

**Statement Before the House Natural Resources Committee
Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers
February 3, 2022**

Thank you, Chairman Neguse (Neh-GOOSE), and Ranking Member Fulcher, for working to hold a hearing on H.R. 6435 so quickly.

Congress has a very limited amount of time to act to ensure timber communities across the country are not negatively impacted by an oversight in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

While I had concerns about the package as a whole – and the impact the law will have on already skyrocketing inflation – I am glad that we now have a 3-year authorization of the Secure Rural Schools Program. This is critical to ensure counties have more flexibility to determine the portion of SRS funds that will go toward schools and roads, Resource Advisory Projects, and forestry projects. Counties have not been able to shift their allocations in these three categories since 2012. Additionally, we were able to put a stop to annual SRS funding decreases.

Unfortunately, current law set a deadline of August 1st for counties to elect SRS or timber payments, as well as make their allocations of SRS

funding to Title I, Title II and Title III of the SRS program – roads and schools, RAC and forestry projects.

The infrastructure package wasn't signed into law until November 11, 2021 – well past the August 1st deadline. And now, counties are facing a situation where they will default to SRS payments, regardless of whether they have chosen timber receipts in the past, and default to an 80% allocation for Title I, the roads and schools program, for FY21 payments.

This is a losing situation for all counties.

We have a solution: H.R. 6435. This bill would preserve counties' current elections for FY21 payments and open the process for new elections beginning in FY2022.

This isn't a perfect solution, as I know many counties would prefer the opportunity to change their elections for FY21 now. However, we must act as quickly as possible to pass a measure that protects all counties from facing default allocations in FY21.

I appreciate my colleagues' support on this bill, as well the work that the Forest Service has done to raise this issue and protect timber communities. I hope that we can move this bill to the House floor for a vote as soon as next week.

Thank you, and I yield back.