

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:**March 15, 1999**

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LAST WEEK -

CONSERVATION OPERATIONS BRIEFING - On Tuesday, March 9, 1999, the Senate Agriculture Committee hosted a briefing on NRCS activities and emerging issues. Representatives from environmental and commodity interest groups were also in attendance. Associate Chief, Danny Sells, opened the meeting. He explained the importance of gaining perspective on how conservation assistance works at the field level and what some of the realities and resources constraints that field staff face. Phil Hogan, District Conservationist from Yolo County California, talked about the kinds of farming and resource issues in his home county. He stated that conservation technical assistance builds relations and trust with farmers. He stated that many growers are willing to perform conservation practices and implement projects even in the absence of program dollars, but really need technical help. He outlined the shortage of resources in field offices, and high customer demand as restricting what can be accomplished. Deputy Chief for Programs, Tom Weber spoke about emerging issues that NRCS faces, including global climate change, agricultural air quality, and water rights. He also detailed issues associated with animal waste management and the resources that are needed to tackle the issue. He also explained the issue of aging watershed dams and what the future hazards and threats that may be presented. Questions raised by participants included how NRCS leverages assistance and input from non-federal partners, and what steps NRCS is taking to have input on Global Climate Change policy.

HOUSE MARKUP OF EMERGENCY SUPPLEMENTAL - On Thursday, March 4, the House Appropriations Committee (Chairman Bill Young, R-FL) marked up a bill making emergency supplemental appropriations for Fiscal Year 1999. Provisions of the legislation included funding for farm credit programs and Farm Service Agency salaries and expenses. Report language accompanying the bill reportedly states the opinion of the Committee that the cap on Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) transfers should be raised or amended by the House and Senate agriculture committees. The bill will be considered on the House floor, most likely before the Easter Recess. Details on the Senate version of the bill, S. 544 were included in last week's Summary. The Senate will attempt to bring the bill to the floor this week, following consideration of missile defense legislation.

LEGISLATION OF NOTE -

The following bills of significance to NRCS and conservation have been introduced:

| Bill | Member | Purpose |
|-------------|------------------------|--|
| H.R. 579 | Condit (CA) | Would allow a tax credit for the purchase and installation of agriculture water conservation systems. |
| H.R. 684 | Miller (CA) | Would amend the Clean Water Act to increase regulations on concentrated animal feeding operations. |
| H.R. 701 | Young (AK) | Would amend policies for drilling on the Outer Continental Shelf, and provide funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. |
| H.R. 798 | Miller (CA) | Would implement provisions of the President's Lands Legacy Initiative. |
| S. 492 | Sarbanes/Mikulski (MD) | Chesapeake Bay Restoration Act. Would encourage increased efforts to restore the Chesapeake Bay. Would also establish an EPA small watershed grants program. |
| S. 544 | Stevens (AK) | Making supplemental appropriations for Fiscal Year 1999. |

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THIS WEEK -
SENATE MARKUP OF WATERSHED PROJECT RESOLUTION -

On Wednesday, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee (Chairman John Chafee, R-RI) will markup a resolution authorizing the Middle Deep Red Run small watershed project in Oklahoma. The project plan includes nine floodwater retarding structures, one multi purpose structure, and associated wildlife mitigation measures under the authority of the NRCS Small Watershed Program, (P.L. 566). The project requires that a similar resolution be passed by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee before it can be authorized and await funding.

March 18

9:00 am

406 Dirksen Building

HOUSE AGRICULTURE HEARING ON DISASTER PROGRAMS - House Agriculture Committee (Chairman Combest, R-TX) will hold a hearing on disaster payments to farmers and the operation of other programs.

March 18 8:30 am 1300 Longworth Building

COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT REAUTHORIZATION - The Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans Subcommittee (Chairman Saxton, R-NJ) of the House Resources Committee will mark up pending legislation.

March 18 2:30 pm 1334 Longworth Building

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LOOKING AHEAD -

NEPA OVERSIGHT -The House Resources Forests and Forest Health Subcommittee (Chairman Chenoweth, R-ID) will hold a hearing on the expedited processes used under the National Environmental Policy Act for environmental emergencies.

March 23 2:00 pm 1334 Longworth

PLANT PESTICIDE RULE - The House Agriculture Subcommittee on Risk management and Specialty Crops (Chairman Ewing, R-IL) will hold a hearing on the Environmental Protection Agency's proposed Plant Pesticide Rule.

March 24 10:30 am 1300 Longworth Building

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