WETLANDS RESERVE PROGRAM ENHANCEMENT ACT

Mr. HUTCHINSON. Mr. President, earlier this week I introduced the Hutchinson-Lincoln Wetlands Reserve Program Enhancement Act to help strengthen the popular Wetlands Reserve Program administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Simply put, this legislation will act to strengthen the current WRP which provides financial incentives to farmers and private landowners who voluntarily set aside marginal lands and restore them to optimal wetland wildlife habitat.

These restored wildlife areas are some of the best wildlife conservation habitat in America and are critical to the future of waterfowl throughout our Nation. Established by the 1990 farm bill as a long-term conservation option for farmers, the WRP protects farm wetlands using 10-year, 30-year, and permanent easements. Land which is eligible for WRP is characterized by wetlands that are farmed, lands adjacent to protected wetlands, and crop-livestock and pastures which are naturally prone to flooding.

If eligible, the landowner voluntarily limits the use of the lands while retaining private ownership and access to the land. In addition, they may also lease the land for hunting, fishing, and other undeveloped recreational activities. The NRCS, in conjunction with the landowner, then develops a plan for the restoration and the maintenance of the wetland.

Once restored, wetlands act to: No. 1, improve water quality by filtering sediments; No. 2, reduce flooding; No. 3, recharge ground water; No. 4, promote biological diversity; and No. 5, furnish educational, recreational, and aesthetic benefits. These benefits, as a result of the WRP, have helped landowners throughout the 46 States where farmers have currently enrolled in what has become a very successful program.

At the local level, I want to mention three farmers in Arkansas who are benefiting from the WRP. Hattie Neely of Moro, AR, in Lee County, grows soybeans and has enrolled 31 acres in this very important program. Then there is Donie Wallace of Gillets, AR, in Arkansas County, who grows soybeans, and he has enrolled 30 acres in the WRP. And Dick Carmichael of Monticello, AR, in Drew County, grows soybeans and rice and has enrolled 115 acres in the WRP.

In each case, these farmers are using the WRP to restore bottom land hardwood forests and a natural wildlife habitat. Other farmers in Arkansas are using WRP to retire agricultural lands unsuited for crop production because of elevated levels of salt from irrigation water. In this case, WRP lands filter runoffs, keeping salts and sediments in the wetlands and out of the natural waterways.

Despite the benefits to farmers across America, the WRP will soon become a victim of its own success. The current WRP is authorized to enroll up to 975,000 acres nationally through the year 2002. WRP is in such high demand from America’s farmers that it will reach its acreage cap next year. The top 10 States—Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, California, Missouri, Iowa, Texas, Florida, Oklahoma, and Illinois—have a combined enrollment of almost 427,000 acres in these States alone.

In response to the success of WRP, my bill seeks to expand the acreage cap from the proposed 180,000 acres in fiscal year 2000 to a newly authorized maximum of 250,000 acres per year through the year 2005. This will help to ensure that farmers who want to enroll in the program will have the option to do so.

There is no doubt that the American farmer faces an industry that is in crisis. To find solutions for the many challenges facing farmers, I want to ensure that my colleagues in the Senate do not overlook the importance of conservation to family farmers, both as a way to protect valuable wildlife resources and as a source of additional income.

In the Mississippi Delta, family farmers are using the WRP to move frequently flooded farmland away from high-risk, high-cost farming back to original hardwood timberlands.

Mr. President, I thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of family farmers who care about protecting the natural resources with which they are entrusted. I ask my colleagues to consider the importance of wildlife conservation in the life of family farmers. Join me in the support of what I think is very good, very important, bipartisan conservation legislation.

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE

At 3:20 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mr. Berry, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bill, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate.

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD—SENATE

July 30, 1999

Mr. COCHRAN. I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore of the Senate, Mr. COCHRAN of Mississippi, recognized the Chair.

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Provided further, That Mr. MEHERAN is appointed in lieu of Mr. BERMAN for consideration of sections 741, 1501, 1505, 1534-35, and titles V, VI, and IX of the Senate amendment.

