

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:**February 22, 1999**

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LAST WEEK

AGING WATERSHED ISSUE BRIEFING - On Wednesday, February 17, Larry Caldwell, NRCS State Engineer in Oklahoma, and Bruce Julian, NRCS Watersheds and Wetlands Division led a briefing for the House Agriculture Committee on the aging watershed infrastructure issue. Subjects of focus for the briefing included the funding trends for P.L. 566, and P.L. 534 over the past five decades; the number of structures built under the programs; the common problems associated with aging dams; and possible next steps. Bruce Julian spoke about the kinds of benefits that watershed projects provide, including flood prevention, water supply, and recreational benefits. He explained the overall value of the watershed infrastructure nationwide, and the flood reduction benefits that are realized by local communities. Larry Caldwell showed a four-minute video on dam safety, and showed a series of slides explaining the importance of rehabilitating old dams and maintaining the existing infrastructure. Questions from the Committee included where aging dams are located with respect to specific Congressional Districts; what the likely ratio of funding on rehabilitation would be for the federal government versus local sponsors; and how the local responsibilities for operation and maintenance differ from the responsibility to rehabilitate failing structures.

THIS WEEK -

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS HEARING - The House Appropriations Committee has scheduled hearings on the Administration's FY'2000 Budget proposal relating to NRCS and Conservation programs. Key witnesses will include USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, Jim Lyons; and NRCS Chief, Pearlie Reed.

February 24, 1999 1:00pm 2362-A Rayburn Building

SENATE HEARING ON AGRICULTURE ISSUES -The Senate Agriculture Committee (Chairman Lugar, R-Ind.) will hold a hearing for the Secretary of Agriculture to discuss a broad range of issues involving USDA. These will include: the Fiscal Year 2000 budget, federal crop insurance reform, food shipments to Russia, and USDA's year 2000 computer compliance.

February 24, 1999 9:30am 328-A Russell Building

LOOKING AHEAD -

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS HEARINGS -

The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, and Related Agencies (Chairman Thad Cochran, R-Miss.) has changed the format for hearings on the FY 2000 Budget. In lieu of holding hearings on each mission area including statements from each agency in the Department, the panel will instead listen to testimony on four major subject areas. The hearing topics, times, and witnesses as currently reported are as follows:

Issue	Date	Witness
Assistance to Producers and the Farm Economy	March 2, 1999	Keith Collins, Chief Economist Gus Schumacher, Under Secretary Farm and Foreign Agriculture
Food Safety	March 16, 1999	Catherine Woteki, Under Secretary for Food Safety
Nutrition and Health	March 23, 1999	Shirley Watkins, Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, Consumer

STATE OF CONSERVATION BRIEFING - A briefing previously scheduled for January 12th regarding the state of conservation activities on private land has been re-scheduled for March 9th. The briefing will be sponsored by the Senate Agriculture Committee and open to the public and media. NRCS staff will present information about the current state of NRCS program delivery-system and conservation assistance, and will also outline key priority issues for the agency for 1999.

March 9 10:00am 328-A Russell Bldg.