



washington dc update

Federal Water Planning – A Possible Attachment to WRDA?

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Hicks-Ray Confirms Concern with Minority Staff



Today, in a telephone conversation with Minority staff member of the T&I Committee, the potential for including federal planning in WRDA was known but no firm indication; however, “a preemptive effort” is warranted. WESTCAS is well advised to join with other associations expressing concern.

The Congress has returned after its one week Memorial Day recess and will continue in session until the end of the month when it adjourns for the 4th of July recess. Not surprisingly, much of the initial action from Committees of interest to WESTCAS members is a focus on the implications of the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Other than that, much of the legislation that we have been watching is stalled at various points of the process whether in Committee, awaiting action on the floor, or awaiting action in the Senate. What would normally be the Appropriations season with FY11 markups has been delayed by Democratic reluctance to bring bills to the floor for debate over fears that Republicans might try and force a series of votes that highlight the deficit.

As the days and weeks go by and the end of the 111th Congress begins to come into view, one of the surest ways to get anything done is the potential of attaching a piece of legislation onto a bill that might be popular in an election year. One example is the potential for attaching the “Sustainable Watershed Planning Act” which has existed for a number of months in draft form at the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, into the reauthorization for WRDA.

WRDA authorizes Corps of Engineers projects and is always popular with Members in an election year. The Sustainable Watershed Planning Act draft: “Establishes the Office of Sustainable Watershed Management within the office of the President to assess, coordinate, and implement policies and actions to ensure the sustainable use of the water resources of the United States.” One of the goals of this legislation would be to require all Federal projects to maximize ecological benefits.

This would be done by developing watershed plans that would be focused on promoting issues such as water efficiency, improved water quality, and improved ecological health. Proposed projects that could not meet these watershed-wide standards would not be allowed to move forward.

Contact Fred or Tom

Fred Hicks – 703.626.5384

P.O. Box 2115

Springfield, VA 22152-0115

fbhicks@aol.com

Tom Ray – 254.855.0880

P.O. Box 955

Waco, TX 76703-0955

tom@hicks-ray.com



WESTCAS
Western Coalition of Arid States