

WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:

May 22, 2000

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LAST WEEK:

FREEDOM TO E-FILE ACT – On Thursday May 19th, the Senate amended and passed by voice vote S. 777, the Freedom to E-File Act. The bill requires the Department of Agriculture to develop a system for customers to access Department forms and file paperwork online. The legislation is now cleared for the Presidents signature.

TMDL FILED HEARING – The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee (Chairman Smith, R-NH) held a field hearing on May 6, 2000 in Whitefield, New Hampshire. The purpose of the hearing was to receive testimony regarding the Environmental Protection Agencies’ (EPA) proposed Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) rule and the National Pollution Discharge Elimination (NPDES) permit process. Over 150 persons attended the field hearing to hear testimony from three panels. Chuck Fox, EPA Assistant Administrator was the first to give testimony and to field questions and comments from the audience. Discussion topics ranged from TMDLs to proposed legislation from Senators Robert Smith (R-NH) and Michael Crapo (R-ID), the Water Pollution Program Enhancements Act of 2000, S. 2417.

Participants on other panels included the NH Timberland Owners Association, NH Cooperative Extension, NH Association of Conservation Districts, Champion International (Northeast Region), the Northeast Water Pollution Control Commission, and representatives of state forestry and environmental offices from Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont.

Major concerns were raised about the need for technical assistance so that agricultural and forestland users could continue to implement Best Management Plans (BMPs). State leaders also expressed concern about the cost of establishing TMDLs in order to meet EPA’s requirements.

LEGISLATION OF NOTE

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

BILL	MEMBER	PURPOSE
S. 2540	Brownback, KS	To amend the Food Security Act of 1985 to require the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a carbon sequestration program to permit owners and operators of land to enroll the land in the program to increase the sequestration of carbon, and for other purposes.
S. 2546	Bond, MO	To amend the Clean Air Act to prohibit the use of methyl tertiary butyl ether, to provide flexibility within the oxygenate requirement of the reformulated gasoline program of the Environmental Protection Agency, to promote the use of renewable ethanol, and for other purposes.
S. 2564	Boxer, CA	To provide Outer Continental Shelf Impact Assistance to State and local governments, and amend the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act. (CARA Senate Companion Bill)
H.R. 4461	Skeen, NM	Making appropriations for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and related agencies programs for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2001, and for other purposes.

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THIS WEEK:

AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS – Both the House and the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Bills are ready for floor action. The House is expected to take action early this week. The Senate leadership has indicated that the Senate will not consider any appropriations legislation until it has passed the House. Funding levels in both Houses of the Congress are as follows:

	Senate	House
Conservation Operations.....	\$714,116,000	\$676,812,000
Watershed Surveys and Planning.....	\$10,705,000	\$10,868,000
Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations.....	\$99,443,000	\$83,423,000
RC & D.....	\$36,265,000	\$41,015,000
Forestry Incentives Program (FIP).....	\$6,325,000	\$ 0
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).....	\$174,000,000	\$174,000,000

These funding levels will now go to the full bodies of the House and the Senate for consideration. NRCS Legislative Affairs staff will provide more details as numbers are reported and substantiated.

TMDL HEARING – The Department Operations, Oversight, Nutrition, and Forestry Subcommittee (Chairman Goodlatte, R-VA) of the house Agriculture Committee will hold a field hearing on the impact of the proposed total maximum daily load regulations on agriculture. The regulations would set maximum daily limits on the amount of certain discharges into waterways.

May 22nd 9:00 a.m. Wingate University Fine Arts Center, Wingate NC

CONSERVATION BILLS HEARING – The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee (Chairman Smith, R-NH) will hold a hearing on pending conservation legislation. The hearing will address three similar conservation bills; S. 25, S. 2123, and S. 2181.

May 23rd 10:00 a.m. 406 Dirksen Bldg.

LOOKING AHEAD:

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. The Committee is scheduled to mark up the following legislation: S. 2123, H.R. 701, and S. 25.

June 14th To Be Determined 366 Dirksen Bldg.

URBAN RESOURCES PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM – The Department Operations, Oversight, Nutrition, and Forestry Subcommittee (Chairman Goodlatte, R-VA) of the House Agriculture Committee will hold an oversight hearing on the Inspector General’s evaluation report on the Urban Resources Partnership Program. The hearing will take place on June 7th at 10:00 a.m. in room 1300 of the Longworth House Office Building.

June 7th 10:00 a.m. 1300 Longworth Bldg.

