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For More Information:  
Justin Caporusso  
(916) 447-4806

[JCaporusso@rcrcnet.org](mailto:JCaporusso@rcrcnet.org)

# RCRC Officers Advocate in Washington, D.C. on Behalf of Rural California Counties

**SACRAMENTO, CA – March 02, 2015 –** Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) Officers and staff met with key federal policymakers in Washington, D.C. last week to discuss issues impacting California’s rural counties. The main issues included reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (SRS), long-term reauthorization of the federal Payment in Lieu of Taxes program (PILT), reauthorization of the Federal Transportation Funding Program (MAP-21), the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act (WDFAs), and the Waters of the U.S. (WOTUS) rulemaking change.

“RCRC’s annual trip to Washington, D.C. provides our organization and California’s rural counties the opportunity to advocate with a collective voice before our Nation’s policymakers on federal issues critical to our communities,” said Lee Adams, RCRC Chair and Sierra County Supervisor. “This year our strategic focus was on SRS, Federal PILT, MAP-21, the WDFAs, and WOTUS.”

### Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act

The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (SRS) provides funding for rural counties and school districts to help replace revenue lost from dwindling forest receipts. The 113<sup>th</sup> Congress failed to reauthorize SRS payments for fiscal year 2014, crippling California county public works programs and schools.

RCRC supports the immediate reauthorization of SRS, and urges Congress to provide a long-term, stable source of funding going forward. Several paths to reauthorization of SRS are being considered by Congress, but the need for a fiscal “offset” to pay for the program is proving to be a challenge.

### Federal Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILT)

The Federal Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program provides payments to counties to offset losses in property tax revenues due to the presence of tax-exempt land owned by a variety of federal agencies. With the exception of a five-year extension in 2008, Congress has been reviewing reauthorizations annually, leaving county payments uncertain.

And while RCRC is thankful that in December Congress provided a one-year reauthorization of Federal PILT, for county budgeting purposes, a long-term, multi-year reauthorization is needed.

#### Federal Transportation Funding Program (MAP-21)

The Moving Ahead for Progress Act in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (MAP-21) is a two-year program to fund the nation's highways and transit systems. Slated to expire at the end of September 2014, Congress passed the Highway and Transportation Funding Act of 2014 extending the federal surface transportation program, and providing short-term funding to the Highway Trust Fund (HTF) through May 31, 2015.

RCRC supports the reauthorization of MAP-21 with reforms to ensure specific funding is made available for high-risk rural roads and a dedicated funding stream for on-system bridge replacement/rehabilitation, both of which were eliminated under MAP-21.

#### Wildfire Disaster Funding Act and Overall Wildfire Funding Budget

Over the past decade wildfires have plagued California, and continue to threaten the state due to the lack of active management on our federal lands. Just twenty years ago the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) was spending approximately 15 percent of its total budget on firefighting; today, the USFS spends 40 percent or more of its total budget on firefighting. This forces the USFS to shift its focus from fire prevention and forest health activities, to fire suppression. Ultimately, this system creates a large backlog of needed prevention, and forest health projects go unfunded.

The Wildfire Disaster Funding Act (WDFFA) has been put forth this year in the Congress to alter the way wildfire disasters are funded by making the funding mechanism for wildfire disasters similar to that of other types of disasters. RCRC supports the WDFFA as a means to begin the process of making our forests healthier and more resilient to catastrophic wildfire.

#### Waters of the U.S. (WOTUS)

In March 2014, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) proposed a rule that would change the definition of "Waters of the U.S." to expand federal jurisdiction to include some wetlands, waters that are adjacent to traditional navigable water, and other undefined, marginal waters.

RCRC encourages Congress to continue to pressure the EPA and Corps to withdraw the proposed rule and continue seeking legislative remedies to stop implementation of the proposed rule should it be finalized.

#### **ABOUT RURAL COUNTY REPRESENTATIVES OF CALIFORNIA (RCRC)**

*The Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) is a thirty-four member county strong service organization that champions policies on behalf of California's rural counties. RCRC is dedicated to representing the collective unique interests of its membership, providing legislative and regulatory representation at the State and Federal levels, and providing responsible services for its members to enhance and protect the quality of life in rural California counties. To learn more about RCRC, visit [rcrcnet.org](http://rcrcnet.org) and follow @RuralCounties on Twitter.*