

**LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:****July 26, 1999**

NRCS, Office of Legislative Affairs  
 Room 5121 South Agriculture Bldg.  
 (202) 720-2771

For additional information contact:

Tia G. Young  
 Douglas J. McKalip  
 Anita Holland-Spears

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**LAST WEEK -**

**SUBCOMMITTEE APPROVAL OF AGING WATERSHEDS BILL** - On Tuesday, July 20, The Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities, Resource Conservation and Credit (Chairman Barrett, R-NE) of the House Agriculture Committee held a markup of H.R. 728, introduced by Rep. Frank Lucas (R-OK). The legislation would provide authorization and funding for NRCS to rehabilitate aging watershed structures throughout the country. Rep. Lucas reported that within the next decade 1,300 small flood control dams nationwide will reach the end of their 50-year life expectancy and that currently there is no federal assistance available to local communities for rehabilitation of these structures. Rep. Barrett (R-NE) expressed his concerns regarding authorizing new spending at a time when USDA funding is austere. Rep. Minge (D-MN) stated that there are other aging dams in the country such as the Depression era Works Progress Administration (WPA) dams. He offered an amendment to H.R. 728 to add WPA dams to the scope of the rehabilitation effort. On a voice vote, the panel rejected the amendment. Nick Smith (R-MI) raised a concern about the federal government's 65 percent cost-share provision in the bill. He said more of the money should come from the areas most affected by the legislation. However, Mr. Smith did not propose to amend the legislation. The bill was approved and forwarded to the full Committee on Agriculture. A markup by the full committee has not yet been scheduled.

**FARMLAND PROTECTION PROGRAM HEARING** - On Wednesday, July 21, the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee (Chairman Lugar, R-IN) held a hearing on the Farmland Protection Program. Senator Lugar open the hearing by commenting that less than 5 % percent of the U.S. is developed and federal data show that the outward growth of metropolitan areas has consumed 1.5 million acres of farm land each year since 1960. He also stated that as more people migrate to rural areas, this has caused a disruption to many farmers and ranchers in their day-to-day farming activities as well as the economic community that supports them.

Richard Rominger, the Deputy Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, testified that rural roads and occasional farmsteads in so many parts of the country are giving way to

subdivisions, parking lots, and malls. He stated there is an important national interest in the protection of farmland threatened by structural development and conversion to non-agricultural uses. He furthered stated as farmers or as public servants, one of the lasting marks that we will leave upon the land will be the health of our natural resources.

Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) stated the U.S. is losing farmland to urban sprawl at an alarming rate and with the Farmland Protection Program, farmers have a tool to fight urban sprawl. Senator Leahy introduced legislation, S. 333, which would extend the authority of the program and provide \$55 million annually.

Senator Rick Santorum expressed concerns regarding the backlog, benefits and cost of the program. However, he did state the program would be good for farmers. Senator Santorum introduced S. 598, which would also reauthorization of the program.

**CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM** - On Thursday, the Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities, Resource Conservation and Credit of the House Agriculture Committee held a hearing on the Conservation Reserve Program. The first witness was Rep. Collin Peterson (D-MN) who expressed concerns regarding the cost and flexibility of the program. He also wanted the acreage to be increased for buffer strips and other areas. Rep. Peterson introduced H.R. 408, which would expand the numbers of acres authorized for inclusion in CRP.

Thomas Grau, Deputy Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services, for the Department of Agriculture testified that Secretary Glickman announced acceptance of an additional 5 million acres in CRP and expected that on October 1 there will be nearly 32 million acres in CRP. He stated they were preparing for the next general signup, although the dates have not been given yet. He also said there was concern that small enrollments may greatly increase competition that producers whose offers are not accepted may become discouraged and lose interest, not only in the CRP, but in overall conservation efforts.

Rep. David Minge (D-MN) expressed concerns regarding delay with the upcoming signup and staffing problems. Rep. Eva Clayton (D-NC) had concerns with farmers obtaining better information on signups and who determines the criteria. Rep. John Thune (R-At Large SD) questioned the Department's efforts to insure that rental rates are in line with cash rates.

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**THIS WEEK**

**ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT FIELD HEARING** - The House Resources Committee (Chairman Young, R-AK) will hold a hearing on the implementation of the Endangered Species Act.

July 24

10:00 am

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**CROP INSURANCE MARKUP** - The House Agriculture Committee (Chairman Combest, R-TX) will markup H.R. 2559, a bill to amend the Federal Crop Insurance Act to strengthen the safety net for agricultural producers by providing greater access to more affordable risk management tools and improved protection from production and income loss.

July 27                                      10:00 am                                      1300 Longworth Building

**RURAL WATER PROJECTS HEARING** - The Water and Power Resources Subcommittee (Chairman Doolittle, R-Calif.) of the House Resources Committee will hold a hearing on financing rural water projects.

July 29                                      2:00 p.m.                                      1324 Longworth Building

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#### **LOOKING AHEAD**

After completing legislative business, Congress will adjourn for the summer recess August 7 - September 7.