

WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:

July 2, 2001

Office of Legislative Affairs
Room 5121 South Agriculture Bldg.
(202) 720-2771
For additional information contact:
Douglas J. McKalip
Eric W. Carlson
Sharyn C. Alvarez

LAST WEEK:

FY 2002 AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS BILL- The House started debate on the FY 2002 Agriculture Appropriations on Thursday and adjourned before completing work. Action on the bill will not be completed until Congress returns July 10. No votes were taken on any amendments that would impact NRCS programs.

FORESTRY HEARING- The Agriculture Subcommittee on Department Operations, Oversight, Nutrition and Forestry (Chairman Goodlatte, VA) held a public hearing on June 28, 2001, for the purpose of the hearing testimony regarding forestry programs in the context of a comprehensive farm bill. The panel of six witnesses included Mark Berkland, NRCS Director, Conservation Operations as one of three administration witnesses. The other witnesses included CREES, Forest Service, NACD, National Association of State Foresters (NASF), and a local Extension Forester from Virginia. This was the second hearing on forestry and the farm bill. The NASF and NACD proposed combining the Private Lands and Forestry Stewardship Incentive Program and the Forestry Incentive Program into a \$150 million program in the next farm bill. Rep. Dennis Rehberg (MT) offered many questions about the importance of local and state authority in shaping federally funded forestry programs. All the witnesses mentioned the importance of NRCS as an agency that needs to be involved in the delivery of forestry programs.

WATER POLLUTION REDUCTION SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING - The Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee (Chairman Duncan, TN) of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee held a hearing on June 28, 2001 to receive a much anticipated report from the National Academy of Sciences titled "The National Research Council Report on Assessing the Scientific Basis of the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Approach to Water Pollution Reduction". Dr. Kenneth H. Reckhow, Duke University Professor, and Chair of the National Research Council committee that developed the report. The report supports the TMDL program, but to modify the manner in which the program is delivered using an adaptive management system that incorporates ongoing research and monitoring. These recommended changes included the incorporation of biological monitoring, and substantial funding increases to the states

for monitoring, and the use of models that are appropriate for the region and types of pollutants.

FARM BILL OVERVIEW – On Thursday, June 9, 2001, the Senate Agriculture Committee (Chairman Harkin, IA) held a hearing on issues for the upcoming rewrite of comprehensive farm policy. Many members of the Committee made comments in support of conservation. Chairman Harkin opened the meeting by stating that he felt conservation was a major success of the 1996 bill. He also stated his belief that conservation security act should be included in the new farm bill as well as bioenergy provisions. Sen. Tim Hutchinson (AR) stated that voluntary incentives should be provided for land in production. Sen. Pat Leahy (VT) said that the farm bill should be completed this year, and should include farmland protection, and also address the mounting backlog in conservation programs. Sen. Zell Miller (GA) noted the concern that additional regulatory pressures are being placed on farmers, and that conservation incentives are needed to help them. Sen. Michael Crapo (ID) said that he is developing several conservation concepts and looks forward to working with members of the Committee to further develop them. Sen. Pat Roberts (KS) said that EQIP should be expanded in terms of funding and eligibility, and that also carbon sequestration provisions should be included in the next farm bill. Sen. Blanche Lincoln (AR) asserted that a forestry title should be included as well.

Nongovernmental witnesses at the hearing included Mr. Leland Swenson of the National Farmers Union (NFU), Bob Stallman of the American Farm Bureau Federation, and Craig Cox, of the Soil and Water Conservation Society. Mr. Swenson stated that there were many opportunities to provide economic opportunities while enhancing the environment. He also stated NFU support for the Conservation Security Act. Mr. Stallman also stated the need for a form a conservation stewardship initiative. Craig Cox said that current conservation policy is too reliant on programs which take land out of production. He asserted that funding for existing conservation programs should be doubled from about \$2.5 billion to \$5 billion and that new funding should be focused on the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and land stewardship payments. Mr. Harkin said that the Committee would continue to examine the issues with additional hearings in July.

LEGISLATION OF NOTE

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

BILL	MEMBER	PURPOSE
H. R. 2330	Bonilla, TX	Making appropriations for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and related agencies programs for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2001.
H. R. 2375	Kind, WI	To promote the conservation and preservation of working farms, ranches and private forests.

THIS WEEK:

INDEPENDENCE DAY RECESS - The House of Representatives is on recess until July 10, 2001. Following the completion of business, the Senate plans to be on recess until July 10, 2001.

=====

LOOKING AHEAD:

CALIFORNIA WATER ISSUES FIELD HEARING - Water and Power Subcommittee (Chairman Calvert, R) of the House Resources Committee will hold field hearings on water supply in California.

June 30	9:00 a.m.	Modesto Board Council Chambers Modesto, CA
July 2	9:00 a.m.	City Council Chambers San Jose, CA

=====