wild horse and burro interest groups, wildlife or hunting organizations, or watershed associations

Category C contains three to five persons that:

- hold state elected office (or a designee)
- hold county or local elected office
- represent American Indian tribes within or adjacent to the area for which the committee is organized
- area school officials or teachers
- represent the affected public at large

What would my time commitment be?

The RAC typically meets twice per year, but can meet more, as needed. Each meeting lasts between six and seven hours, with a 9 a.m. call to order and adjourning between 3:30 p.m. and 4 p.m. These are considered official meetings because voting occurs.

Before each meeting, a binder containing all submitted project proposals and other necessary meeting information is mailed to each RAC member (information is also available online). Each member is expected to review the proposals and bring any questions to the meeting. The amount of time necessary to review proposals fluctuates with the number of proposals received.

Field trips to project sites can also be organized for interested committee members and are not considered official meetings because voting does not occur.

Members also receive e-mails and phone calls throughout the year from the RAC Coordinator to organize meetings and to provide necessary updates.

What does a typical meeting look like?

Meetings are generally six to eight hours in length and are hosted either virtually or a hybrid of in-person and virtual (members not physically present participate via phone or video conference).

All meetings have a set agenda. The meeting typically begins with a review of the agenda, a review of ethics information (all RAC members required to review Ethics training slideshow annually), and monitoring updates from previously approved projects.

The meeting then moves into presentations of new project proposals by project proponents. RAC members receive and review project proposals ahead of the meeting and have questions ready. Presentation time is utilized by proponents to share additional information and answer any questions asked by Committee members.

Following presentations, time is set aside for public comment. Members of the public can request time to comment on proposed projects (2 – 3 minutes). Following the public comment period is discussion and prioritization of projects by the Committee. During this time, the RAC will determine which projects to recommend and how much money should be awarded to each project. After funding has been determined and projects have been recommended, there is a short time for meeting wrap-up and discussion about the next meeting.

Breaks and lunch are built into the agenda. Lunch usually falls after project presentations and before the discussion and prioritization of projects. Robert's Rules of Order are utilized for meetings.

When does the RAC meet?

The RAC meets one to four times per year to review projects for funding and to receive monitoring reports for funded projects.

Meetings are held virtually or are a mix of in-person and virtual (either by phone or other electronic means). Meetings are typically six to eight hours in length, with breaks throughout. If the RAC has received many proposals or has a large amount of business to discuss, a RAC meeting may take place over two days.

The RAC convenes for official meetings and may also meet up for field trips to see project sites if there is an interest among RAC members.

How does the RAC operate?

The committee typically meets to consider funding projects that meet the legislative intent of economically healthy communities and healthy, sustainable public lands. The meetings are announced in the Federal Register and the local newspapers and are open to the public.

How are members appointed?

Fifteen citizens are appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture to serve four-year terms. Membership is voluntary but mileage for travel can be reimbursed.

Citizens apply using the [AD-755 form](#). The form needs to be filled out in its entirety, as applicable. Instructions for filling out the form are available on the [Northeast Oregon Forests RAC website](#).

Although RAC members serve four-year terms, the local RAC Coordinator is outreaching for new members on a continuous basis. The goal of the coordinator is to keep a whole and functioning committee in place, and to continually spread the word about the RAC and activities of the committee. Continuous outreach and community involvement is vital for the success and continuity of the program.

How are RAC funds used?

Funds may be used for projects on National Forests or adjoining private land to provide benefits to National Forest resources. The committee has funded projects such as culvert replacement to enhance fish passage, a fuel reduction projects to protect communities from wildland fire, and several county-wide weed control programs. At least 50% of funding must be road maintenance/obliteration or watershed improvement/restoration projects.