

WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:

October 16, 2000

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LAST WEEK:

AGRICULTURAL APPROPRIATIONS - On Wednesday, October 11, the House passed the Conference Report to accompany H.R. 4461, the FY 2001 Agriculture Appropriations Bill. The Senate is expected to approve the Conference Report by Wednesday, October 18, 2000. A detailed table outlining NRCS Funding totals is attached to the Summary. Additional provisions of interest to NRCS are as follows:

Farmable Wetland Pilot - Establishes a two-year program capped at 500,000 acres in CRP for a wetland and buffer pilot program in the states of MN, IA, ND, SD, MT, and NE. Requires an impact report about the pilot program by 2003.

Grazing – Includes a modification for incidental grazing on CRP land except May 1-August 1 of each year for a reduced payment.

Good Faith Reliance - Provides relief for owners/ operators attempting to comply with terms of a contract and enrollment requirements.

Cooperative Agreements - Enables cooperative agreements to be used for the acquisition of goods and services, including personal services, for all programs.

Wetland Reserve Program - 100,000 additional acres are added to raise the statutory cap for WRP to 1,075,000 acres.

Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Program - A portion of the funds provided in the Crop Insurance Act can be used to implement this program.

CRP/EQIP Technical Assistance - \$35 million is added for technical assistance for FY 2001 and beyond.

Congressional Earmarks - Over \$97 million is directed by House, Senate and conference reports in many programs including Conservation Operations, Emergency Watershed, and Farmland Protection to support specific projects or activities.

Aging Watersheds - Authorization is provided to rehabilitate watersheds in MS, WI, NM, and OH using Emergency Watershed Protection funds, including \$8,000,000 in funding.

Common Computing Environment - \$59,500,000 was allocated to implementing this effort with an emphasis to integrate geographic information systems.

Other funding levels of interest to NRCS and conservation include \$80,000,000 for Emergency Conservation Program, \$5 million for rural partnerships grants through Rural Development, \$3,000,000 for outreach to disadvantaged farmers, and \$9,250,000 for sustainable agriculture grants through the S.A.R.E. Program.

MINNESOTA MOURNS 4TH DISTRICT REPRESENTATIVE - Rep. Bruce F. Vento, D-MN, age 60 succumbed to lung cancer Tuesday at his home in St. Paul, Minnesota. Rep. Vento represented the 4th District since 1977. Vento was a senior member of the House Resources Committee who sponsored environmental causes and protection of public land. It is estimated through his service on the Resources Committee Rep. Vento backed more than 300 bills protecting the environment. "He showed an impressive grasp of environmental issues and worked for years to strengthen and protect our urban parks, public lands, and America's other natural resources," said Minority Leader Richard A. Gephardt, MO. Vice President Al Gore said that Vento "championed the preservation and expansion of national parks, wilderness area, wildlife refuges and other environmental treasures. His conservation legacy will endure for many generations to come."

NEW LEGISLATION -

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

BILL MEMBER PURPOSE

S. 3152	Roth, DE	Provides tax incentives for many conservation programs including the treatment of CRP payments as rental income, and the treatment of expenses related to Partners for Wildlife among other programs.
S. 3175	Craig, ID	Establishes Rural Development as a government wide initiative among all departments with each State Rural Development Council being the focal point for the program.
H.R. 5297	Everett, AL	Amends the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act to permit the cost-sharing of water storage and main line distribution construction through the Small Watershed Program
H.R. 5386	Isakson, GA	Amends the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide economic relief to farmers and ranchers.

THIS WEEK:

CONTINUING RESOLUTION H. J. RES. 111 - Awaiting President Clinton's signature is a third continuing resolution that will keep the federal government in full operation until Friday October 20, 2000. Thus far, three of 13 appropriations bills have been enacted.

CHARGE TOWARD ADJOURNMENT – With Election Day (Nov. 7) drawing near, Congressional leaders have expressed the desire to conclude all legislative business by Monday October 23, 2000. When all appropriations bills are completed, the 106th Congress will be adjourned until January 2001. Leaders in both chambers have stated that a weekend session will be utilized if necessary to complete legislative business.
