

WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:

June 26, 2000

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LAST WEEK:

APPROPRIATIONS – No action was taken on the FY 2001 Agriculture Appropriations Bills, H.R. 4461 and S. 2536.

TMDL FIELD HEARING – On Monday, June 19, Department Operations, Oversight, Nutrition and Forestry Subcommittee (Chairman Goodlatte, R-VA) of the House Agriculture Committee held a field hearing on the impact of the Environmental Protection Agency’s Total Maximum Daily Load rules on agriculture. The hearing was held in Lonoke, Arkansas. The regulations would set maximum daily limits on the amount of certain discharges into waterways. NRCS Director of Animal Husbandry and Clean Water Programs, Tom Christensen testified on behalf of the Department.

Mr. Christensen advocated the role of voluntary incentive-based USDA programs such as CRP, WRP, and EQIP, and urged the committee to fully fund these programs in order to assist landowners meet TMDL requirements.

Chairman Goodlatte indicated to those in attendance that NRCS was listening to concerns and offered his thanks for the testimony. Several other farm organization witnesses mentioned the value of NRCS to helping farmers apply conservation measures. Additional hearings are expected in the future.

SENATE MARKUP OF AUTHORIZATION BILLS – On Tuesday, June 20, the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee (Chairman Lugar, R-IN) held a markup on pending legislation, including S. 1762, Small Watershed Rehabilitation Amendments, introduced jointly by Senators Paul Coverdell (R-GA) and Blanche Lincoln (D-AR). With only four members of the Committee absent, members voted by

unanimous consent to report the legislation favorably without any amendments. S. 1762 would amend the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act to provide cost-share assistance for the rehabilitation of structural measures as part of a water resources project. Chairman Lugar praised the hard work of the bill's sponsors. The Committee also favorably reported S. 1066, a carbon sequestration bill introduced by Senator Pat Roberts (R-KS). The legislation would establish research initiatives regarding global climate change and the potential impacts that agriculture can have on carbon sequestration.

ENACTMENT OF CROP INSURANCE AND FREEDOM TO E-FILE BILLS –

On Tuesday, June 20, 2000, the President signed into law, H.R. 2559, the Agriculture Risk Protection Act (Public Law 106-224). While signing the measure, the President expressed serious reservations about the bill, stating, “it still fails to fix what is plainly an unsuccessful farm policy.” He went on to state dissatisfaction over the fact that very little conservation funding was included in the bill. The President said that he hoped provisions of his farm safety net proposal, including funding for CRP, WRP, and the Conservation Security Program should have been included. The President said, “I am disappointed that virtually no funds were included for these programs, and I will continue to seek substantially increased funding for them this year”. The Vice President also expressed similar sentiment, stating, “In addition, Congress should have adopted the Administration’s proposals to make conservation an integral part of the farm safety net through voluntary conservation programs.”

President Clinton also signed S. 777, “Freedom to E-File” legislation into law as well (Public Law 106-222). This legislation would mandate that USDA make program forms and information available on the Internet.

LEGISLATION OF NOTE – The NRCS Legislative Affairs staff identifies and tracks legislation of particular interest to NRCS and conservation. This information is available on the NRCS Legislative Affairs web-site under the heading LEGISLATION OF NOTE. The address for the Legislative Affairs web-site is as follows:
<http://www.nhq.nrcs.usda.gov/LA/LAhome.html>

NEW LEGISLATION -

The following Bills of significance to NRCS and conservation have been introduced.

BILL	MEMBER	PURPOSE
S. 2750	Reid (NV)	Would establish an interagency committee to implement the Lake Mead Water Improvement Project and Las Vegas Wash Wetland Restoration. NRCS is an agency specifically named in the bill. House companion bill, H.R. 4692 was also introduced by Rep. Berkley
H.R. 4593	Clayton (NC)	National Employment Dispute Resolution Act of 2000
S. 2755	Bingaman (NM)	Would establish groundwater protection goals and assistance for the high plains region of the Southwest.
H.R. 4687	Thompson (MS)	Would implement new disciplinary measures for violations of Civil Rights associated with agriculture programs.
H.R. 4675	Clayton (NC) (36 cosponsors)	Would amend the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act to improve the representation and accountability of county and area committees. Under the bill all permanent county employees would be converted to federal Civil Service status.
H.R. 4688	Thune (SD)	Would amend the Ag. Credit Act of 1987 to enable qualified states to perform mediation services for USDA programs including credit, wetlands determinations, and compliance with farm programs.
H.R. 4691	Baca (CA)	Would amend the farmland protection program to establish a regional focus for the program in the Chino basin.

THIS WEEK:

POSSIBLE ACTION ON AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS AND

SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING – With only a few legislative days remaining before the Independence Day Recess, Congressional leadership has indicated a push to complete action on the House version of the agriculture spending bill (H.R. 4461) for Fiscal Year 2001. As reported in previous legislative summaries, questions regarding trade policy with Cuba have stymied the bill up to this point. House leaders have reported progress on a resolution, and also have provided the agriculture appropriations subcommittee with an increased allocation, which will help fund an apple and potato payment add-on. With respect to emergency spending, Congressional staff have indicated that the Conference on Military Construction (H.R. 4425) will be a likely vehicle to carry through emergency spending provisions.

EPA AND WATER POLLUTION – The House Agriculture Committee (Chairman Combest, R Texas) will hold a hearing on the Environmental Protection Agency’s proposed rules and legislation (H.R. 4502) on the impact of TMDLs.

June 28th. 10:00a.m. 1300 Longworth Bldg.

CALFED PROGRAM – The House Water and Power Subcommittee (Chairman Doolittle, R-Calif.) of the Resources Committee will hold an oversight hearing on the CALFED program.

June 29th. 2:00p.m. Longworth Bldg.

CONSERVATION AND REINVESTMENT ACT (CARA) – The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee (Chairman Murkowski, R-Alaska) will mark up legislation that would allocate part of the royalties from offshore drilling to conservation activities instead of continuing to send them to the federal treasury for general use. The Committee is scheduled to mark up the following legislation: S. 2123, H.R. 701, and S. 25. The House passed H.R. 701 on May 18th.

June 27th & 28th 9:30a.m. 366 Dirksen Bldg.

This markup was scheduled for June 14th, re-scheduled for June 21st, and postponed to June 27th and 28th.

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LOOKING AHEAD:

HOUSE FARM POLICY HEARING SERIES – The House Agriculture Committee (Chairman Combest, R-TX) will hold a series of hearings on federal farm policy.

July 12 10:00am 1300 Longworth Bldg.
July 19 10:00am 1300 Longworth Bldg.
July 26 10:00am 1300 Longworth Bldg.

IMPACT OF BANNING MTBE – The Livestock and Horticulture Subcommittee (Chairman Richard Pombo, R-CA) of the House Agriculture Committee will hold a hearing on the impact that banning the MTBE fuel additive would have on agriculture.

July 13 10:00am 1300 Longworth Bldg.

INCREASED PROTECTION FOR NATIONAL FOREST LAND – The Senate Forests and Public Land Management Subcommittee (Chairman Craig, R-Idaho) of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee will hold a hearing on the draft environmental impact statement related to increased protection for 40 million acres of national forest lands.

July 12th. 2:30p.m. 366 Dirksen Bldg.

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