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NACo urges House to pass healthy forests, communities act

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The National Association of Counties (NACo) today urged the U.S. House of Representatives to renew the federal government’s commitment to manage federal forests for the benefit of counties impacted by federal forestland, improve forest health and help prevent catastrophic wildfires.

The House this week will consider H.R. 1526, the Restoring Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities Act. This legislation would restore critical funding by extending the Secure Rural Schools program, renew the federal government’s commitment to manage federal forests for the benefit of counties impacted by federal forestland, improve forest health and help prevent catastrophic wildfires.

Specifically, the legislation would:

• reestablish the priority of actively managing our forests and promote responsible timber production on Forest Service commercial timber land
• improve forest health and prevent catastrophic wildfires by allowing significant state and local involvement
• improve forest management by establishing Good Neighbor Authority, which allows state and federal authorities to work together on fire mitigation efforts even when project areas cross ownership boundaries, and
• allow for a short-term extension of Secure Rural Schools payments to rural counties and schools.

The expiration of the Secure Rural Schools program in 2012 would create dramatic budgetary shortfalls if Congress fails to renew the longstanding federal obligation to county governments.

“The enactment of a modern revenue sharing program would ensure that students receive essential education services and that rural communities have funding for roads, conservation projects, search and rescue missions and fire prevention programs,” said Matt Chase, NACo executive director. “NACo supports the Restoring Healthy Forest for Healthy Communities Act, and urges all member of Congress to vote ‘yes’ on H.R. 1526.”

For more information, contact Ryan Yates at 202.942.4207 or ryates@naco.org.

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The National Association of Counties (NACo) is the only national organization that represents county governments in the United States. Founded in 1935, NACo provides essential services to the nation’s 3,069 counties. NACo advances issues with a unified voice before the federal government, improves the public’s understanding of county government, assists counties in finding and sharing innovative solutions through education and research, and provides value-added services to save counties and taxpayers money. For more information about NACo, visit www.naco.org.