

President's budget reduces funding for county roads

TILLAMOOK — President Bush's proposed fiscal year 2007 budget reduces federal funding for county roads by 25 percent in next year's budget with a plan to phase out all federal funding for county roads in five years.

It's called the Secure Rural Schools and Communities Act (PL 106-393). The bill is also known as the Federal Safety Net Program.

Since 1908, 25 percent of U.S. Forest Service revenues from timber sales, mineral resources, and grazing fees, have been returned to states in which national forest lands are located to help maintain and improve local schools, roads and other activities. Because receipts from timber sales fluctuated over time and have been severely reduced in the last decade as a result of environ-

mental restrictions, in 2000 Congress developed the "Secure Rural Schools" Act to stabilize payments to states for five years, from 2001 to 2006. If adopted, the change will be the payment plan's second major alteration in five years. In 2000, the "Secure Rural Schools" Act separated payments to states from 92 years of timber sales and grazing fees.

In the FY 2007 budget, the president's budget proposes to provide a funding basis for the continuation of the Secure Rural Schools and Communities Act (PL 106-393) through authorizing the sale of certain parcels of National Forest System Lands.

The president's budget and the reduction in Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act will have a significant impact on Tillamook

County roads, according to County Commissioner Mark Labhart.

Tillamook County will receive about \$1,746,400 this year from the federal Safety Net payments. In 2007, the president's proposed budget would reduce this funding by 25 percent, to \$1,309,800, a cut of \$436,600, he said.

"If this cut makes it through the federal budget it would be a significant hit to our already cash strapped county road system," said Labhart. "If the president's proposal is allowed to continue as proposed for five years, we lose all \$1.7 million" for maintaining our county roads."

The commissioners will be working closely with congressional staff to ensure that the original commitment by the federal government continues,

according to Commission Chair Tim Josi.

"Our congressional staff has been very supportive of full authorization of the Safety Net Law all along and we will continue to work closely with them through the federal budget process," said Commissioner Chuck Hurliman.

"It is important to remember that this is only a proposed budget," said Labhart. It is significant that the president included this program in his budget — it sets the program as a priority. The president proposes, and Congress disposes. The commissioners are committed to continue to work with Congress on full reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act."