

07-26--2007

To: House Natural Resources Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee on Public Land Communities Transition Assistance Act, HR3058, and uses of Title 1, 2 Forest Reserve funding resources.

My name is Jim French, and I am Trinity County Supt. of Schools, and Chairman of the Trinity County Resource Advisory Council. I also serve as the Vice Pres. of the National Forest Counties & Schools Coalition representing 780 rural Americans.

Trinity County is a large, rural, mountainous county in N. California of which 76% is national forest, minimizing our local tax base. We are the second largest recipient of Forest Reserve dollars in California, once being a large timber producer on national forest land. Trinity County receives a total of \$7,907,817, \$6,721,645 in Title 1 is annually split equally between roads and schools, \$948,938 in Title 2, and \$237,234 in Title 3 funding.

Forest Reserve funding has been an integral part of Trinity County school funding for over 40 years, and is essential to our continued success. These funds provide for instruction aides in our many multi-graded classrooms, implementing the federal No Child Left Behind requirements. In my county schools office the funds are used to provide school nurses, counselors, art and music programs. Forest Reserve dollars additionally fund greatly under funded Special Education programs. A wide array of student programs without dedicated program funding are funded under Forest Reserve, our annual Spelling Bee, Academic Decathlon, Young Author's Faire, and Young Artist's Workshop to name a few.

In an era of declining student population (24.4% since 1996), and declining school revenue, without Forest Reserve funding, our schools would have to eliminate the majority of our instruction aides, and programs listed above. Forest Reserve funding represents 33% of my unrestricted county schools office budget, and 22% of my largest school districts budget. Without Forest Reserve funds, the four largest school districts in my county, and my county schools office would file qualified, or negative budgets with the state, citing the inability to meet our financial obligations.

Our declining student population is due in great part to the changing forest practices, and associated local economy loss, which in turn necessitates greater need for new, and different Forest Reserve funding. It is unlikely that revenues from conventional timber harvest will return to a level to fund the federal obligation. Our actual receipts from timber harvest are 9% of the historic average. I believe that our situation is common, and ongoing in rural resource dependent America. In an era of ever increasing accountability on our schools, our children will be “left behind without” Forest Reserve funding.

Re: Resource Advisory Committees authorized under Title 2 of PL -106-393

I also am chairman of the Trinity County Resource Advisory Committee funded under Title 2 of the current law. Our county is the second largest contributor to both Title 2 & 3 programs in California, and we dedicate the largest funding amounts to Title 2 projects by percentage, and actual dollar amounts in California. To date we have expended \$5,302,404 on Title 2 projects within our county boundaries. Attached is a list of all of our projects to date

Below are features of our successful RAC, which may serve as a model for future RACs.

- 1. Our RAC established clear agreed upon strategies. Early on we decided to focus on Fuel Reduction projects that helped to protect rural communities at risk, and watershed projects that restored, and reduced sediments in our streams, and rivers. Ten percent of our Title 2 funds are distributed to other allowable projects such as trail maintenance, and work with our Native American community.**

- 2. We identified ground rules for participation that define the parameters of disagreement. In our RAC the rule is: conduct yourself so that you could be invited to dinner by any member after any meeting. The RAC process is really about building relationships, and then finding common ground (literally) for projects.**
- 3. Our RAC identified many partners to collaborate on a program of work as well as funding. We dovetail all of our Fuels Projects with identified “Communities at Risk” as identified by our county Fire Safe Council Plan. Most our watershed projects have State Fish & Game, or Five County Salmonid matching dollars as part of the project.**
- 4. We complete as much work as possible by grants and agreements to provide additional local work opportunity, and economic growth.**
- 5. We schedule enough time in our RAC calendar to allow the process to work. Early on we met once a month, but now do most of our work in sub-committee format, and the full RAC meets up to four times a year to vote on projects.**

6. Ongoing productive relationships between County Commissioners, the Forest Service, and schools are critical to RAC success. Our RAC had two county supervisors on it.

Attached for your review are just a few of the many photos taken on our RAC Monitoring Field Trips. They are representative of our many projects, with a focus on fuels , some that have generated timber revenue as shown in the first RAC project photo. I’m proud to say that starting three years ago, we have been able to generate some saleable timber with our Fuels Reduction Projects, reducing the overall cost of the fuels projects. I view the generation of RAC approved forest products as an essential feature of future RAC Fuels projects, and a partial funding source for reauthorization of this bill.

The other two photos represent roadside fuel reduction projects that make our rural communities more fire safe.

The RAC process has shown great promise for quality collaboration in our county, and across the nation. Without the RACs national forest management gridlock that was commonplace, will escalate. RAC members views of the how to manage our forests have grown through thoughtful collaboration. Preventing catastrophic wildfire, and restoring watersheds are essential to our forest futures, and RACs stand poised to continue restoration, and fuels reduction work that they have started.

It is critical in my county, and throughout the 780 rural American counties that HR 3058 be authorized to provide continuing, critical benefit to our rural school children, forests, and communities maintaining the compact that the federal government made with rural counties many years ago when private land entered federal ownership, and minimizing our ability to generate a more robust local tax based economy. Thank you for your time, and thoughtful consideration, I'm happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

**James B. French
Trinity County Supt. of Schools
Trinity County Resource Advisory Chairperson
Vice President, National Forest County Schools Coalition**

attachments: 3 RAC Projectphotos, RAC Projects Spreadsheet