

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:

October 14, 1997

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LAST WEEK:

HOUSE PASSES AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS - The House passed the conference report to accompany H.R. 2160 on Monday, October 6. After first approving it by voice vote, a roll call vote was requested resulting in passage by a margin of 399-18. The Senate has yet to schedule consideration of the conference report.

GRAZING BILL CLEARS HOUSE AG COMMITTEE - On Wednesday, the House Agriculture Committee (Chairman Bob Smith, R-OR) marked up and passed H.R. 2493, a bill that addresses grazing policies on Federal lands. Chairman Smith's bill would set a grazing formula under law which would raise the fee from \$1.35 per adult head of cattle per month to \$1.84. Permit holders would also be guaranteed renewal of their permits after 10 years of following the terms of their lease. Opponents say the grazing fees are still below the amount charged on private lands. The committee defeated amendments that would have removed Resource Advisory Councils and matched grazing fees on public lands with those on state lands.

PFIESTERIA IMPACT ON FISHING - The Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans Subcommittee (Chairman Saxton, R-N.J.) of the House Resources Committee held a hearing on pfiesteria and its impact on fishery resources on Thursday. Witnesses included Terry D. Garcia of the Department of Commerce and a diverse panel of scientists. Garcia said the recent pfiesteria outbreaks should be viewed in the broader national context of other periodic algal blooms, which have resulted in so-called red tides off Florida and California. Others suggested that pfiesteria is merely the latest symptom of an old problem: too many nutrients in the water. All agreed that a larger and more concerted effort should be made at the federal level to gather information about the microbe. Members of the Subcommittee stated that more should be done and promised to explore further funding for pfiesteria research.

LEGISLATION OF NOTE-

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

Bill	Member	Purpose
H.R. 2609	Miller (FL)	To make regulatory correction concerning methyl bromide to meet the obligations of the Montreal Protocol without placing U.S. farmers at a competitive disadvantage

H.R. 2670

Saxton (NJ)

A bill to amend the Federal Water Pollution Control Act to permit grants for the national estuary program to be used for the development and implementation of a comprehensive conservation and management plan

THIS WEEK:

CONGRESSIONAL RECESS - Members will spend the week in their home districts as Congress takes the week off for the Columbus Day recess.

LOOKING AHEAD:

AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS AWAIT FINAL PASSAGE - The last step in passage of the FY98 Agricultural Appropriations is Senate approval of the conference report. The Senate will likely pass the measure as soon as they return from the Columbus Day Recess on October 20th and before the continuing resolution expires on October 23rd. Congress has 6 of the 13 appropriations bills to complete by October 23rd.

USDA ACCOUNTABILITY & CIVIL RIGHTS - The House Agriculture Committee (Chairman Bob Smith, R-OR) will hold a hearing on accountability and civil rights at USDA. The hearing will include discussion on H.R. 2185, a bill to establish equitable service for customers and equal opportunity for employees of the Department of Agriculture.

Oct. 23 10:00 am 1300 Longworth Bldg.

FLOOD CONTROL AT DEVILS LAKE - The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee (Chairman Chafee, R-R.I.) will hold a hearing on the Army Corps of Engineers' flood control project at Devils Lake, North Dakota.

Oct. 23 9:00 am 406 Dirksen Bldg.

TARGET ADJOURNMENT DATE FOR 1st SESSION - Congressional leaders have begun commenting on potential adjournment dates for the end of the first session of the 105th Congress. The first published schedules for the session set November 14th as the target date. Some members are currently suggesting a November 7th adjournment. The 2nd session of 105th Congress would begin in January, 1998.

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TRAINING AVAILABLE ON LEGISLATIVE ISSUES AND PROCESS -

FOR REGIONAL LEADERSHIP TEAMS - This session will better inform key regional staff and State Conservationists on the status and potential effect of current legislative proposals and activities on natural resource conservation and NRCS. The first regional session was conducted with the Midwest Leadership Team September 25. The South Central Region has scheduled the session for November 13, at Toledo Bend and the West Region with their Board of Directors in Phoenix, AZ, on December 9th. *Contact Legislative Affairs for details.*

FOR STATE TEAMS - Legislative affairs can provide your state with one to four hour sessions designed to increase employee understanding of the legislative process, review issues currently before the Congress, and identify the importance of developing grass roots support for natural resource issues. Virginia was the first state to provide this training in FY98. Missouri will utilize this training for the third year in a row on November 4. *Contact Legislative Affairs for details.*

CAPITOL HILL WORKSHOP - This 2 1/2 day training session is offered by the National Employee Development Center three times in FY98: Feb. 3 - Feb. 5; March 31 - April 2; and June 9 - June 11. It is open to employees GS-13 and above. Participants will examine the role of Congress in the development of national policy. *Contact Tony Lovell at NEDC, (817) 334-5401 Ext. 3214, for details.*

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