

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:**February 16, 1999**

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

For additional information contact:

Tia G. Young
 Douglas J. McKalip

LAST WEEK

WATERSHED HEARING - On Wednesday, February 10, 1999, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Water Resources (Chairman Sherwood Boehlert, R-NY) met to discuss the Administration's FY2000 budget submission and programs under the Subcommittee's jurisdiction. NRCS Associate Chief Danny Sells presented testimony to the Subcommittee. He underscored the importance of the NRCS watershed program to communities around the nation. He said that the program has provided flood prevention, water supplies, recreation, and economic development to much of the country. He also warned the subcommittee of the condition of aging dams constructed over the past 50 years. The Associate Chief concluded his remarks by summarizing upcoming needs that both the program backlog, and aging infrastructure will present. Questions from the Subcommittee included one from Chairman Boehlert regarding the NRCS workforce. He expressed concern that NRCS does not have the number of people it needs to meet all of its responsibilities. Mr. Sells agreed to provide detailed analysis of the agency's staffing situation to the Subcommittee. Questions were also asked regarding upcoming watershed projects that are before the Subcommittee for authorization.

ANIMAL FEEDING OPERATIONS (AFO) BRIEFINGS - On Wednesday and Thursday of last week, NRCS staff briefed the House and Senate Agriculture Committee on the soon-to-be released Unified Animal Feeding Operations Strategy. Joe DelVecchio, Kevin Brown, and Carole Jett of NRCS, and Deputy Under Secretary Glenda Humiston explained the outcome of the AFO listening sessions and also discussed the public review and comment period associated with the draft strategy. They highlighted the timeframe for release of the final strategy, which has been targeted for February 19, 1999, and also explained some of the key issues in the draft strategy, which have come under discussion.

LEGISLATION OF NOTE-

The following bills of significance to NRCS and conservation were recently introduced:

Bill	Member	Purpose
S. 25	Landrieu (LA)	Conservation and Reinvestment Act of 1999. Would amend the Land and Water Conservation Fund, support urban parks, and wildlife conservation.

S. 188	Wyden (OR)	Amends the Clean Water Act to authorize a state revolving loan fund for construction of water conservation and quality improvements.
H.R. 294	Sweeney (NY)	Would ensure that federal agencies assess whether regulations result in the taking of properties, and directs the Secretary of Agriculture to report on the issue.
H.R. 408	Peterson (MN)	Would increase acreage allowed in the Conservation Reserve to 45 million acres.
H.R. 728	Lucas (OK)	Would provide authority to NRCS to rehabilitate aging dams, and would also provide funding for a thorough assessment of the health of the watershed infrastructure.

THIS WEEK -

AGING WATERSHED ISSUE BRIEFING - On Wednesday, February 17, Larry Caldwell, NRCS State Engineer in Oklahoma, and Bruce Julian, NRCS Watersheds and Wetlands Division will lead a briefing for the House Agriculture Committee on the aging watershed infrastructure issue. Subjects of focus for the briefing will include the funding trends for P.L. 566, and P.L. 534 over the past five decades; the number of structure built under the programs; the common problems associated with aging dams; and possible next steps.

LOOKING AHEAD -

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS HEARING - The House Appropriations Committee has scheduled hearings on the Administration's FY'2000 Budget proposal relating to NRCS and Conservation programs. Key witnesses will include USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, Jim Lyons; and NRCS Chief, Pearlie Reed.

February 24, 1999 1:00pm 2362-A Rayburn Building

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS HEARINGS -

The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, and Related Agencies (Chairman Thad Cochran, R-Miss.) has changed the format for hearings on the FY 2000 Budget. In lieu of holding hearings on each mission area including statements from each agency in the Department, the panel will instead listen to testimony on four major subject areas. The Hearing topics, times, and witnesses as currently reported are as follows:

Issue	Date	Witness
Assistance to Producers and the Farm Economy	March 2, 1999	Keith Collins, Chief Economist Gus Schumacher, Under Secretary Farm and Foreign Agriculture
Food Safety	March 16, 1999	Catherine Woteki, Under Secretary for Food Safety
Nutrition and Health	March 23, 1999	Shirley Watkins, Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, Consumer

STATE OF CONSERVATION BRIEFING - A briefing previously scheduled for January 12th regarding the state of conservation activities on private land has been re-scheduled for March 9th. The briefing will be sponsored by the Senate Agriculture Committee and open to the public and media. NRCS staff will present information about the current state of NRCS program delivery-system and conservation assistance, and will also outline key priority issues for the agency for 1999.

March 9 10:00am 328-A Russell Bldg.