

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

SECURE RURAL SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY SELF DETERMINATION ACT REAUTHORIZATION

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS

UNITED STATES CONGRESS

APRIL 11, 2013

IN SUPPORT OF

H.R. 1294

THE SELF-SUFFICIENT COMMUNITY LANDS ACT OF 2013

STATEMENT OF

SKIP BRANDT, COMMISSIONER, IDAHO COUNTY, IDAHO

ON BEHALF OF HIMSELF AND

JON CANTAMESSA, FORMER COMMISSIONER, SHOSHONE COUNTY, IDAHO

GORDON CRUICKSHANK, COMMISSIONER, VALLEY COUNTY, IDAHO

DAN DINNING, COMMISSIONER, BOUNDARY COUNTY, IDAHO

STAN LEACH, COMMISSIONER, CLEARWATER COUNTY, IDAHO

AND

THE IDAHO ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

Introduction

I am Skip Brandt, Commissioner, Idaho County, Idaho.

I am pleased to be here today to testify in support of H.R. 1294 The Self-sufficient Community Lands Act of 2013. H.R. 1294 is based on a Community Forest Trust concept developed by a bipartisan group of five duly elected county commissioners from throughout Idaho and subsequently endorsed by the Idaho Association of Counties.

I submit this statement of support for H.R. 1294 on behalf of myself, my fellow commissioners identified on the cover page who helped initiate this concept, and the Idaho Association of counties.

We applaud the leadership of our Representative Raul Labrador in authoring this legislation and his support for the rural forested communities of Idaho.

H.R. 1294 will allow a transition path from the federal transfer payments of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act (SRS) program, to a sustainable and reliable program for revenues which do not depend on distributions from the US Treasury. It would authorize our proposal for specific lands within the Idaho national forests to be designated as a Community Forest Trust pilot and that the resources on those lands be managed in an sustainable and environmentally sound manner for the purpose of generating resources for Idaho counties in lieu of transfer payments under the Secure Rural Schools program.

We support the interim reauthorization of the SRS program in 2013 as it is immediately essential to the funding of county government school and road programs throughout the country. However, as part of that reauthorization we are specifically proposing the Congress include H.R. 1294 which will allow us, and any other interested stated, to establish a Community Forest Trust pilot projects. These pilot projects will demonstrate the opportunity for the Community Forest Trust to provide a far superior alternative to the SRS federal transfer payments. Additionally, revenues generated from the Community Forest Trust pilot project would quickly begin to offset some of the federal government transfer payments under the SRS program, and thereby help immediately to partially reduce the impact to the federal treasury for SRS payments.

We have developed the Community Forest Trust concept from our combined experience with local government and natural resource management, and with considered and ongoing input from natural resource management professionals. Each of our counties has voted formally in public meetings to embrace the Community Forest Trust concept for Idaho and to seek authorizing legislation from the US Congress. So has the Idaho Association of Counties.

We do appreciate the federal government's long standing obligation of support for counties with significant quantities of federal land. Congress has recognized, and we completely concur, that there must be a federal mechanism for contributing funds to local government where federal lands are not available for the local government tax base. The federal transfer payments of the SRS program have

been essential for the last several years to maintaining threshold county government services for schools, roads, and public safety. However, the continuous uncertainty over whether the SRS program will continue and if so at what level, does not provide for stability, and makes it impossible for our counties to develop long term plans. We also believe the federal deficit is a significant problem for our entire country and a primary threat to our national security. H.R. 1294 will help address these paramount issues. Additionally, the pilot programs authorized by H.R. 1294 have the opportunity to stimulate increased economic development and employment in our rural communities, and facilitate efficient prioritized treatments of unhealthy forests with high risk of fire and disease. These are priorities we also share with the US Congress.

Community Forest Trust

Our original proposal for a Community Forest Trust is described in detail in a hearing statement and concept paper we presented to this committee for the record in July, 2011. Basically the idea is for a Community Forest Trust to be designated by Congress from federal forest lands and further for Congress to provide those lands be managed in trust by the state for the benefit of county governments and local communities. In Idaho's case, professional forest management would be provided by the Idaho Department of Lands under the environmental laws as they apply to all Idaho state forest trust lands. Proceeds from management of the Community Forest Trust would be distributed to counties receiving Secure Rural Schools funding in lieu of transfer payments from the federal treasury, after having first reimbursed the managing agency for land management costs. Management of the Community Forest Trust would be overseen by a Board of elected officials and stakeholders as identified in H.R. 1294.

H.R. 1294 pilot projects would be managed sustainably and with multi-stakeholder input and environmental monitoring.

In Idaho, most of our counties are actively actively engaged in multi-interest collaborative discussions on federal lands management projects. In Idaho County we helped organize and have continuously participated in the nationally acclaimed Clearwater Basin Collaborative to address forest management opportunities on federal forest lands in our area. We would build on these relationships to solicit input to help shape management plans and projects for pilot projects authorized by H.R. 1294.

Our Clearwater Basin Collaborative Projects have also won support under the Collaborative Forest Restoration Act Program – competing against numerous collaborative projects nationally.

Pilot Project

To demonstrate the benefits of the Community Forest Trusts as envisioned by H.R. 1294, we have proposed a 200,000 acre Idaho pilot project be initially and immediately approved, located in management blocks throughout the forested region of the state. This is a small pilot including less than 1 % of the 20 million acres of national forest land in Idaho. While it is unreasonable to expect a pilot of

this small size to fully offset established levels of SRS transfer payments, it is sufficiently sized to prove and fine-tune the Community Forest Trust model and, once functioning, we believe has the potential to generate up to \$15 million annually to offset federal SRS transfer payments to Idaho counties.

Boundary, Clearwater, Idaho, Shoshone, and Valley Counties

The counties we represent contain some of the largest percentages of federal forest lands in the country.

Table 1: National Forest Land by County

County	Total Acres by County	USDA Forest Service Acres	USDA Forest Service Acreage Ownership
Boundary	812,032	490,803	60%
Clearwater	1,575,424	801,599	51%
Idaho	5,430,528	4,431,561	82%
Shoshone	1,685,760	1,200,577	71%
Valley	2,654,048	2,037,245	77%

The Secure Rural Schools and Self Determination Act program is an essential component of our county budgets for roads and schools.

Table 2: 2010 Secure Rural Schools Act- Highway Funding by County

County	Funding Amount	Funding Percentage
Boundary	\$1,107,050	100%
Clearwater	\$959,373	89%
Idaho	\$5,475,081	98%
Shoshone	\$1,872,786	100%
Valley	\$1,336,272	100%

Face the challenges of all rural America with declining economies, employment opportunities, and populations -living below national standards. Particularly acute in counties with extensive federal forest lands

Table 3: Unemployment Data by County – Number of People

County	Unemployment, June 2010	Percentage Unemployed, June 2010	Unemployment, May 2011	Percentage Unemployed, May 2011
Boundary	772	16.7%	742	14.7%
Clearwater	601	16.7%	578	17.4%
Idaho	905	12.0%	870	11.8%
Shoshone	1,025	16.3%	931	15.2%
Valley	837	17.3%	742	17.0%

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We urge this Committee quickly approve H.R. 1294.