

WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:

July 24, 2000

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LAST WEEK:

APPROPRIATIONS –The Senate passed their version of FY 2001 Agriculture Appropriations (S. 2536) on July 21, 2000. The funding levels agreed upon in the Senate are as follows:

Conservation Operations.....	\$714,116,000
Watershed Surveys and Planning.....	\$10,705,000
Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations.....	\$99,443,000
RC & D.....	\$36,265,000
Forestry Incentives Program (FIP).....	\$6,325,000
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).....	\$174,000,000

An amendment added supplemental funding for several programs to address pressing needs. These funding levels are as follows:

Emergency Watershed Protection.....	\$70,000,000
Conservation Reserve Sec. 11.....	\$35,000,000
Wetlands Reserve Program*.....	\$117,000,000

* The WRP acreage cap was increased by 100,000 acres.

In addition, the Senate reportedly supported funding for technical assistance to implement provisions of the crop insurance bill, and also stated that the Secretary should have the

option to fund the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). The bill now moves to a conference with the House that will take place sometime following the August recess.

AGING WATERSHED INFRASTRUCTURE BILL PASSES IN HOUSE – H.R. 728, the “Small Watershed Rehabilitation Amendments”, passed the House by voice vote on July 17, 2000. The legislation provides authorized funding of \$90 million for aging dams and small watershed infrastructure. During floor debate, members from both sides of the aisle applauded the small watershed program and the work of NRCS. Rep. Don Sherwood (R-PA) provided endorsement of the legislation from the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. He stated that the bill was about protecting lives and property. Rep. Charlie Stenholm stated his support for the bill, and also expressed his interest in pursuing additional conservation data privacy protection at a future date. (Privacy language was not included in the House-passed bill). Rep. Doug Bereuter (R-NE) also added support, and complemented the work of the bill’s lead sponsor, Frank Lucas (R-OK). The updated text of the bill as passed can be viewed by going to www.thomas.loc, and accessing at the “engrossed” version of H.R. 728. The Senate version, S. 1762, is awaiting floor action.

FARM POLICY HEARING – On July 19th the Agriculture Committee (Chairman Combest, R-TX) held a hearing to discuss agriculture and possible strategies for the 2002 Farm Bill. Farmers representing major commodity groups provided testimony. The groups included soybean, corn, barley, rice, and sorghum producers.

The groups agreed on several issues including the continuation of the flexibility for planting offered in the Freedom-to-Farm Act. There was support of continuing Conservation Reserve Program to complete the 36.4 million acres, but differing opinions on specifics. The major concern expressed by all groups is the historic low prices for commodities, despite low acreage planted. Imports from Europe and Canada were major concerns. One group, the soybean producers are working on developing a program that would provide financial incentives for conservation.

Chairman Larry Combest (R-TX) expressed his hope that the next farm bill would provide incentives for highly efficient and effective operators and not reward producers who “farm the programs”. Ranking minority member Charlie Stenholm (D-TX) challenged the groups to offer up solutions to the import problem. He stated that producers like the freedom to plant and want the market to provide the cash, but the market doesn’t provide enough to cover cost of production. Stenholm stated the need to think out of the box and not discount any ideas, including supply management.

CONSERVATION AND REINVESTMENT ACT (CARA) – The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee (Chairman Murkowski, R-Alaska) marked up legislation that would allocate part of the royalties from offshore drilling to conservation activities instead of continuing to send them to the Federal Treasury for general use. The legislation provides funding for the Farmland Protection Program (FPP). Legislative Affairs staff will provide updates once more substantive information is available on this issue.

H.R. 8, ESTATE TAX ELIMINATION ACT OF 2000 - The Senate passed H.R. 8 (59-39) on Friday July 14th. The bill passed by a wide majority (279-136) in the House on June 9, 2000. The bill, which eliminates the tax on estates over a 10-year period will now be prepared for the President's signature. There is speculation that the President will veto the bill.

LEGISLATION OF NOTE – The NRCS Legislative Affairs staff identifies and tracks legislation of particular interest to NRCS and conservation. This information is available on the NRCS Legislative Affairs web-site under the heading LEGISLATION OF NOTE. The address for the Legislative Affairs web-site is as follows:
<http://www.nhq.nrcs.usda.gov/LA/LAhome.html>

THIS WEEK:

INCREASED PROTECTION FOR NATIONAL FOREST LAND – The Senate Forests and Public Land Management Subcommittee (Chairman Craig, R-Idaho) of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee will hold a hearing on the draft environmental impact statement related to increased protection for 40 million acres of national forest lands.

July 21st 9:30am 366 Dirksen Bldg.

LAND CONSERVATION TAX ISSUES – Taxation and IRS Oversight Subcommittee (Chairman Hatch, R-UT) of the Senate Finance Committee will hold a hearing on federal income tax issues relating to various legislative proposals to encourage the creation of public open spaces in urban areas and the preservation of farm and other natural rural lands for conservation purposes.

July 25th 10:00am 215 Dirksen Bldg.

HOUSE FARM POLICY HEARING SERIES – The House Agriculture Committee (Chairman Combest, R-TX) will hold a series of hearings on Federal farm policy.

July 26th 10:00am 1300 Longworth Bldg.

LOOKING AHEAD:

AUGUST RECESS – The Congress will be in recess from July 31st through September 5th.

