

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:

September 29, 1997

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LAST WEEK:

AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS AWAIT FINAL PASSAGE - After being placed on the House schedule for Tuesday, final passage of the FY98 Agriculture Appropriations bill remained incomplete at weeks end. Following a series of procedural votes in protest of campaign finance policy, the House was able to make progress on only a small portion of the 13 spending bills which must be passed by September 30th. In addition, Appropriators awaited action on FDA reform legislation to assess budgetary impacts of that legislation. As a result, Congressional staff plan to include Agriculture Appropriations as part of a Continuing Resolution (CR) that will ensure funding for many federal agencies until October 23rd.

ENDANGERED SPECIES HEARING - The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee (Chairman Chafee (R-RI) held a hearing on November 23rd regarding S. 1180, which would reauthorize the Endangered Species Act. Witnesses included Jamie Rappaport Clark, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Terry D. Garcia of the Department of Commerce; and Montana Governor, Mark Racicot. Senator Chafee opened the hearing by recapping the merits of S. 1180 including ensuring certainty for landowners, encouraging preventative conservation, and working toward species recovery. Ms. Clark stated that the Administration embraces many of the provisions of S. 1180 but would reserve endorsement of the measure until some changes are included. She also said that securing funding to implement the bill would be the legislation's greatest challenge. She stated that other federal agencies may need additional appropriations to adequately implement the bill if enacted.

LIVESTOCK GRAZING MARKUP - On Wednesday, the House Agriculture Committee marked up legislation that would amend current federal policy for grazing on public lands. The bill, H.R. 2493 was introduced by Committee Chairman, Bob Smith (R-OR). If enacted, H.R. 2493 would raise the current grazing fee from \$1.35 to \$1.84 per animal unit month. The legislation would also revise grazing regulations implemented by the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. Opponents of the measure, including Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt state that the bill lacks sound environmental provisions. H.R. 2493 will also be reviewed by the Resources Committee, which shares jurisdiction with the Agriculture panel on federal grazing issues.

AGRICULTURE RESEARCH REAUTHORIZATION - The House Agriculture Subcommittee on Forestry, Resource Conservation and Research marked up and passed a bill to reauthorize USDA research on Thursday. H.R. 2534 would improve coordination of agriculture research and reauthorize the food genome initiative. Several amendments were presented to the bill, however, no provision was included regarding haying and grazing on CRP land, such as included in the Senate version of the bill, S.1150. H.R. 2534 would also reauthorize the Title VII - Rural Development, of the 96 Farm Bill.

LEGISLATION OF NOTE-

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

Bill	Member	Purpose
H.R. 2493	Smith (OR)	Establishes uniform management of livestock grazing on Federal lands.
H.R. 2534	Combest (TX)	Reauthorizes Research programs of the USDA.
S. 1181	Kempthorne (ID)	Would amend current tax code to provide Federal tax incentives to owners of environmentally sensitive lands to enter into conservation easements for the protection of endangered species habitat.

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THIS WEEK:

FINAL PASSAGE OF FY98 AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS - POSSIBLE CR - Agriculture Appropriations will likely be part of a continuing resolution, which will fund federal agencies beyond the end of the Fiscal Year on Tuesday. Congressional staff have indicated that the bill would ensure funding until approximately October 23rd as Congress finishes work on the 13 Appropriations Bills necessary to keep the government operating.

FIRE AS A MANAGEMENT TOOL - The House Resources Committee (Chairman Young, R-AK) will hold a hearing on the impact of setting fires to manage federal forests and allowing natural fires to burn. The panel also will examine if such fires would violate air quality standards set by the Environmental Protection Agency and how those standards affect the use of fire as a forest management tool. Witnesses scheduled to attend include EPA Administrator, Carol Browner; USDA Secretary, Dan Glickman; and Interior Secretary, Bruce Babbitt.

Sept. 30 11:00 am 1324 Longworth Bldg.

ENDANGERED SPECIES MARKUP - The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee (Chairman John Chafee, R-RI) will markup S. 1180, which would overhaul the law that seeks to ensure the survival of threatened and endangered species. The legislation was introduced on September 16th.

Sept. 30 9:30 am 406 Dirksen Building

USDA PERFORMANCE - Department Operations, Nutrition and Foreign Agriculture Subcommittee (Chairman Goodlatte, R-Va.) of the House Agriculture Committee will hold a hearing on USDA Government Performance and Results Act statement.

Oct. 1 10:00 am 1300 Longworth

LOOKING AHEAD:

USDA NOMINATIONS - The Senate Agriculture Committee (Chairman Lugar, R-In.) will hold a confirmation hearing on pending USDA nominations including Sally Thompson to be the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of the Department.

Oct. 8 9:00 am 328-A Russell Building
