

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:**March 29, 1999**

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LAST WEEK -

HOUSE AND SENATE PASS RESPECTIVE VERSIONS OF EMERGENCY SUPPLEMENTAL - On Tuesday, March 23rd the Senate passed S. 544, legislation making emergency supplemental appropriations for Fiscal Year 1999. The bill contains \$100 million for the Emergency Watershed Program, and a one-year fix to the Section 11 Cap, which would provide \$28 million in technical assistance funds for implementing the Conservation Reserve Program. On Wednesday, the House narrowly approved H.R. 1141, which does not contain these two provisions. Both measures now move to a Conference Committee which will resolve differences between the two bills. The Conference Committee will likely convene after Congress reconvenes following the Spring Recess on April 12.

HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEES HOLD HEARING ON PLANT PESTICIDE RULE - On March 24th, several House Agriculture Subcommittees held a joint hearing on a Plant Pesticide Rule produced by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The hearing (Chaired by Thomas Ewing, R-IL) dealt with the authority EPA has to regulate plants that have been altered through biotechnology to produce pesticides internally. Also in question was the term used for the altered plants. Currently, EPA is using the term "plant pesticides," however the industry prefers "plant expressed protectant." This will take a federal register notice and rule-making process to resolve. Future hearings are planned on this topic.

NORTHEAST AGRICULTURE CAUCUS BRIEFING - On Friday, March 26th, the House Northeast Agriculture Caucus (Co-chaired by Rep. Sherwood Boehlert, R-NY and Rep. Tim Holden, D-PA) hosted a panel discussion on agriculture conservation. Danny Sells, Associate Chief of NRCS; Tim Searchinger of the Environmental Defense Fund, and Deb Atwood of the National Pork Producers Council addressed a full-committee room comprised of Congressional staff, as well as environmental and commodity group representatives. Danny Sells outlined the mission, vision, and history of NRCS, and explained the important role that NRCS and its partners play in helping local people identify and solve natural resource issues. Tim Searchinger explained the importance of the northeast and, how programs that were passed as part of the 1996 Farm Bill work in that region. He said that the conservation part of agriculture programs were of special significance to Members of Congress from the northeast and their constituents. Deb Atwood outlined the current challenges faced in the current budget cycle, and funding needs. She stated that the \$28 million provision of the Senate supplemental bill was needed to ensure program support for FY 1999. She also stated that an additional \$90 million would be needed in the Fiscal Year 2000 Conservation Operations account to ensure that NRCS assistance would continue. In total, both environmental and commodity groups underscored the need to support technical assistance funding, and that environmental

resources and the nation's farmers stand to gain much from continued Congressional support for NRCS.

LEGISLATION OF NOTE -

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

BILL	MEMBER	PURPOSE
H.R. 701	Young (AK)	Would provide funding from off-shore drilling to State and local governments to establish a fund to meet the out-door conservation and recreation needs of the American people.
H.R. 1101	Pombo (CA)	Would amend the Endangered Species Act of 1973 to improve the ability of individuals and local, State, and Federal Agencies to prevent natural flood disasters.
H.R. 1141	Young (FL)	Would make emergency supplemental appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1999.
H.R. 1096	Lowey (NY)	Would amend the Federal Water Pollution Control Act to provide special funding to States for implementation of National Estuary Conservation and management plans.

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THIS WEEK -

SPRING RECESS - Both the House and Senate have adjourned for the Spring Recess. Both chambers will reconvene on Monday, April 12th, at 12:00 pm

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