

LISA MURKOWSKI  
ALASKA

COMMITTEES:  
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
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APPROPRIATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR,  
ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES  
CHAIRMAN  
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR,  
AND PENSIONS  
INDIAN AFFAIRS

## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0203  
(202) 224-6665  
(202) 224-5301 FAX

510 L STREET, SUITE 600  
ANCHORAGE, AK 99501-1956  
(907) 271-3735

101 12TH AVENUE, ROOM 329  
FAIRBANKS, AK 99701-6278  
(907) 456-0233

800 GLACIER AVENUE, SUITE 101  
JUNEAU, AK 99801  
(907) 586-7277

805 FRONTAGE ROAD, SUITE 105  
KENAI, AK 99611-9104  
(907) 283-5808

1900 FIRST AVENUE, SUITE 225  
KETCHIKAN, AK 99901-6059  
(907) 225-8880

851 EAST WESTPOINT DRIVE, SUITE 307  
WASILLA, AK 99654-7142  
(907) 376-7665

February 17, 2017

The President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

As you begin the work of setting priorities for Fiscal Year 2018 and write the President's budget request, it is my hope that you consider the inclusion of adequate, mandatory funding for the Secure Rural Schools and Self-Determination (SRS) program. SRS payments provide critical revenues to more than 775 rural counties and 4,400 schools throughout the country, impacting nine million students across 41 states, including in my state of Alaska. In many cases, these "forest counties" include massive swaths of public lands, particularly National Forest System lands, often consuming 65 to 90 percent of total land within their boundaries.

In my state of Alaska, the Forest Service controls approximately 22 million acres of land, including 17 million acres in the Southeast region. In these communities, there is little choice for schools—many of whom have come to depend on funds from the federal government to fund their schools, as the Forest Service has failed to responsibly manage forests and allow for adequate timber receipts. As of 2014, SRS payments accounted for up to 20% of school budgets in some boroughs. Since this time, Alaska state budgets have declined, so the importance of adequate federal revenues has only increased.

Over 100 years ago, recognizing the key support these counties provide to our national forests, Congress passed legislation to specify that 25 percent of revenues from timber harvests on federal lands would be shared with affected counties for "the benefit of the public schools and public roads in county or counties in which national forests are situated." Though helpful, massive reductions in timber production on federal forests over the last 30 years has dropped revenues by as much as 99 percent in some counties and over 70 percent nationwide.

SRS was first enacted in 2000 to renew this 100-year-old revenue sharing promise in light of significant losses faced by forest counties as timber revenues declined. This program was originally designed as a bridge for timber dependent communities to provide temporary relief while more proactive forest management practices were put into place. Since that time, these communities have become more reliant on these payments, as they have seen little to no relief from the devastating decline in regulatory overreach and resulting lack of productivity on Forest Service lands.

SRS expired on September 30, 2015, and it has not been reauthorized for Fiscal Year 2016 or beyond. Forest counties and schools received their last authorized SRS payment in March 2016. Without SRS, existing revenue sharing payments are not sufficient to support the services these counties must provide, and counties are forced to choose between critical services for their citizens.

Prevailing uncertainties about SRS make it nearly impossible for local governments and schools to plan their annual budgets. The federal government has long recognized its obligation to these forest counties, and I am committed to working with you in my capacity as Chairman of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee to bring both short and long-term solutions to these communities.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lisa Murkowski", with a large, stylized initial "L".

Lisa Murkowski  
United States Senator