

WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:

October 10, 2000

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LAST WEEK:

ENERGY & WATER DEVELOPMENT - The Conference Report on the Energy and Water Development Appropriations bill, H.R. 4733, passed the House and the Senate and has been sent to the White House for the President's signature. It is likely that the President will veto the bill. The main point of contention concerns the Army Corps of Engineers management plan for the Missouri River. The bill language could prevent the Corps from revising the Missouri River plan to greater emphasize environmental concerns.

INTERIOR CONFERENCE - The House-Senate Conference on the Interior Department FY 2001 Appropriations was completed on September 29, 2000. The conference report included a scaled back version of H.R. 701, The Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA) passed by the House. The Farmland Protection Program originally contained in the CARA bill was not included in the Conference Report. Several Forest Service programs, such as the Forest Legacy Program, received increased funding. There is also emergency funding for western fires.

SECOND CONTINUING RESOLUTION - A second Continuing Resolution, H.J. Res. 110, was passed on Thursday, October 5, 2000. This will keep government programs and agencies operating at existing spending levels through October 14, 2000. The President has indicated a reluctance to approve additional Continuing Resolutions. The Continuing Resolution covers 11 incomplete appropriations bills.

AGRICULTURAL APPROPRIATIONS CONFERENCE - On October 6, 2000, House- Senate conferees completed work on H.R. 4461. The conference report is to be filed over the weekend for final passage early next week.

A summary of expected funding for NRCS is as follows:

Conservation Operations.....	714,116,000
Watershed Surveys and Planning.....	10,868,000
Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations.....	99,443,000
Emergency Watershed.....	110,000,000
Resource Conservation and Development.....	42,015,000
Wetlands Reserve /a.....	52,675,000
Environmental Quality Incentives Program.....	174,000,000
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program /b.....	0
Soil and Water Conservation Assistance /b.....	40,000,000
Farmland Protection Program /c.....	10,000,000

/a an addition of 100,000 acres for WRP was included

/b technical corrections to Crop Insurance Act to use funds for T/A , WHIP and EQIP

/c Crop Insurance Act funding for FY 2001 only

An amendment introduced by Senator Thad Cochran (R-MS) that directs the Chief of NRCS and the Chief of the Forest Service to report directly to the Secretary of Agriculture until January 20, 2001 was included in the Conference Report.

An amendment from Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) establishes a pilot program for CRP on wetlands in six mid-western states. Amendments by Sen. Kohl and Rep. Farr (D-CA) were sent to the full Appropriations Committee for possible inclusion in an omnibus bill at the conclusion of the Congress. These amendments would establish increase funding for EQIP and provide additional funding for FPP.

FEDERAL WETLANDS POLICY – The House Government Reform Committee (Chairman Burton, R-IN) held a hearing on October 6, 2000 to discuss the role of the Federal Government’s wetland policies. The hearing was separated into two panels. The first panel represented a private citizen who had been fined and imprisoned for wetland violations. The Federal Government was represented on the second panel by Michael Davis, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Legislation, Office of Civil Works, Department of the Army, and Robert Wayland III, Director of the Wetlands, Oceans, and Watersheds, Environmental Protection Agency.

Committee members Rep. Helen Chenoweth-Hage (R-ID), Rep. Judy Biggert (R-IL), Rep. Mark Sanford (R-SC) and Chairman Burton questioned the Federal polices pertaining to wetland determinations. The main focus of the questioning was to find out if wetland determination policies are consistent and exercised in a prudent manner. Deputy Assistant Secretary Davis and Director Wayland testified that although they believe the policies are consistent, both of their organizations consistently strive to improve policies. Both Federal witnesses agreed to continue to review policy and the use of policy in an effort to provide the best services possible.

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THIS WEEK:

APPROPRIATIONS – The Congress is expected to continue work on the unfinished appropriations bills including H.R. 4461, the Agriculture Appropriations Bill. NRCS Legislative Affairs staff will continue to provide information as it becomes available.

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