

Senate Passes Extension of Cantwell-Championed Rural Schools, Roads Program

Local News

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Posted on : September 26, 2013 at 5:20 am

Secure Rural Schools program invested over \$400,000 in Grays Harbor County in 2012

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. Senate passed an extension of a key program championed by Senator Maria Cantwell, as amended by the Senate and approved on Thursday by a 97-2 margin, would extend the Secure Rural Schools program, which helps compensate counties for revenue lost from declining U.S. Forest Service timber harvests on federal lands.

Secure Rural Schools (SRS) expired at the end of fiscal year 2012, and the last payments went out in December 2012. During 2012, Washington received about \$20 million in SRS program funding to help fund schools, roads, search and rescue, and other important services in rural areas. "Secure Rural Schools is a lifeline to communities all across Washington state," said Cantwell. "In 2012, counties in Washington state received about \$20 million in SRS payments, including: Chelan County, \$1.6 million. The full list of SRS payments to Washington counties can be found

[here.](#)

Cantwell has been a leader in pushing for a long-term continuation of SRS. In March during a U.S. Senate Energy and Natural Resources (ENR) Committee hearing, Cantwell called for an extension of SRS and mandatory full funding of the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program, while also making them simpler, more transparent, and more responsive to the needs of rural communities. At the hearing, committee members heard testimony from Paul Pearce, president of the National Forest Counties and School Coalition and a former Skamania County Commissioner. "My own county, Skamania County, is a county of 11,000 people," said Pearce during his opening statement to the committee. "I was the commissioner there until just the beginning of this year. If we were to lose this funding, two of the four school districts will in fact

close.” Skamania County was the highest recipient of SRS payments in Washington state in FY 2012, receiving nearly one-fifth of the state's total SRS payments. In 2012, Cantwell supported an amendment ([S. Amdt. 1825](#)) to the *Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act* ([H.R.4348](#)) that extended the SRS payments and mandatory full funding of PILT for one year. She joined 26 other senators in May 2012 in sending a [letter](#) to the Senate conferees negotiating a final transportation reauthorization agreement with the House urging the extension of both county payment programs. Cantwell also cosponsored the bipartisan County Payments Reauthorization Act of 2011, which would extend SRS for five years as well as fully fund PILT for five additional years. Under federal law, national forest land cannot be taxed by counties or other state and local jurisdictions. In place of taxes, a 100-year-old U.S. Forest Service policy shares revenue generated by timber harvests on federal lands near forest communities. Funds can be used for schools, roads, search and rescue, and other essential services. As timber harvests declined during the 1990s, hundreds of counties experienced a severe revenue loss. Since 2001, the SRS and PILT programs have helped areas hit hardest by declining timber sales, providing funding for schools and roads in communities nationwide.