

January 15, 2009

WASHINGTON, DC –Congressman Peter DeFazio (OR-04) announced today that the U.S. Forest Service approved his request to reinstate Forest Work Camps as an authorized use of funds from the Secure Rural School (SRS) program, often called county payments. The change will give county governments more flexibility in administering SRS funds for law enforcement and corrections programs.

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Forest Work Camps are an alternative incarceration program in rural settings for low risk offenders. The majority of the offenders assigned to Forest Work Camps are members of work crews that complete various jobs on Federal forest projects. While incarcerated at the camp, inmates may receive training in first aid, CPR, building trades (such as carpentry, concrete work and painting), and welding. Offenders are also required, depending upon their individual needs, to participate in alcohol and drug treatment or education programs.

"This is particularly good news at a time when the County's budget is stretched so thin. The Forest Work Camps are a cost effective way to get important work done on our public lands. Additionally, they provide low risk offenders with job skills, and ultimately assist them in making a transition back to society," DeFazio said. "This program is a win win for everyone involved. I worked hard to get work camps included in the original law that passed in 2000 and I am pleased that the Administration worked with us to ensure that the program will continue."

As a former Lane County Commissioner and advocate for alternative incarceration programs, DeFazio fought to include the Forest Work Camps program in the original Secure Rural Schools legislation as an authorized use of county funds. However, when the Senate included a four year extension of Secure Rural School payments in H.R. 1424, Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008, the Senate dropped language authorizing Forest Work Camps. Without the county payments funding, Lane County would have had to close the work camp.