

# Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Program Implementation 2015

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# Origins of the Forest Reserves

**Transfer Act of 1905 –**  
transferred the management of forest reserves from the General Land Office (DOI) to the Bureau of Forestry, henceforth known as the US Forest Service (1907)



# Origins of the Forest Reserves

- Why?
- Clear cuts; later led to Fires
- Overgrazing
- Unfettered mineral extraction
- Lack of public access





## 1908 Act (25% fund)

- 25% of receipts from national forests
- Funding for schools and roads
- Proportionate to % of national forest land in a county



## SRS Created (2000)

- Congress found that:
  - NFS grown to 193 million acres since 1907
  - Fed ownership deprives local communities of revenue
  - Counties have expended funds that benefit federal lands
  - Timber sales have fallen dramatically
  - Judicial and admin. decisions based on NSO have limited harvest



# Politically Complex

- Republicans (54 S., 247 HR)
- Democrats (44 S., 187 HR)
- Counties (747)
- Administration (WH, USDA, FS)
- Judiciary



# Partnership between the Forest Service, BLM and Communities

- Funding to economically support communities that host National Forest land
- Title I (county funds - roads and schools)
- Title II (federal funds – restoration via Resource Advisory Committees [RACs])
- Title III (county funds - emergency services, firewise, community wildfire protection planning)



**Get Ready!**

**Get Prepared!**

**BE FIREWISE!**





# Legislative History

- Designed for 10 years
- 5 reauthorizations since 2000
- More complex over time
- Expired at the end of FY 2014
- **Payments went from \$300 million to \$50 million**



# A late reauthorization of SRS in 2015

- 1908 Act payments made in January by FS (83% drop)
- Counties **Freaked Out!!!**
- SRS reauthorized in April
- RACs deactivated, then reactivated
- Confusion and anger
- Financially complicated



# Complicated???

- Title I overpayments
- Title II and III unobligated balances
- Title II funds abutting G&A deadlines (lost \$6m from last authorization)
- Many other issues



# Case Study will focus on **Title II SRS funds**

- Federal Funds (2017 initiate deadline, 2018 obligate deadline)
- Allocated by Resource Advisory Committees (RACs) via mandated formula
- Projects recommended by RACs, approved by Forest supervisors
- Projects must benefit federal lands
- Projects fuel local economies



# What is a Resource Advisory Committee?

- Federal Advisory Committees (FACA committees)
- 15 members
- Recommend projects for use of Title II funds
- Specialized qualifications
- Members approved by Secretary of Agriculture
- Complex and time consuming nomination process



# Authorized Purposes: What can you do with Title II?

- Improve the maintenance of existing infrastructure;
- Implement objectives to enhance forest ecosystems; and restore and improve land health and water quality; and
- To improve cooperative relationships.



# Implementation Options

- **Contracts/Force Account** - Procurement for FS benefit
- **Grants and Cooperative Agreements** - Federal Financial Assistance for projects off NFS land
- **Agreements** - Mutual Interest/Benefit for NFS based projects



# Issues with RACs in 2015 - 2016

1. Are prior years funds available?
2. RACs demoralized
3. Cannot “lobby” Congress for changes to bureaucracy
4. Concerns raised about RAC member diversity
5. USDA FACA process taking one year + for member approval
6. Only have until 9/30/17 to initiate projects
7. New members unclear on RAC function





