



NACo Support for Title II Resource Advisory Committees (RAC)

NACo has long supported the inclusion of Title II Resource Advisory Committees in the reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program (as authorized by PL 110-343) in order to facilitate collaborative planning of public lands projects at the local level, promote employment of forest county citizens, and proactively address the progressive deterioration of the health of public lands. Passage of the new SRS reauthorization was largely based on the accomplishments of Resource Advisory Committees and the resultant forest health improvement on the National Forest System.

The success of Title II with the input from Resource Advisory Committees (RACs) has been demonstrated by the thousands of projects nationwide that have greatly improved forest health and made meaningful contributions to local economies. When originally Congress authorized the program in 2000, most envisioned creating a mechanism wherein county commissioners would dedicate between 15 and 20% of their funds to create forest health improving projects on National Forest and adjacent lands. Those projects were to be recommended and approved by a broad-based 15-person local stakeholder group that by federal design had to reach consensus on project before recommending them to the agency for final approval. This was a bold public land management initiative.

Today, there are over 60 active Resource Advisory Committees representing over 150 of our largest forest counties nationally. To date these broad-based stakeholder committees have, through consensus-based decision making, approved thousands of projects to improve watersheds, wildlife habitats, and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire. Simultaneously, these projects have created a substantial number of jobs in local communities and made significant contributions toward community economic stability as originally intended. Finally, Title II has reduced forest management gridlock through its consensus based decision making process. To date, no RAC has disbanded or melted down due to unresolved differences and conflict. Even more impressive is the fact that to date no Title II project has been appealed or litigated. No other active land management initiative in either the Departments of Agriculture or Interior can equal such a track record.

The lessons learned about collaborative public land management and local stakeholder involvement with public land management agencies is very powerful. NACo strongly believes RAC's are creating a new foundation and body of knowledge that will support the next generation of public land management initiatives. While it has been enormously successful to date, in our view, the most impressive contributions lie ahead of us as we learn to maximize its potential. An indicator of this is the fact that in each year of implementation the RAC's are bringing more partners, more funding sources, and more creative ideas to the table. Today over 30% of RAC project funding comes from outside partners. Projects are becoming more complex, treating larger areas of our National Forests and involving larger numbers of partners. Each year our RAC's are learning to partner more effectively with state, county, federal, and private entities.

With the recent SRS reauthorization, an increasing number of counties and communities will be creating new RACs. NACo asks that the incoming administration work with NACo and its members to bring these committees online in a timely fashion. NACo is committed to the ideals of collaboration and would ask the Forest Service to continue to strengthen the intergovernmental relationship with the Nations counties.