

Coastal Connection

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Current Issues in Washington

The House of Representatives will focus on energy-related legislation this week, including a bill that would allow increased energy production in offshore waters (see story on this page.)

The Senate will spend the week debating a constitutional amendment to ban flag burning.

Both chambers will be on recess next week for the Independence Day holiday.

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The Coastal Connection is published weekly when Congress is in session, or as events warrant.
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Senate Begins to Move FY07 Appropriations Bills

Last week, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved two FY 2007 appropriations measures: the Agriculture and Legislative Branch bills.

This week, several subcommittees are scheduled to markup their bills. Energy and Water Development, Homeland Security, and the Environment-Interior bills will be considered on Tuesday. The Foreign Operations bill may also be considered this week.

On Thursday, the full Senate Appropriations Committee is expected to approve the set of bills listed above.

On the other side of the Capitol, lawmakers will consider the FY 07 Commerce-State-Justice appropriations bill in the full House this week.

After completing action on this

bill, the House will only have one remaining appropriations measure to consider: Labor-Health and Human Services-Education.

In spite of this recent flurry of activity, it remains highly unlikely that Congress will be able to develop final versions of all of the appropriations bills prior to the start of the FY 2007 fiscal year on October 1.

There are only a few available legislative days left on the calendar. The Fourth of July recess begins on Friday and the month-long August recess will soon be here. Many issues will be competing for precious floor time as leaders try to develop an agenda for the rest of the year.

Furthermore, election-year posturing may push final negotiations on some bills past the November elections.

Ocean Energy Bill Advances

The House Resources Committee approved the Deep Ocean Energy Resources (DOER) Act last week and is expected to hit the House floor later this week.

The bill, HR 4761, would provide coastal states greater authority

over offshore energy development and a percentage of possible royalties.

The bill faces an uncertain fate in the House. Even if it passes this week, it will have to overcome many obstacles in the Senate.

Experts Release Report on Rebuilding the Gulf Coast

A group of experts convened by the American Geophysical Union (AGU) recently released a reported entitled, "Hurricanes and the Gulf Coast: Science and Sustainable Rebuilding."

The report was drafted by a Conference of Experts intended to guide lawmakers through the rebuilding process in areas affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The 20 scientists who participated in the conference looked at seven major areas: hurricanes, storm surge and flooding, subsidence, climate change, hydrology, infrastructure, and disaster preparedness and response.

For each of the mentioned topics, the report assesses the current understanding of the phenomenon, near-term scientific needs, and long-term direction.

The scientists recommended im-

proved seasonal forecasting to help address the threat of hurricanes and improved wind data and shoreline topography to help combat storm surge.

Subsidence is an area that the report cites for further study to enable local leaders to impose wise policies that deal with effect of receding coastal land masses, which result in more vulnerable coastlines as they are less able to absorb storm surge.

Disaster response is also an area where the report finds many issues that could be improved.

Accurate weather information disseminated to the public leading up to an event, a well-thought out disaster response plan, and properly trained emergency response personnel are the keys to weathering both moderate and severe storms.

The report makes several recommendations that serve as a basis for discussion for scientists and policymakers. (1) Establish a multidisciplinary steering committee to review the reconstruction and new threats to the region from natural disasters, and charge that committee with monitoring the rebuilding and identifying key scientific issues and assets to address these issues. (2) Assemble a database of experts who would be available to provide scientific guidance as needed. (3) Provide periodic assessments of reconstruction and planning efforts.

If you would like the complete report that includes the full list of recommendations, please visit AGU's website at www.agu.org/report/hurricanes/.

Florida Establishes Guidelines for Temporary Coastal Armoring

Florida's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Bureau of Beaches and Coastal Systems has issued new guidelines to help coastal communities improve storm protection.

DEP Deputy Secretary for Regulatory Programs and Energy Mike Sole indicated that the "recommendations will further improve the state's ability to protect and manage its coastal areas."

When high-intensity storms threaten the coast, state law permits local governments to construct temporary coastal fortifications to protect infrastructure and

private property. In a recent memo to local governments in Florida, the DEP noted that emergency temporary rigid coastal armoring is allowed for the protection of private structures or public infrastructure.

Local governments can approve temporary structures for 30 days after a storm event. The structures must be removed unless an application is made within 60 days of their installation to leave them in place permanently.

This protection is intended to complement the natural protection that healthy beaches afford by reduc-

ing the impact of storm surge and wave action. A 2003 Florida Atlantic University study found that for every dollar invested in beach restoration, the State of Florida receives a \$6 to \$8 economic return.

To date, 170 miles of beach have been restored and maintained by the State of Florida.

The agency has prepared a reference document for local governments to use when they issue emergency permits for temporary coastal armoring. The document can be found at www.dep.state.fl.us/beaches.