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Members of Texas Legislature Urge Congress to Restore Secure Rural Schools & Community Self-Determination Act

Austin, TX – Today, members of the Texas Legislature sent a resolution to Congress to urge them to reauthorize the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (SRS Act), which provides funding to counties which contain federal forest lands. The members who signed the resolution include Senators Robert Nichols (R-Jacksonville), Brandon Creighton (R-Conroe), Charles Schwertner (R-Georgetown) and Representatives Trent Ashby (R-Lufkin), Ernest Bailes (R-Shepherd), Travis Clardy (R-Nacogdoches), Will Metcalf (R-Conroe), and James White (R-Hillister).

"This funding mechanism is very important for counties and school districts, who otherwise would not be able to receive any type of revenue from that area of their counties, due to tax-exempt federal forest lands. This funding helps them to be able to operate efficiently and ensure they are providing the best for their communities," said Senator Nichols. "I encourage Congress to pass legislation which will reauthorize the SRS Act and provide these 13 counties with funding."

"It's imperative that Congress reauthorize the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act. Many rural communities in Texas, especially here in House District 18, rely on the revenues generated from tax-exempt timber sales to help fund local schools and county roads," said Representative Bailes.

In 1908, the federal Forest Service began to pay 25 percent of its gross receipts to states for use on roads and schools in counties which contained tax-exempt federal forest lands. In the late 1990s, the volume and value of timber harvested on national forest lands because to decrease, which caused rural counties and school districts to face funding problems.

Because of this, Congress passed the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act in 2000, which created a program of payments to counties based on historic timber sales, rather than current revenues. This helped to fill the gaps that had been left in local budgets from the lack of timber revenues. Counties had the ability to choose whether they would like to receive SRS payments, or continue to receive the 25 percent revenue payment.

"When the federal government took ownership of private lands that would have generated valuable tax-revenue for school districts and counties, they committed to make certain these local entities were solvent. In my district alone, four counties would stand to lose nearly one million

dollars if this law is not extended," said Representative Ashby. "I look forward to continuing my work with the Texas Federal delegation, as well as my colleagues in the Legislature, to guarantee that this promise from decades ago is kept - ensuring Texas schools have the necessary resources to provide a high quality education."

"I'm proud to join Senator Nichols and my legislative colleagues to support Congress' reauthorization of this important Act. Not only does it support our vital timber industry in East Texas but helps fund our public schools and secure our campuses for the protection of our schoolchildren," says Representative Clardy.

"Rural America spoke overwhelmingly at the ballot box in 2016: D.C. decisions involving international trade deals, the economy, and health care, to name a few, are not working for rural East Texas," said Representative White. "The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act is another example. I look forward to working with my federal Congressional delegation on the full authorization of these needed funds for rural schools and infrastructure. "

While set to expire in 2006, the SRS Act was extended through 2013. It was then retroactively reauthorized in 2015 to cover the 2014 and 2015 fiscal years, however, it then expired in September 2015. If Congress does not reauthorize the SRS Act, counties will revert back to receiving the 25 percent payments. Specifically:

- Trinity County would receive \$288,900 through SRS but only \$43,000 through the 25 percent payment mechanism;
- Houston County would receive \$364,600 through SRS but only \$59,700 through the 25 percent payment mechanism;
- Walker County would receive \$224,300 through SRS but only \$47,000 through the 25 percent payment mechanism;
- Montgomery County would receive \$48,100 through SRS but only \$40,800 through the 25 percent payment mechanism;
- San Jacinto County would receive \$191,000 through SRS but only \$52,200 through the 25 percent payment mechanism;
- Angelina County would receive \$127,700 through SRS but only \$16,700 through the 25 percent payment mechanism;
- Nacogdoches County would receive \$28,100 through SRS but only \$2,700 through the 25 percent payment mechanism;
- Shelby County would receive \$150,000 through SRS but only \$40,800 through the 25 percent payment mechanism;
- San Augustine County would receive \$205,700 through SRS but only \$21,500 through the 25 percent payment mechanism;

- Sabine County would receive \$328,100 through SRS but only \$65,500 through the 25 percent payment mechanism;
- Newton County would receive \$10,200 through SRS but only \$1,200 through the 25 percent payment mechanism;
- Jasper County would receive \$45,300 through SRS but only \$6,100 through the 25 percent payment mechanism;
- Tyler County would receive \$7,720 through SRS but only \$590 through the 25 percent payment mechanism

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