

WASHINGTON, DC—Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield) today led a bipartisan effort to create jobs on public lands when he sent a letter to the Chairman of the Natural Resources Committee, Congressman Nick Rahall and the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Parks, Forests, and Public Lands, Congressman Raul Grijalva. The letter requests that the Chairmen hold a hearing on the Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) appointment process. RACs, which were created as part of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act in 2000, help to make improvements on public lands and create and maintain family wage jobs in areas of Oregon which are currently suffering from unemployment rates of almost 20%.

The purpose of the RACs is to bring together a diverse cross-section of local citizens to design and implement collaborative projects on national forests. The RACs have been a tremendous success. Over the last eight years, 55 RACs have been formed and have implemented over 5,000 projects, not one of which has been litigated. These projects may include road, trail, and infrastructure maintenance or removal; improvements in forest health; and the restoration, maintenance, and improvement of wildlife and fish habitat.

“RACs have been highly effective at designing projects that create good paying jobs and that make needed improvements on our public lands. But, only one quarter of the RACs have enough members to function,” DeFazio said “We need to find out why these positions are not being filled in a timely manner so we can fix the process, get needed projects out the door, and put people back to work.”

When Congress reauthorized the Secure Rural Schools Act in 2008, it created 69 new RACs for a total of 124 RACs. Unfortunately, last year, due to the back-log of appointments, 89 of the total 124 RACs were unable to fulfill their responsibilities because they did not have enough approved members to constitute a quorum. As a result, of the \$52 million allocated to counties for RAC projects in 2009, only \$26 million has been committed to projects. This year another \$45 million will be available for RAC projects. Without approved RAC members, efforts to preserve and create jobs will continue to be stalled.

Last month, DeFazio was joined by 23 of his colleagues in sending a bipartisan letter to Secretary of Agriculture, Thomas Vilsack, requesting that he expedite the process of Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) appointments. DeFazio has not received a response to this letter.

The letter is below:

February 16, 2010

The Honorable Nick Rahall

Chairman

House Committee on Natural Resources

1324 Longworth House Office Building

Washington, DC, 20515

The Honorable Raul Grijalva

Chairman

Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands

1333 Longworth House Office Building

Washington, DC, 20515

Dear Chairman Rahall and Chairman Grijalva:

We are writing to share our concerns about delays by the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management in approving Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) appointments. We respectfully request that you hold an oversight hearing on the RAC approval process.

You will recall that as a part of Secure Rural Schools and Self-Determination Act we included one of the most successful features of the Act, the establishment of local Resource Advisory Committees (RACs). The purpose of the RACs is to bring together a diverse cross-section of local citizens to design and implement collaborative projects on national forests. Over the last eight years, 55 RACs have been formed and have implemented over 5,000 projects. Of those 5,000 projects, not one has been litigated.

When Congress reauthorized the Act in 2008, an additional 69 RACs were created. Unfortunately, last year, nearly 80 of the total 124 RACs were unable to fulfill their responsibilities to either Congress or their local communities because they lack sufficient approved members to constitute a quorum. Of the \$52 million allocated to counties for RAC projects in 2009, only \$26 million has been committed to projects due to lack of quorums or lack of approved charters. This year, an additional \$45 million of Title II dollars will be available but RAC vacancies may delay more than half of the funding. Without approved RAC members, efforts to preserve and create jobs in rural communities have been stalled.

We understand that the U.S. Department of Agriculture has nearly 700 individuals awaiting RAC appointments; the Bureau of Land Management has approximately 200 more. Most of the appointments have been pending for more than a year.

Unfortunately, our efforts in seeking a meaningful response from the U.S. Department of Agriculture have not been successful. Despite sending a letter to Secretary Vilsack expressing our concerns about RAC appointments nearly two months ago, we have not yet received a reply.

An oversight hearing on RAC appointments is needed to examine ways to improve the approval

process to ensure RACs can meet their responsibilities, projects can be approved, and much needed jobs maintained and created.

Thank you for your continued commitment to rural counties.

Sincerely,

Peter DeFazio

Don Young

Stephanie Herseth Sandlin

Cynthia Lummis