From the Committee on Education and the Workforce, for consideration of the House bill, and the Senate amendment (except sections 741, 1501, 1505, 1534-35, and titles V, VI, and IX), and modifications committed to conference: Mr. BLILY, Mr. TAUZIN, Mr. GOODLING, Mr. PETRI, Mr. CASTLE, Mr. GREENWOOD, Mr. DE MINT, Mr. CLAY, Mr. KILDREE, and Mrs. MCCARTHY of New York.

From the Committee on Commerce, for consideration of sections 1365 and 1401-03 of the House bill, and sections 1504, 1515, and 1523 of the Senate amendment, and modifications committed to conference: Mr. BLILY and Mr. DINGELL.

Provided, That Mr. BILIARAKIS is appointed for consideration of section 1365 of the House bill and section 1523 of the Senate amendment.

Provided further, That Mr. TAUZIN is appointed for consideration of sections 1401-03 of the House bill and sections 1504 and 1515 of the Senate amendment.

EXECUTIVE AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

The following communications were laid before the Senate, together with accompanying papers, reports, and documents, which were referred as indicated:

EC-4448. A communication from the Acting Director, Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants: Final Rule to List Nine Evolutionary Significant Units of Chinook Salmon (Oncorhynchus tshawytscha), Chum Salmon (Oncorhynchus keta), Sockeye Salmon (Oncorhynchus nerka), and Steelhead (Oncorhynchus mykiss), as Threatened or Endangered", promulgated June 1999, to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC-4449. A communication from the Chair, National Women's Business Council, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report entitled "The 1999 NWBC Best Practices Guide: Contracting with Women": to the Committee on Small Business.

EC-4450. A communication from the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, transmitting, a draft of proposed legislation relative to vouchers for extremely low-income elderly families; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

EC-4451. A communication from the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, transmitting, a draft of proposed legislation relative to technical and conforming amendments; Docket No. 98–NM–350 (7–22/7–26) "Airworthiness Directives: Saab Model SAAB 2000 Series Airplanes; request for Comment" (FRL #6409–6), received July 27, 1999; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC-4452. A communication from the Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation, Department of the Interior, transmitting, a draft of proposed legislation relative to the security of dams and reservoirs under the jurisdiction of the Bureau; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

EC-4453. A communication from the Director, Office of Regulation and Information, Office of Policy, Planning and Evaluation, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Acquisition Regulation: Commercial Performance Standards" (FRL #6409–7), received July 27, 1999; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC-4454. A communication from the Director, Office of Regulatory Management and Information, Office of Policy, Planning and Evaluation, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Approval and Promulgation of State Plans for Designated Facilities and Individual Plants: Washington" (FRL #6409–6), received July 27, 1999; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC-4456. A communication from the Director, Office of White House Liaison, Department of Commerce, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to the resignation of the Chief Financial Officer and Assistant Secretary for Administration, and the designation of an Acting Chief Financial Officer and Assistant Secretary; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC-4457. A communication from the Director, Office of White House Liaison, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to the resignation of the Chief Financial Officer and Assistant Secretary for Administration, and the designation of an Acting Chief Financial Officer and Assistant Secretary; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC-4458. A communication from the Director, Office of White House Liaison, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to the resignation of the Under Secretary for Technology, and the designation of an Acting Under Secretary; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC-4459. A communication from the Director, Office of White House Liaison, Department of Commerce, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to the resignation of the Assistant Secretary for Technology Policy; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC-4460. A communication from the Secretary, Federal Trade Commission, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to cigarette labeling and advertising for 1997; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC-4461. A communication from the Program Analyst, Office of the Chief Counsel, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Aircraft Registration, Certification, and Type Designation; Small Airline and General Aviation Requirements; Airworthiness Directives: SAAB 2000 Series Airplanes; request for Comments" (Docket No. 96–NM–350 (7–22/7–26) "RIN2190-AA41" (1999–0280), received July 26, 1999; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC-4462. A communication from the Program Analyst, Office of the Chief Counsel, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled...