



National Association of Conservation Districts

June 4, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-230 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-221 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
House of Representatives
H-232 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
House of Representatives
H-204 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) represents America's 3,000 locally-led conservation districts, working with millions of landowners and operators to help them manage and protect land and water resources on private and public lands. Established under state law, conservation districts share a single mission: to work cooperatively with federal, state and other local resource management agencies and private sector interest groups to provide technical, financial and other assistance to help landowners and operators apply conservation to the landscape.

Rural communities that include tax-exempt federal lands or that are timber-dependent rely on Payments In-Lieu of Taxes (PILT) and Securing Rural Schools (SRS) programs to ensure critical infrastructure needs are met. The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) respectfully asks Congress to consider the unique circumstances impacting these rural communities by turning attention to PILT and SRS programs as Congress aids Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic. While PILT and SRS are subject to the annual appropriations cycle, a long-term solution is needed for both programs to give these local communities the consistency they need for long-term planning as they continue to help their communities respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Counties are spending more on public health crisis management, healthcare infrastructure, as well as other critical services and rely on these programs to make up for lost tax income. Additionally, SRS helps rural communities fund the National Firewise Communities Program, which is a program that brings education on wildfire management to these communities. The opportunity to stabilize SRS exists in legislation, such as S. 1643, the *Forest Management for Rural Stability Act*, which received bipartisan praise during a hearing before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee last November. This legislation would exempt SRS from the annual appropriations process by creating an endowment fund, where interest collected would stabilize SRS payments to national forest counties and schools. A long-term solution to funding both PILT and SRS would give rural communities the help they need to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic and set them up to have economic successes into the future.

Thank you for your work and consideration for rural communities during these trying times.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tim Palmer".

Tim Palmer
President
National Association of Conservation Districts