

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:

July 21, 1997

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LAST WEEK:

AMERICAN HERITAGE RIVERS -

The House Committee on Resources held an oversight hearing on the American Heritage Rivers Initiative on July 15, 1997. Rep. James Hansen (R-UT) Chaired the hearing. He summarized the concerns of many committee members regarding the American Heritage Rivers Initiative including private property rights; diversion of federal staff and funds to the program; and the process that had been used to develop the initiative. Administration witnesses included Kathleen McGinty of the White House Council on Environmental Quality; Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, and Secretary Dan Glickman.

Mr. Glickman pointed out that the program is completely non-regulatory. He said that the participating agencies would be utilizing only existing resources and authorities to support the initiative. The Natural Resources Conservation Service was featured in the Secretary's remarks as offering important expertise in streambank restoration, and watershed planning. Over all, the Secretary stated that the program should be viewed as providing "empowerment zones" for rivers and that the participating partners would try to help communities realize their goals.

Many members of the committee reiterated concerns that Congress had not had ample input into the initiative and had not granted authority or reprogrammed funds accordingly. Rep. Peterson (R-PA) said that many federal agencies are not trusted in rural America, where much assistance is needed. Sec. Glickman responded by stating that his agencies have an impressive record in helping rural America and provided RC&D as a prime example of this. Rep. Paul McHale (D-PA) said that he hoped members of Congress would allow the initiative to go forward. He said that while he recognized some communities would not choose to participate, he hoped that their opposition would not preclude others from moving the initiative forward.

FY98 AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS -- STYMIED IN THE HOUSE-

Agriculture Appropriation for Fiscal Year 1998 reached the House floor on Wednesday, July 16th. However, the bill was pulled from consideration on Thursday following a series of procedural votes in protest of leadership activity on another issue. House Democrats, led by Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) claimed lack of input on the legislation which would fund Foreign Operations. As a result, Congress adjourned for the weekend and will take up the Agriculture Appropriations Bill the week of July 21.

SENATE MARK UP OF FY98 AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS -

Both the Agriculture, Rural Development and Related Agencies Subcommittee (Chairman Cochran, R-Miss.) of the Senate Appropriations Committee and the full Senate Appropriations Committee (Chairman Stevens, R-AK) completed mark up of the FY98 appropriations bill.

The current funding figures represent each committee’s working draft of the bill. Totals may change if amended during floor consideration. **(Both chambers are likely to take up Agriculture Appropriations the week of July 21.)**

(in Thousands)

	<i>Request</i>	<i>House</i>	<i>Senate</i>
Conservation Operations	\$722,268	\$610,000	\$729,880 ¹
Watershed Surveys and Planning	n/a	\$ 10,000	n/a
Watersheds & Flood Prevention			
Technical Assistance	0	0	0
Financial Assistance	\$ 40,000	\$101,036 ²	\$ 40,000
Forestry Incentives Program (FIP)	\$ 6,325	\$ 6,325	\$ 6,325
RC&D	\$ 47,700	\$ 29,377	\$ 47,700 ³
Wetlands Reserve Program	\$163,579	\$163,579	\$163,579
Wildlife Habitat Incentives (WHIP)	\$ 30,000	\$ 30,000	\$ 30,000
Environmental Quality Incentives (EQIP)	\$200,000	\$200,000	\$200,000
Conservation Farm Option (CFO)	\$ 15,000	\$ 15,000	\$ 15,000
Farmland Protection Program (FPP)	\$ 18,000	\$ 18,000	\$ 18,000

USDA CIVIL RIGHTS REPORT -

House Agriculture Committee (Chairman Smith, R-OR) held a hearing to review the Agriculture Department’s Civil Rights Action Team (CRAT) report on July 17th. Secretary Glickman, Deputy Secretary Rominger, and Acting Assistant Secretary Reed were the witnesses for the first panel. After opening remarks and prepared statements regarding the status of the implementation of the recommendations in the CRAT report the members of the Committee questioned the panel. A number of concerns, including the lack of proposed legislation, field employee status(County vs. Federal), resources for implementing the recommendations and questions regarding individual recommendations were raised and answered.

A second panel consisting of Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA) and Rep. John Conyers (D-MI), representing the Congressional Black Caucus, presented prepared statements and expressed concerns over the difficulties that the Secretary will encounter in fully implementing the CRAT recommendations. They both thanked the Chair for the first ever Agriculture Committee hearing dealing with Civil Rights and closed by suggesting that the Chair reconvene the Committee in September to hear only from farmers themselves regarding their concerns over Civil Rights issues. Chairman Smith said he would take that suggestion under advisement.

¹ Senate accepted President’s Budget structure for Surveys and Planning and Watershed and Flood Prevention

² The House funded the program solely through the Small Watershed Account and limited technical assistance to \$50 million.

³ The Senate did not include language specifying the use of funds for watershed coordinators

LEGISLATION OF NOTE-

The following bills of significance to NRCS and conservation were recently introduced:

Bill	Member	Purpose
S. 1033	Cochran (MS)	FY98 Agriculture Appropriations

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THIS WEEK:

FLOOR ACTION ON FY98 AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS -

It is anticipated that the Senate will take up their appropriations bill, S. 1033, as early as Tuesday. The House will likely take up their appropriations bill, H.R. 2160, either Tuesday or Wednesday.

IMPACT OF CLEAN AIR REGULATIONS ON AGRICULTURE - The Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee (Chairman Lugar, R-Ind.) will hold a hearing on the impact of newly proposed clean air regulations on the agriculture industry.

Witness: Carol Browner, Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency

July 22 9:00 a.m. 328 Russell Bldg.

CONFIRMATION HEARINGS FOR USDA SUB-CABINET OFFICIALS -

The Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee (Chairman Lugar, R-Ind.) will hold a confirmation hearing on pending nominations of Catherine E. Woteki to be Under Secretary of Agriculture for Food Safety, and Shirley Watkins to be Under Secretary of Agriculture for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services.

July 23 9:00 a.m. 328 Russell Bldg.

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LOOKING AHEAD:

FY98 AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS -

It is anticipated that the House and Senate will pass their respective appropriations bills before the August recess. This will allow for the conferees to work out any difference between the two measures during the August recess and have a conference report ready for final passage once Congress reconvenes in September.

SENATE BRIEFING ON BUFFER INITIATIVE -

The Chief, along with others in the partnership, will discuss the agency's conservation buffer initiative with Members of Congress and their staffs.

TBA (This briefing was originally scheduled for July 9.)

CONGRESSIONAL RECESS -

The traditional August recess is scheduled for August 2 through September 1, 1997. Members are scheduled to return to Washington September 2nd.

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