

# THE SECURE RURAL SCHOOLS ACT

## A Bridge Between Forestry and Conservation Management on Public Lands

### Supporting Public Safety, Roads, and Schools



The recent withdrawal of the Western Oregon Plan Revision, combined with the outdated provisions of the Northwest Forest Plan and the sunset of the Secure Rural Schools Act, will negate gains made in public safety services, quality educational systems, and an efficient transportation system.

Economic development, along with sustainable and safe communities, simply cannot occur without these underpinnings.

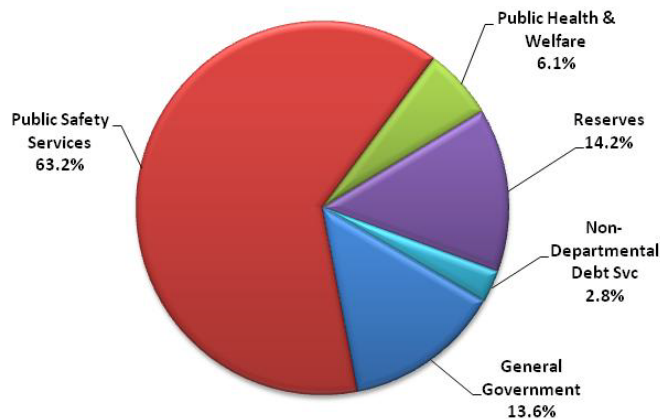
**Lane County seeks a level and longer term  
reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools Act.**



## **Public Safety in Lane County**

The Lane County Sheriff's Department provides services that encompass dispatch, patrol, jail operations, search and rescue, and parole and probation. Funding for the Department comes from the County's General Fund. As the largest recipient of these discretionary dollars, the Sheriff's office is also the most vulnerable when it comes to cuts. Federal forest funding is important to the Sheriff's office, as revenue from the Department of Interior's Bureau of Land Management forestry districts in Oregon is shared with Counties under a unique arrangement (the 1937 O & C Act) that provides 50% of its revenues to be deposited into the general fund of the "O & C" counties.

### **Discretionary General Fund Allocation by Service Category**



*Public safety services, as used in the chart to the left, encompass services at Lane County that include the Sheriff's Office, the Department of Youth Services, the District Attorney, Justice Courts, and Animal Control Services*

### **Successes**

- When Congress re-authorized SRS in 2008, funding to operate the Lane County jail was restored. In order to provide a balanced budget for FY 2009, the Board of County Commissioners was forced to close 84 beds. As a result, the daily "matrix" releases increased substantially, such that dangerous criminals were routinely being released due to overcrowding issues. A number of these individuals subsequently committed crimes in the community. With the restoration of funding, the Board was able to direct additional funding to the Sheriff to reopen the jail beds.
- Behavioral crimes in Lane County's largest city, Eugene, declined by 5.6% from 2008 to 2009.
- Property crimes in Lane County's largest city, Eugene, declined by 13% from 2008 to 2009.

### **Threats**

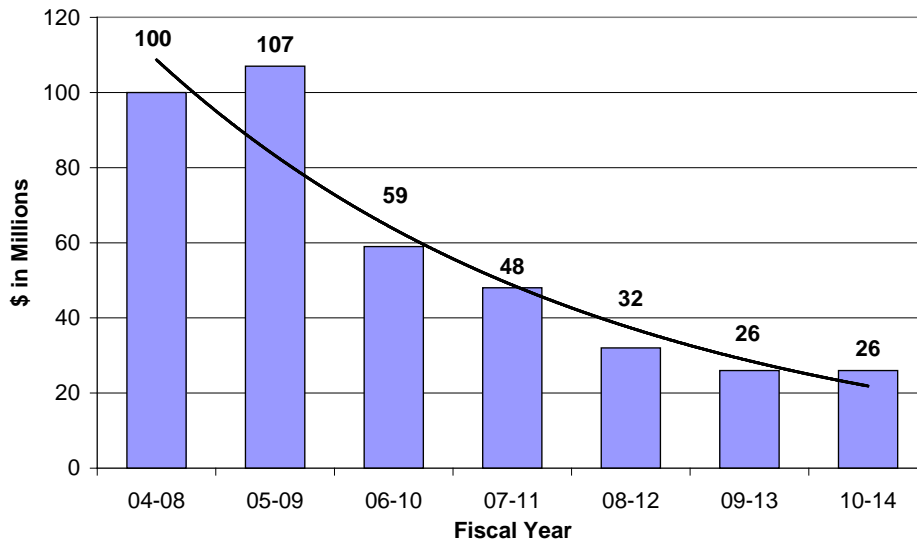
- Between 2007 and 2008 the number of marijuana plants seized from outdoor gardens increased by 1500% (396 to 6,401).
- The Lane County Sheriff reports that over 31 active sets of gangs currently operate in the area.
- The Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) 2009 study revealed that Lane County consistently had crime rates 50% higher than the Oregon counties. The CJC study also advised that both property and violent crime rates in Lane County have increased in recent years, contrary to marked decreases in most counties.
- Over the last four years drug related deaths reported in Lane County have increased by 40%.
- Person crimes in Lane County's largest city, Eugene, increased by 1% between 2008 and 2009, most notably influenced by increases in the category of forcible rape.

***A longer term and level reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools Act would provide sustainable funding for the Lane County Sheriff's Office operations.***

## Roads in Lane County

The Public Works Department maintains 1,432 miles of roads and 413 bridges. Typifying the availability of strong, straight, and durable forest products, Lane County has more covered bridges (17) than any other county west of the Mississippi River. The largest percentage of funding for the Public Works Department comes from the Road Fund, a dedicated fund that receives money from state gasoline tax and a portion (75%, based on the National Forest Revenue Act of 1908) of timber revenue from the National Forest lands in Lane County. This fund continues to receive revenue through the Secure Rural Schools Act, albeit in decreasing amounts over the final four years of the Act.

