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Funds for Federal Land Sought

Henderson County Commissioner Lobbies for compensation for counties with tax-exempt federal land

October 23, 2007 – Henderson County, NC: Henderson County Commissioner Chuck McGrady met with members of Congress on Capitol Hill recently to secure support for full funding of the Payments in Lieu of Taxes program (PILT). McGrady was part of the National Association of Counties' (NACo) "fly-in" organized to lobby support for the needs of counties that struggle with reduced tax revenues as a result of having federal land in the county.

McGrady serves as the Chairman of the Federal Land Payment Subcommittee and is a member of the Public Lands Steering Committee with NACo, in which he represents Western North Carolina counties including Henderson County.

PILT are federal payments that have helped communities pay for essential services including education, law enforcement, search and rescue, health care, environmental compliance, fire fighting, and parks and recreation, McGrady said.

"Henderson County gets about \$25,000 in PILT funds," he said, pointing out that Pisgah National Forest takes about 8% of the county's northwest corner. "Swain County gets about \$500,000 in PILT funds because of the federal land in that county."

For 30 years, the PILT program has provided federal payments to local governments to help offset losses in property taxes due to nontaxable federal lands within their boundaries. The law recognizes that the inability of local governments to collect property taxes on federally-owned land can create a financial hardship.

McGrady said: "We are urging Congress to fully fund the PILT program at its authorized level each year." The current payment is "far short of the approximately \$333 million authorized, and substantially short of the amount that would be generated were the same lands privately held on the county tax roles."

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