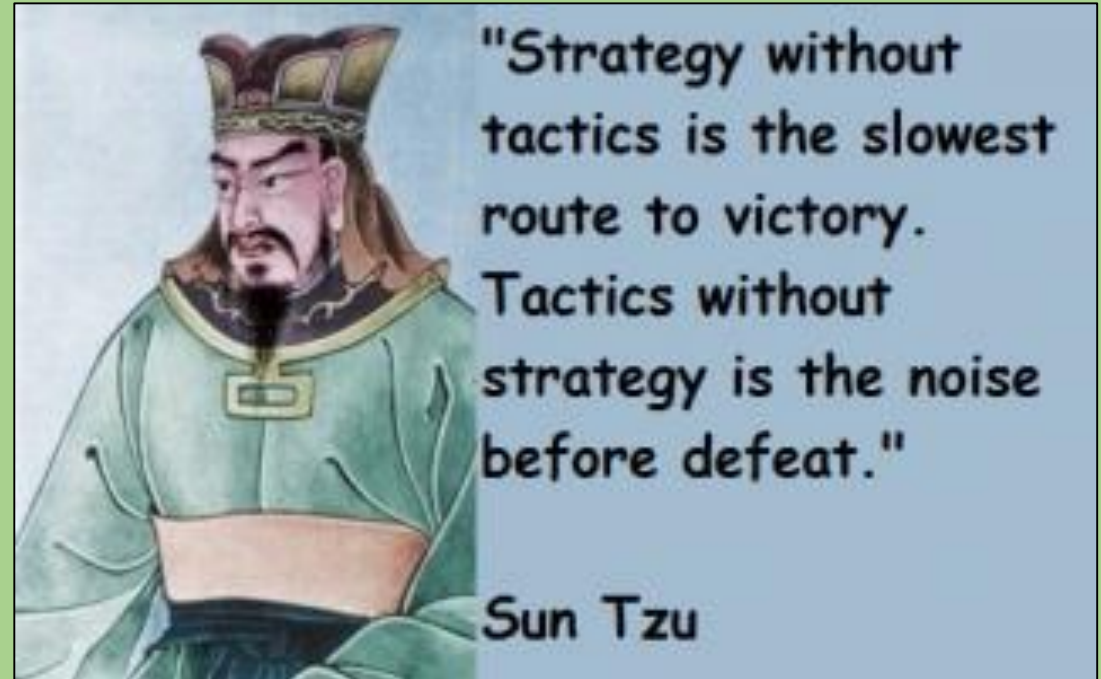
# 1. Unobligated Title II balances

- Met with CFO staff, finance staff, OGC (define FS position)
- Met with DOI staff (budget, OGC) to explain FS position
- Went to OMB to explain different positions
- OMB counsel, balances lost (**\$6.2 million**)
- Communicated to FS Washington Office staff and field staff



## 2. RACs demoralized

- New National SRS Manager
- Communications... **repeat**
- Assurance that someone in the National Office cares, listens, and is trying to help!
- Work in progress



### 3. Cannot Lobby Congress



- Justified to FS, USDA, OMB budget staff why change was needed
- Inserted language into FY 17 President's budget about intent to change administrative provisions
- Now can support PB, **NOT** lobbying

