

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:**April 19, 1999**

NRCS, Office of Legislative Affairs
Room 5121 South Agriculture Bldg.
(202) 720-2771

For additional information contact:

Tia G. Young
Douglas J. McKalip

LAST WEEK -

WATERSHED HEARING - On Thursday, April 15, the House Agriculture Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities, Resource Conservation, and Credit (Chairman Bill Barrett, R-NE) held a hearing to discuss the NRCS Small Watershed Program, and specifically, the state of the aging watershed structures. Associate Chief, Danny Sells represented NRCS at the hearing. The Subcommittee heard testimony first from Rep. Henry Bonilla of Texas, regarding the Bexar-Medina-Atascosa (BMA) Watershed Plan. He emphasized the need for the watershed project and the desire to see the Agriculture Committee authorize the plan. Associate Chief Danny Sells stated that the benefits that the BMA Watershed project would provide are indicative of the good work that NRCS does under the P.L. 566 program. He stated that the BMA watershed would aid the Edwards Aquifer, which is the source of water for over 1.3 million people. Mr. Johnny Ward represented the watershed plans local sponsors and echoed the need for approval. Members asked several questions regarding the project, and how the cost/benefits for the plan were determined. Also, several questions were raised regarding the backlog in the small watershed program, and how project lists are prioritized.

The second part of the hearing dealt directly with the issue of aging watershed projects. Associate Chief, Danny Sells spoke of what watershed projects mean to communities and what the risks of failure mean to life and property. Mr. Billy Wilson of Kinta, OK expressed the needs of local communities, and the scale of the aging dams issue. Rep. Frank Lucas underscored the need for Congress to take action on the issue. He mentioned his legislation, H.R. 728 and expressed a desire to see the legislation pass. He stated that a small amount of funding spent on rehabilitation would prevent a major responsibility in terms of financial, legal, and moral liability. Several Members of the Subcommittee asked questions about the state of aging dams, the size of the backlog, the policies of the NRCS, and about potential next steps. Rep. Frank Lucas concluded by stating a desire to see his legislation marked up by the Agriculture Committee.

SENATE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE BRIEFING ON NRCS NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT POLICY - On Thursday, Chuck Lander, Nutrient Management Specialist; and Kevin Brown, on detail to the NRCS Legislative Affairs Staff, briefed the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee on the revised NRCS Nutrient Management Policy. This concludes all briefings to be held for Congress, Agriculture groups, and environmental interests. The revised policy is scheduled to be published in the Federal Register the week of April 19, 1999.

HEARING ON LOESS HILLS OF IOWA - On Thursday, April 15, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Historic Preservation, and Recreation (Chairman Craig Thomas - WY) held a hearing to request the National Park Service to undertake a study of the Loess Hills in western Iowa to review options for the protection of the area's natural, cultural and historical resources. Senator Harkin of Iowa, who served as one of the witnesses, discussed four reasons why legislation was needed: 1) the unique soil of the Loess Hills; 2) the extreme fragility of Loess Hills; 3) the outstanding local and state support for conducting a feasibility study and; 4) the tremendous potential of the Loess Hills area. Senator Grassley, who is also from Iowa and served as a witness, emphasized a federal study was needed to achieve a complete review since the groundwork for a study had been done by the grassroots-based Loess Hills Alliance and the Iowa Legislature.

Shirley Frederikson Coordinator, Golden Hills Resource, Conservation and Development testified to the unique landform of Loess Hills that ranges from one to fifteen miles wide and approximately 200 miles long. She pointed out the early years of the hills and how they were inhabited by Ice Age animals such as the woolly mammoth, giant beaver and sloth.

Ms. Frederikson said the Loess Hills are currently in jeopardy from fill dirt removal, indiscriminate development and other human impacts. Because of these reasons, and for preservation, she asked the National Park Service be authorized to begin the study as soon as possible.

LEGISLATION OF NOTE -

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

BILL	MEMBER	PURPOSE
S. 642	Grassley (IA)	Would allow a tax deduction for cash payment to the Farm & Ranch Risk Management Account during the taxable year.
S. 669	Coverdell (GA)	Would amend the Federal Water Pollution Control Act with pollution control requirements.
S. 713	Murkowski (AK)	Would amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide a charitable deductions for contributions to the Native Alaskan subsistence whaling.
S. 715	Murray (WA)	Would amend the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to designate a portion of the Columbia River as a recreational river, and for other purposes.

THIS WEEK

CONSERVATION AND INVESTMENT - Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee (Chairman Frank Murkowski, AK will hold a hearing on pending legislation.

April 20 9:30 am 366 Dirksen Bldg.

FOOD QUALITY PROTECTION ACT - Department Operations, Oversight, Nutrition and Forestry Subcommittee (Chairman Bob Goodlatte, VA) of House Agriculture Committee will hold a hearing on the implementation of the Food Quality Protection Act.

April 22 10:00 am 1300 Longworth Bldg.

WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT - Water resources and Environment Subcommittee (Chairman Sherwood Boehlert, NY) of House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee will mark up pending legislation.

April 21 10:00 am 2167 Rayburn Bldg.

WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT - House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee (Chairman Bud Shuster, PA) will mark up pending legislation.

April 22 10:00 am 2165 Rayburn Bldg.

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LOOKING AHEAD -

FORESTS AND WILDERNESS - Forests and Forest Health Subcommittee (Chairman Helen Chenoweth, ID) of House Resources Committee will mark up pending legislation.

April 27 2:00 pm 1334 Longworth Bldg.