



March 22, 2018

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
U.S. Capitol Building, Room: S-230
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Hart Senate Office Building, Room: 419
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Paul D. Ryan
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
U.S. Capitol Building, Room: H-232
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
United States House of Representatives
U.S. Capitol Building, Room: H-204
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Ryan and Minority Leader Pelosi,

On behalf of the National Association of Counties (NACo), the only national organization representing all 3,069 counties, parishes and boroughs across the United States, I write in support of provisions within the proposed bipartisan FY 2018 omnibus spending package, including the full funding of the Payments In Lieu of Taxes program (PILT), reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools program (SRS), active forest management reforms and a responsible wildfire funding fix to help end the destructive practice of fire borrowing.

Payments In Lieu of Taxes

Congress plays a key role in guiding the management of the nation's 640 million acres of federal public lands. Sixty-two percent of counties in 49 states nationwide have untaxable federal land within their boundaries. Even though we are not able to collect property taxes on federal land, county governments must still provide essential services for their residents and public lands visitors. Such services include road and bridge maintenance, law enforcement, search and rescue, emergency medical, fire protection, solid waste disposal and environmental compliance. Last year, Congress appropriated \$465 million for PILT, the full-funding level recommended by the U.S. Department of the Interior. Counties appreciate the full-funding of PILT at \$530 million for FY 2018 in the omnibus bill.

Secure Rural Schools

The SRS program provides counties containing significant U.S. Forest Service lands with funding to make up for the shortfall resulting from declining timber sales off federal forest lands beginning in the early 1990s. SRS assists counties in meeting their governing missions by supporting local schools, infrastructure maintenance and emergency services for residents and visitors. NACo is pleased to see a two-year reauthorization of SRS included in the FY 2018 omnibus appropriations bill.

Active Forest Management and a Responsible Wildfire Funding Fix

Last year, more than 10 million acres burned nationwide, costing approximately \$2.9 billion to suppress. This trend of larger, hotter wildfires burning through more acreage is fiscally, economically and environmentally unsustainable. Counties believe that active management of federal forestlands will reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire. The omnibus appropriations legislation will give the U.S. Forest Service needed tools to actively manage the National Forest System, including a new 3,000-acre categorical exclusion for hazardous fuels projects and collaborative restoration projects to make forests more resilient to wildfire.

Furthermore, the problem of fire-borrowing requires a fiscal solution that will allow agencies to use their resources on active land management rather than raiding these accounts to pay to fight wildfires. Counties appreciate the compromise effort to secure a responsible wildfire funding fix that will give land agencies certainty in discretionary funding, as well as access to a disaster cap adjustment beginning in 2020 to help ease the budgetary strain from the growing cost of natural disasters.

NACo supports these bipartisan provisions that ensure fiscal stability for counties, address forest management challenges to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, and bring certainty to land management agencies' budgets for wildland fire management and other important programs. Thank you for your continued support of public lands counties.

Sincerely,



Matthew D. Chase
Executive Director
National Association of Counties

cc: U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
The Honorable John Cornyn, Majority Whip, U.S. Senate
The Honorable Richard Durbin, Minority Whip, U.S. Senate
The Honorable Kevin McCarthy, Majority Leader, U.S. House
The Honorable Steny Hoyer, Democratic Whip, U.S. House