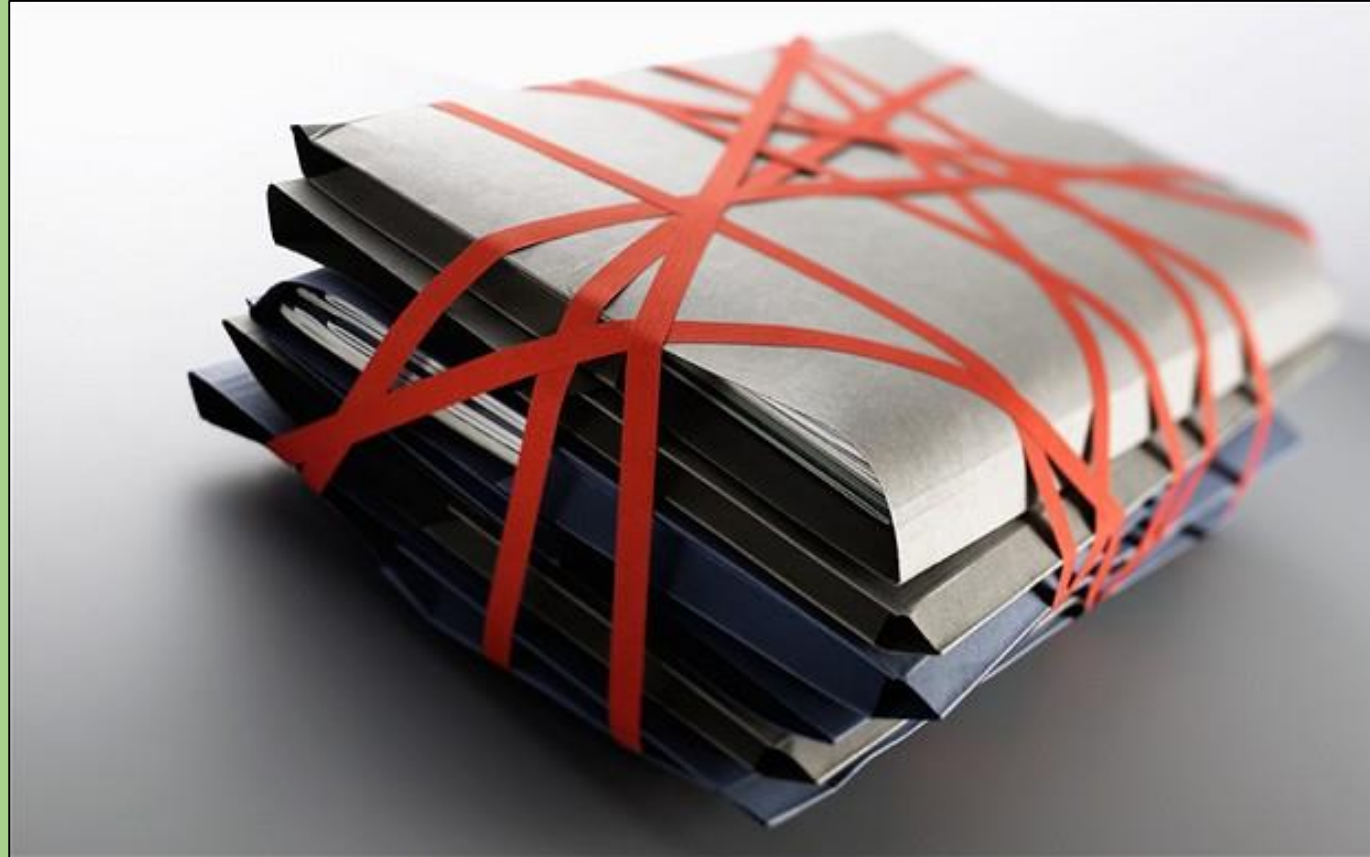
## 4. RAC member diversity

- RAC Charter Renewal in 2014 actions to increase diversity
- National Partnership Office permanently filled a long-vacant, SRS coordinator position
- FS Chief Tidwell and other national leaders personally and regularly engage the Regional Foresters to diversify RAC membership
- Creation of a National SRS Oversight Team
- Partnership with the National, Regional, and Forest-level Tribal Relations and Civil Rights staffs to diversify outreach
- Year-round outreach to increase awareness of local RAC openings
- Robust outreach planning - RACs developed tailored outreach plans
- **Some** improvement



## 5. Lengthy FACA process

- Taking 1 year+ to navigate FACA (compare to 80 day target to hire Feds.)
- Congress upset (\$55 million not being spent)
- White paper options to USDA
- Internal process improvements (reduced 21 weeks)
- Other options on the table for decision makers
- A work **in progress**