**Capital Improvement Projects Trend**



\*Note: Projects funded by State and Federal Fundings, based on 5-year programs

*The graph at left shows the declining dedicated revenue for roadway construction and maintenance in Lane County. The Public Works Department is preparing for its inability to adequately maintain the existing network of 4,000 miles of roads and over 400 bridges.*

## **Successes**

- Lane County has constructed and preserved a sizeable roadway infrastructure and maintains 85% of these roads with a pavement condition index (PCI) of 60 or higher.
- From 1986 to 2004, over \$156 million of road funds was shared with other local governments to assist them in supporting infrastructure projects through the County/City Road Partnership.
- Road and Bridge Maintenance services are provided through a comprehensive zonal concept, with five fully functioning zones distributed across a County the size of Connecticut.
- Through an exception to state law, the Public Works Department is able to provide funding for the Sheriff's Office for patrol functions from the Road Fund at a level of \$1.8M per year.

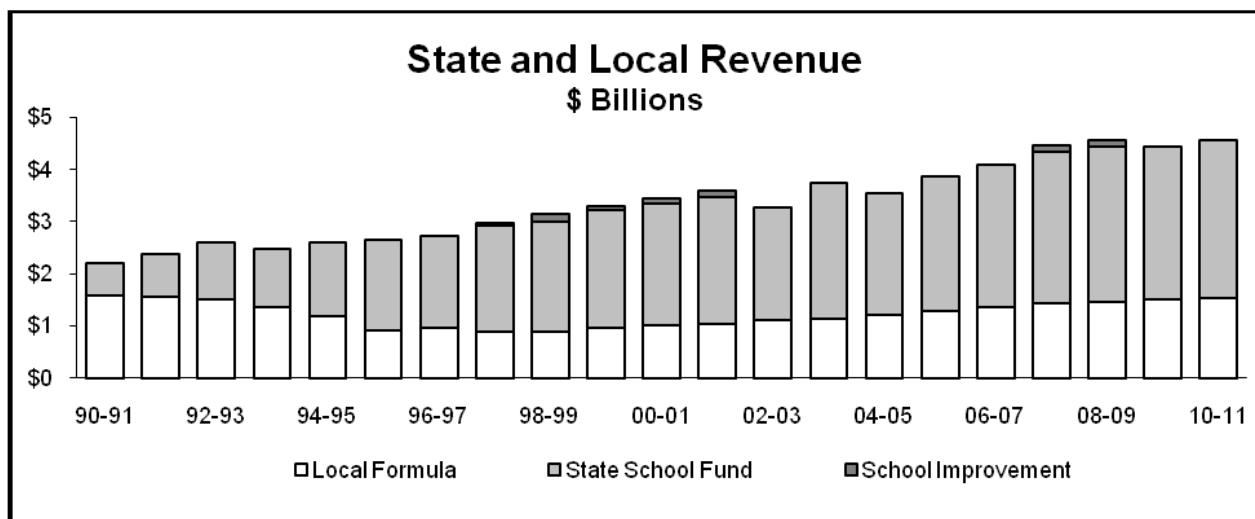
## **Threats**

- Other Oregon counties have begun to tear up pavement on low priority roads in order to save on maintenance costs. Without SRS funding, Lane County will stop maintaining certain roads.
- Lane County consistently has the highest per capita instance of fatal and injury accidents in the State, often with the distinction of the highest total fatalities in the state.
- The lack of a maintained and preserved transportation infrastructure will be seen as a constraining factor on economic and regional development.
- Restoration of native fish populations like Coho and Chinook salmon involve new ways to engineer and place stream culverts, all a result of adequate SRS funding.

***A longer term and level reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools Act would provide sustainable funding for the Lane County Public Works Department.***

**School Funding in Lane County**

There are 16 school districts in Lane County, with all but three located in a rural area. These districts contain 129 schools, of which 20 are high schools, 22 middle schools, 72 are elementary schools, and 15 are alternative schools. These unified districts have an approximate student population of 49,000 and a teaching staff of about 2,900. Each county in Oregon has a County School Fund, into which a portion (25%, based on the National Forest Revenue Act of 1908) of timber revenue from the National Forest lands in Lane County is deposited. These funds are considered “local funds” for the purposes of determining the amount of money each district receives from Oregon’s Common School Fund, thus Secure Rural School Act funding truly touches each school in Oregon. As the Act decreases and/or sunsets, the responsibility for making up that funding loss falls to the State.



*The chart demonstrates how Oregon has moved to a state-funded school system. Measure 5 and Measure 50, constitutional amendments passed in 1990 and 1997 cut and capped property taxes at a time when timber revenues were at historic highs. This action reduced the local share of school funding by more than half. A dramatic increase in state school aid over this period accomplished a shift to primarily state funding.*

**Successes**

- Lane County children enter school with a Ready to Learn (RTL) score which consistently exceeds the statewide benchmark.
- More Lane County 3<sup>rd</sup> graders achieve reading standards than statewide.
- Lane County’s high school dropout rate is consistently better than the state average.
- Lane County schools benefited from recent state law changes that benefit small high schools funding distribution.

**Threats**

- Teen pregnancy rates are higher in Lane County than statewide.
- Lane County 8<sup>th</sup> graders exceed statewide responses regarding tobacco, alcohol and drug use in the last 30 days.
- School years are being shortened across Oregon. Superintendents and budget committees in rural districts are now examining combining grades as a potential funding solution.

***A longer term and level reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools Act would provide a sustainable funding source for the public schools of Lane County.***