



UNITED STATES SENATOR ★ SERVING THE CITIZENS OF IDAHO

**LARRY CRAIG**

**NEWS RELEASE**

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## **CRAIG SECURES PLEDGE TO FUND RURAL SCHOOLS**

### ***Pushes Legislation For Responsible Forest Management***

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Idaho Senator Larry Craig today secured commitments from the Chair and Ranking Republican Senators on the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee to seek matching funds for the Secure Rural Schools Act when the Senate takes up appropriations bills later this year.

The action came during a hearing on the Fiscal Year 2009 U.S. Forest Service budget in the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee, on which Craig serves.

“Today’s pledges from Chair Dianne Feinstein of California and Ranking Republican Wayne Allard of Colorado are a good step toward plugging the huge funding gap that exists in many of Idaho’s counties that have lost timber receipts and jobs from federal lands,” Craig said. “It is imperative that we see it through, to keep education and other essential infrastructure programs afloat until these communities can transition from these funds.”

In 2000, Craig co-authored the Secure Rural Schools Act, along with Oregon Senator Ron Wyden, to restore a stable, predictable funding stream for public schools in States and counties with significant portions of federal lands producing no property taxes. Annual payments to these schools have been hurt by the decline in timber harvests on public land. When sold, a percentage of the revenue from these harvests is directed to support rural schools.

The legislation expired last year, but Craig was successful in convincing Congress to pass a one-year extension. The Forest Service has proposed \$250 million for the program in its budget, and Craig is pushing his Western colleagues to join him in funding the law at \$500 million.

During the hearing, Craig also chastised the U.S. Forest Service for adopting “a troubling policy of isolationism of communities” in Idaho adjacent to public forest lands. He cited increased road closures into public lands, increased trespassing arrests of individuals visiting public lands and decreased timber sales.

“Our communities once were tied to the Forest Service which no longer is a majority employer for them,” Craig said. “This growing isolationism is not happening for the better.”

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Craig also criticized the Forest Service for its mishandling of grazing disputes surrounding big horn and domestic sheep. He told Forest Service Chief Gail Kimbell her agency was falling into the trap of special interests wanting to ban all grazing on public lands.

Craig repeated his calls for responsible public lands management at a hearing later Tuesday in the Energy & Natural Resources Committee on an authorization bill he is co-sponsoring to establish a collaborative forest landscaping program with the Interior Department and the Forest Service.

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