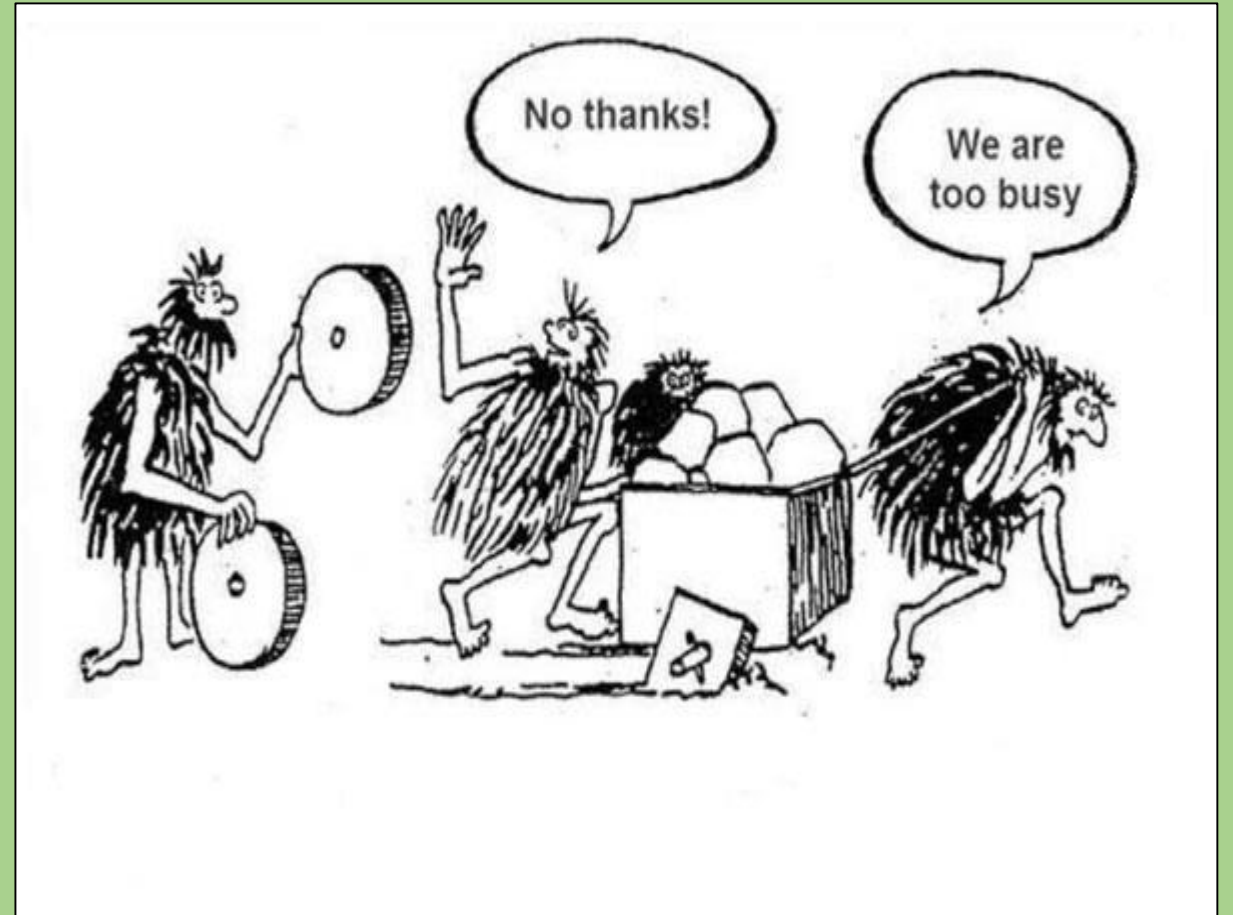
## 6. Must initiate projects by 2017



- With program authorization expiration looming, projects must be entered into and executed prior to 9/30/2017
- Much administrative effort is spent on the discussion of what it means to perform project work after an authority has expired

## 7. New members unclear on RAC function

- RAC role is to recommend projects, FS selects the instrument to implement
- Often, the recommended project is not separated from the method to implement
- Delays caused when there is an internal struggle to decide how to roll out project
- Deadlines and leadership attention are **sharpening focus**



# Lessons learned

1. You can go far with a good justification – sometimes
2. There are some issues that you can fix and others where you can only make recommendations to decision makers
3. Work on an issue at multiple levels, through multiple staffs and stakeholders to gain acceptance
4. Communicate clearly in writing in addition to having meetings
5. The final chapter of SRS remains to be told...





# Questions???

