

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:**April 3, 2000**

NRCS, Office of Legislative Affairs
 Room 5121 South Agriculture Bldg.
 (202) 720-2771

For additional information contact:

Tia G. Young

Douglas J. McKalip

Anita Holland-Spears

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LAST WEEK:

EMERGENCY SUPPLEMENTAL BILL PASSES HOUSE – On Thursday, the House passed H.R. 3908, legislation making emergency supplemental appropriations for Fiscal Year 2000. Following three days of debate, the legislation passed by a strong bipartisan vote of 263-146. The legislation contains technical assistance funding associated with the Conservation Reserve and Wetlands Reserve Program at a level of \$35 million. Senate leaders had indicated a reluctance to take up the measure, citing the need to pass FY'2001 appropriations bills first. However, Congressional staff indicate that the strong statement of support in the House may spur action on the bill in coming weeks.

FARM POLICY FIELD HEARINGS – The House Committee on Agriculture held a farm policy hearing on Monday, March 27, in Raleigh, North Carolina. The Committee heard testimony from 16 farmers who expressed concerns of the increased cost of regulations, unfair foreign trade practices, and low prices as some of the obstacles to the present and future prosperity of American farmers and ranchers. Chairman Larry Combest, R-TX, said that the field hearings are confirming that the farm safety net must be strengthened.

EPA'S CLEAN AIR BUDGET AND CORPS OF ENGINEERS WETLANDS PROGRAM – On Tuesday, March 28, the Subcommittee on Clean Air, Wetlands Private Property and Nuclear Safety, (Chairman James Inhofe, R-OK) of the Environment and Public Works Committee held a hearing on the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Clean Air Budget and Corps of Engineers' (the Corps) Wetlands Program budget for FY 2001. Following the opening statements were testimony from Robert Perciasepe Assistant Administrator for Air and Radiation, EPA and Michael Davis Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army Corps of Engineers. Senator Inhofe stated that EPA's Air Program was once again requesting funding for the Clean Air Partnership Trust Fund after Congress decided last year that it was a slush fund. He indicated they had not received anymore convincing information about the program but EPA returns this year requesting funding. Mr. Inhofe expressed concern of some areas which were not funded such as help with permitting necessary for the new sulfur rule and important studies on ethanol. He said the Corps had announced the new replacement permits for the Nationwide 26 permits on wetlands but felt they had not budgeted for the new permit process. Mr. Inhofe pointed out that last year the House Appropriations required the Corps to conduct a workload study in relation to the Nationwide Permit

changes and was dismayed that the new permit regulations were released before the workload study was complete and released.

Mr. Davis said the cost for operating the Army regulatory program over the last ten years risen steadily. He said that the increase has come about as changes in law and policy have resulted in the need for new initiatives to maintain and improve levels of environmental protection and service to the public. He furthered stated that the CWA Section 404 program is a vital part of the Nation’s overall effort to protect, restore and preserve our water resources. Mr. Davis also said that the goal of the Section 404 program is to protect the waters of the United States, including wetlands. He said that over 28 years the Army Corps of Engineers has prevented the destruction of hundreds of thousands of acres of wetlands and the degradation of thousands of miles of rivers and streams. He commented that through the Army Regulatory Program, the Corps is committed to serving the public in a fair and reasonable manner while ensuring he protection of the aquatic environment as required by laws and regulations.

FREEDOM TO E-FILE HEARING - On Wednesday, March 29, the House Agriculture Committee approved by voice vote a measure that would allow farmers to file government-required paperwork via the Internet. The Freedom to E-File Act, H.R. 852, would require the Department of Agriculture to establish an electronic filing and retrieval system so farmers would have electronic access to forms and filing capabilities. Farmers currently must go to the Farm Service Agency offices to complete such paperwork. The measure would also require the Agriculture Department to post on the Internet information on farm programs, quarterly trade reports, economic and production reports and other information. Rep. Ray R. LaHood, R-Ill commented that the bill is about giving farmers and ranchers access without requiring them to drive long distances.

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LOOKING AHEAD:

FARM POLICY FIELD HEARINGS – House Agriculture Committee Chairman, Larry Combest (R-TX) and Ranking Member Charlie Stenholm (D-TX) have announced the schedule of farm policy hearings in 10 cities in regions from March through May, encouraging producers to submit detailed proposals for agriculture policy. Although each hearing may last for up to four hours, full discussion of producers' plans and Committee Members' questions will limit the number of witnesses who can testify at the hearings. Producers may be invited to offer testimony as a witness, or if not selected, producers may either submit specific views for the record, or e-mail informal comments to the Committee. To be considered as a potential witness at the hearing, producers should include information about their agricultural experience and their farming operations. The Committee will select witnesses who are qualified to provide specific testimony about federal farm policy, and answer questions posed by Agriculture Committee Members about policy alternatives.

The schedule for the Farm Policy Field Hearings are as follows:

Monday, April 3
Kutztown, Pennsylvania
 Kutztown University
 9:00 a.m. Eastern Time

Monday, May 1
Sacramento, California
 Heidrick Ag History Center
 (Woodland, California)
 8:30 a.m. Pacific Time

Tuesday, May 2
Sioux Falls, South Dakota
 Augustana College
 8:30 a.m. Central Time

Friday, May 12
Boise, Idaho
 City Council Building
 10:00 a.m. Mountain Time

Saturday, May 13
Peoria, Illinois
 Peoria Civic Center
 8:30 a.m. Central Time

CALIFORNIA CONSERVATION AREA – National Parks and Public Lands Subcommittee (Chairman Hansen, R-UT) of the House Resources Committee will hold a hearing on H.R. 1751, a bill to establish the Carrizo Plain National Conservation Area in the state of California, and for other purposes.

April 11 10:00 a.m. 1324 Longworth Bldg.

FARM POLICY REVIEW - The House Agriculture Committee (Chairman Combest, R-TX) will hold a hearing on federal farm policy.

April 12 10:00a.m. 1300 Longworth Bldg.

COLORADO CONSERVATION AREA – The Forests and Public Land Management Subcommittee (Chairman Craig, R-ID) of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee will hold a hearing on legislation that would establish the Canyons of the Ancients National Conservation Area in Colorado.

April 13 2:30 p.m. 366 Dirksen

AGENCY PERFORMANCE AUDITS – The Government Management, Information and Technology Subcommittee (Chairman Horn, R-CA) of the House Government Reform Committee will hold a hearing on the Financial Management Act of 1996, which establishes requirements for auditors to report on agency compliance and for agency heads and agency management to correct agency deficiencies within a certain time period.

May 3 10:00 a.m. 2154 Rayburn Bldg.

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