

WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:**November 19, 2001**

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LAST WEEK:

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

Bill	Member	Purpose
S. 1633	Collins, ME	To amend the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978 to establish a program to provide assistance to States and nonprofit organizations to preserve suburban open space and contain suburban sprawl.
S. 1673	Lincoln, AR	To provide for the continuation of agricultural programs through fiscal year 2011.
S. 1716	Kerry, MA	To speed national action to address global climate change

FY 2002 AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS CONFERENCE REPORT -

On Tuesday, November 13, the House adopted a \$16 Billion fiscal year 2002 Agriculture Appropriations Conference Report. The report was adopted 379-33. On November 16, the Senate adopted the Conference Report by a vote of 92-7. The bill will now go before the President for signature.

FARM BILL FULL COMMITTEE MARKUP – On November 15, 2001, the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee (Chairman Harkin, IA) completed the mark up of an omnibus farm bill that would reauthorize and restructure a broad range of farm assistance and rural development programs. The committee approved the conservation and commodity titles of the bill. Conservation provisions include:

CCC Funded Programs

- A new Conservation Security Program to provide payments to all farmers for maintaining and adopting conservation practices on working lands
- WRP increases acreage up to 250,000 annually to a cap of 2,225,000 through 2006, adding a Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program
- EQIP funding increases over 4 years to from \$300 million to \$1. 2 billion annually; contracts can be 3-10 years ; 90% cost-share rate for limited resource and beginning farmers; adds incentive payments for third party technical assistance with CNMP components; payments limits increase to \$50,000 annually and \$150,000 per contract

eliminated caps on large confined animal feeding operations, eliminated the 50:50 split of funding for livestock operations. Allows for payment in the first year of the contract, allows use of deobligated funding into current year contracts

- A new Conservation Innovation Grants Program for \$100 million annually starting in 2002
- WHIP funding increases from \$50 million up to \$100 annually over 4 years
- FPP funding increases from \$175 million to \$250 million over 4 years
- Grassland Reserve Program - a new easement program to enroll up to 1 million acres
- CRP increased to 40 million acres; expands farmable wetland pilot program nationally
- Removed restriction of funds for technical assistance for conservation programs within Section II.

Discretionary Programs

- RC&D- permanently authorize program
- Flood Risk Reduction – up to \$15 million annually for flood plain easements
- Great Lakes Basin Program authorized at \$5 million annually through 2006
- Private Grazing Lands Program authorized at \$60 million annually through 2006
- FIP re-authorized through 2006 (Forestry Title)

TMDL HEARING- On November 15, 2001 the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment (Chairman Duncan, TN) held a hearing on the status of Total Daily Maximum Load Program (TMDL). Tracy Mehan, III, EPA Assistant Administrator for Water was the only witness. He testified that EPA was making a special effort to seek input from USDA as they begin the new TMDL rule. This includes working ways to use USDA programs and expertise through locally-led efforts.

WATER SUPPLY HEARING- On November 14, 2001 the Senate Environment and Public Works Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, and Water (Chairman Graham, FL) held a hearing on water supply in the United States. Tom Weber, NRCS Deputy Chief for Programs, provided testimony along with other administration witnesses from the Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Geologic Survey, Bureau of Reclamation, and Environmental Protection Agency. Sen. Graham indicated the Subcommittee is working on legislation to address the nation's water supply. Deputy Chief Weber responded to several questions about conservation needs and the role of USDA. He spoke about the role of NRCS field staff and USDA conservation programs to provide both technical assistance and incentive-based financial assistance to help on farm water use improvements.

BUENA VISTA WATERSHED HEARING - The Conservation, Credit, Rural Development and Research Subcommittee (Chairman Lucas, OK) of the House Agriculture Committee held a hearing on draft legislation that would authorize a conservation project for the Buena Vista Watershed in Rockbridge County, Virginia. Roger L. Bensey, Director, Watersheds and Wetlands Division of NRCS represented USDA and Steve Douty, Council Member, Buena Vista, VA and Scott Dadson, City

Manager, Buena Vista, VA represented the residents of Buena Vista. Mr. Bensey responded to questions regarding the projects ability to outlast the 50-year life span and program backlogs and how priorities are determined. The full committee met to mark up legislation on November 15 and voted to approve the project.

USDA BIOSECURITY PROGRAMS FULL COMMITTEE HEARING - The House Agriculture Committee (Chairman Combest, TX) will held a hearing on the programs that the Agriculture Department currently has in place to monitor and deal with biosecurity threats to the nation's food supply. James R. Moseley, Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, Elsa Murano, Under Secretary of Agriculture for Food Safety, Joseph Jen, Under Secretary of Agriculture for Research, Education and Economics and Bobby Acord, Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service appeared before the committee. The committee was interested in the procedures and practices USDA plans to use to prevent bio-terrorism of our food supply. The Committee also wants to determine if USDA has all the necessary authorities to carry out its charge of food security for the nation.

CONTINUING RESOLUTION - On November 15, the House passed and the Senate cleared H.J. Res. 74, a continuing resolution that will keep the government in full operation through December 7, 2001.
