

Actions taken by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service to accelerate processing and improving of Resource Advisory Committee nominations

The Forest Service currently has 106 Secure Rural Schools (SRS) Resource Advisory Committees (RACs). As of May 10, 2021, 60 RACs include sufficient members for a quorum,¹ 42 RACs lack a quorum, and four RACs are inactive. RACs without a quorum, and inactive RACs, are not permitted to make funding recommendations for SRS Title II projects and investments in local communities.

Prior to January 2021, only 37 of the 106 RACs included sufficient members for a quorum. Membership retention challenges and a dilatory nomination process were the primary contributors to insufficient membership numbers. In December 2020, the Forest Service assembled a strike team of employees from multiple staff areas² to collaborate and streamline the overall review process of RAC nomination packages³.

Implementation improvements included: one-on-one meetings with SRS Regional Coordinators and Designated Federal Officers to review nomination packages; and, identifying and improving inefficiencies in the nomination package tracking system. Additionally, in December 2020, the Forest Service received approval by the USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment to extend SRS RAC membership for individuals whose terms have expired, or will soon expire, for an additional two years. This extension helped seven RACs retain their quorum.

The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-334), also known as the 2018 Farm Bill, established a pilot program granting authority to the Regional Foresters in Region 1 (Northern Region) and Region 3 (Southwestern Region) to process and approve RAC nominees in Montana and Arizona. Under this pilot program, significant efficiency has been realized with RAC nomination packages completed in just 10 to 31 days, compared to a timeline ranging six months to two years for nomination packages reviewed and approved by either the Secretary of Agriculture or the USDA Under Secretary for NRE. Currently, three of the four RACs in Arizona, and all twelve RACs in Montana, have a quorum.

¹ An active RAC requires a minimum of nine, and a maximum of 15, members.

² RAC nomination strike team includes employees from the National Partnership Office, Office of Regulatory and Management Services, and Regional SRS Coordinators.

³ A nomination package may include one or multiple nominees.