



Board of County Commissioners
1820 Jefferson Street
PO Box 1220
Port Townsend, WA 98368

Kate Dean, District 1 David Sullivan, District 2 Kathleen Kler, District 3

May 1, 2017

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
United States Senate
311 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Cantwell,

We are writing to thank you for your ongoing support of the Secure Rural Schools and Self-Determination Act (SRS) and urge your continued leadership on this important matter. It is vital to Jefferson County that Congress act as soon possible to retroactively reauthorize SRS for Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 and provide sufficient funding for this fiscal year and beyond.

Since its inception, the SRS program has been critical to Jefferson County's ability to provide basic services to our constituents. Until 2008, Jefferson County received about \$1.3 million per year for roads maintenance and construction purposes, while an additional \$1.3 million went to schools from Jefferson County's SRS allocation. To put this in perspective, that level of funding is equal to what the County receives in annual motor vehicle fuel tax allocations. In fact, the SRS payment represented about 25% of our regular operating budget for county roads. Unfortunately, in subsequent years the SRS payment decreased to only \$400,000 per year under this program, and the last payment the County received was for FY2015. To deal with the dramatic cutback, the County has continued to defer maintenance on pavements, bridges, and culverts and has eliminated several positions that went along with this work.

While reduced funding levels present significant challenges, not having the SRS program at all is simply unsustainable. Jefferson County will face dramatic budgetary shortfalls that, without an SRS extension and funding, will require us to forego even the most basic maintenance and repairs to avoid bankruptcy.

The events of the winters of 2014 and 2015 demonstrate the predicament we are in. During that time period, Jefferson County bore the brunt of repeated storms in our region. As you can see from the attached photos a number of our roads were severely damaged. Coincidentally, every one of these roads is also a "federal lands access" road meaning they provide direct access to federal resource and recreation lands including Olympic National Park, the famed Hoh River Rainforest, and Olympic National Forest. All of these roads are also "sole access" roads meaning there is no other way in or out when they fail, and so they required immediate repairs in order to maintain access. SRS funding in the past has provided much of the financial resource to respond to these types of events, which unfortunately are not all that unusual in our county.

With assistance from your office, Jefferson County ultimately received reimbursement for repair of some of these damage sites through sources including FEMA and the FHWA-ER program; however, the availability of funding through these programs is typically only known months after the events occur with no guarantee at the time of the event that any assistance will be available. With budgets strained to the breaking point, there is no assurance that the County will have the financial resources in the future to respond to these types of events without a predictable and fully funded SRS program in place.

As you know, timber counties such as ours have been seriously affected by the dramatic reduction in harvests on federal land. In Jefferson County, nearly 65% of the total land area is federally owned. The SRS program was critical to offset the loss of revenues for local governments like ours. A continued lapse in payments would cripple our ability to serve our constituents. We ask that Congress simply make good on the commitment it made to timber counties and enact a long-term, sustainable, and retroactive extension of SRS right away in 2017. With all the recent discussion about infrastructure funding, we believe that funding an existing infrastructure program like SRS should fit right in with current priorities.

We applaud your attention to natural resources and infrastructure issues critical to Jefferson County and across our great state and look forward to working with you and your staff going forward. Please do not hesitate to contact our office if you have any additional questions.

Sincerely,

Kate Dean
Jefferson County Commissioner, District 1



Damage to the Upper Hoh Road, November 2014



Damage to Undi Road (Landslide), 2015



Oil City Road, November 2015



Quinault South Shore Road, December 2014



Dosewallips Road, December 2014