

## National Center for Public Lands Counties

County governments are a leading voice in the intergovernmental partnership in responsible resource management. Understanding our unique role as co-regulators and conveners, Congress has consistently supported appropriations for critical programs like Payments In-Lieu of Taxes (PILT) and Secure Rural Schools (SRS) and granted new authorities to federal lands agencies to broaden the scope, pace and scale of their on-the-ground resource management work with local governments.

To truly benefit from these unique opportunities and investments, counties must accelerate our evidence-based research, peer information exchanges, and overall understanding of our lessons learned, emerging trends analysis, and priority public policy issues.

The NACo and WIR Boards of Directors therefore established the National Center for Public Lands Counties (The Center) to give public lands counties an enhanced opportunity to demonstrate how prosperous public lands counties create a prosperous America. The Center will utilize traditional and new media—such as podcasts and video interviews—to tell these stories and also develop detailed, individual research and written county profiles focused on:

- County partnerships with federal agencies, states, tribes and other counties to reduce wildfire risk, responsibly develop energy and minerals, improve public access to federal lands, protect watersheds, conserve species and their habitat, and protect our national parks and other natural treasures
- County investments of PILT, SRS and other natural resource revenue payments to benefit residents, visitors and surrounding public lands
- The different economic drivers in rural vs. urban public lands counties
- Development and implementation of county natural resource management plans and baseline socioeconomic data for environmental analyses
- Resource values of federal lands compared to nearby privately owned lands
- Meeting the unique challenges facing public lands counties, such as housing affordability for residents and federal employees, ensuring a stable tax base to deliver critical services, and managing infrastructure on federal lands

For the Center to meet its mission and serve as a long-term tool for public lands counties, a voluntary investment of \$15 million over the next two years is needed to hire the necessary staff to conduct this critical research and keep the Center on a sustainable financial course. Initially, the Center will need 1-2 hard-working, passionate and talented writers who can help tell the county story. The Center will report to the NACo and WIR Board of Directors on its financial health and issue an annual report at the annual WIR Conference.

The Center's governing body, which will :

- WIR Executive Committee (President, 1st VP, 2nd VP, Immediate Past President)
- NACo Public Lands Steering Committee Chair
- NACo Public Lands Steering Committee Subcommittee Chairs
- Federal Lands Gateway County Official appointed by the NACo Public Lands Steering Committee Chair
- NACo West Region Representative
- NACo Executive Director
- Executive Director from WIR Immediate Past President's home state

- NACo Public Lands Legislative Director and WIR Liaison, serving as NACo staff liaison to the governing board

The Center's governing board will also be empowered to develop an annual workplan based on the research priorities selected by the WIR Board of Directors and NACo Public Lands Steering Committee. At the WIR Annual Conference each May, the WIR Board of Directors and the NACo Public Lands Steering Committee will review the activities and performance of the Center, and consider and adopt the proposed workplan for the next year.

In order to leverage the expertise of NACo's public lands membership, the governing board will also have the ability to appoint research subcommittees made up of county officials, based on the research priorities selected by the WIR Board of Directors and NACo Public Lands Steering Committee, to coordinate and oversee the research efforts of the National Center. Research work conducted by the National Center will be non-partisan, aligned with NACo policy and priorities and will not directly conflict with the interests of any county.

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