

Coastal Connection

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Current Issues in Washington

Both the House of Representatives and the Senate are on recess for the Memorial Day holiday this week.

When Congress reconvenes next week, the House is expected to consider the FY 2007 Homeland Security appropriations bill.

The Senate is scheduled to debate the constitutional amendment regarding marriage.

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The Coastal Connection is published weekly when Congress is in session, or as events warrant.

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House Passes Energy and Water Appropriation Bill

Before leaving for the Memorial Day recess, the House of Representatives approved the FY 2007 Energy and Water Development Appropriations bill by a vote of 404-20.

The bill funds the Army Corps of Engineers, the Department of Energy, and the Bureau of Reclamation.

The Senate Appropriations Committee is expected to begin work on its versions of the FY 2007 appropriations bills next month.

As Congress begins its Memorial Day recess, the FY 2007 appropriations cycle appears to be very similar to the previous year. The House is moving quickly through its bills and may complete action on all of them prior to the July 4th

recess.

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Thad Cochran (R-MS) has reportedly been working to develop the spending allocations for each of the appropriations subcommittees. These figures may be released sometime next week.

Meanwhile, appropriators are trying to wrap up negotiations on the stalled emergency supplemental appropriations bill that provides additional funds for hurricane relief and military operations. This spending package may be completed within the next couple of weeks.

A status chart for the FY 2007 appropriations bills is printed on page 5 and will be updated throughout the year.

At-Risk Cities Focus of Senate Hearing

A Senate Subcommittee heard testimony from a panel of experts last week as part of a hearing focused on the 2006 Hurricane Forecast and At-Risk Cities.

Max Mayfield, Director of the National Hurricane Center, told senators that the following areas of the country are especially susceptible to the effects of land-falling hurri-

cans because of their large population and/or the length of time it would take to evacuate the area: Houston/Galveston, Tampa Bay, southwest Florida, Florida Keys, southeast Florida, New York City/Long Island, and New England.

He added that New Orleans also remains vulnerable to future hurricanes.

Flood Insurance Reform Measure Passes Senate Committee

The Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee unanimously approved legislation reforming the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) on Thursday, May 25th.

The bill's intent is to bring the NFIP on sound fiscal footing by forgiving \$24 billion in debt and phasing out subsidized rates for repetitive loss properties and second homes.

The Flood Insurance Reform and Modernization Act was passed without any amendments, although some Senators did express concern about the potential of drastic premium rate increases for homeowners.

The bill would phase out premium subsidies by 25 percent a year on all non-primary residences, business properties, repetitive loss properties, and those properties that have incurred damage exceeding their current fair market value.

Similar to the House flood insurance reform bill, the Senate version tar-

gets those properties that are paying pre-FIRM (flood insurance rate map) rates and aims to bring them in line with actuarial rates that are charged to post-FIRM properties.



"The persistence of these subsidies is one of the greatest reasons why the flood insurance program is insolvent. The explicitly subsidized homes are the oldest structures within the program, and are the most likely to incur massive damage because they are not built to modern codes and standards," stated Banking Committee Chairman Richard Shelby (R-AL) at Thursday's markup.

The House's bill differs from the Senate bill on two main issues. First, the House bill does not target repetitive loss properties specifically for premium increases to actuarial rates. In addition, the bill does not provide debt forgiveness for the NFIP but does raise the debt ceiling.

Marlowe & Company has continued to analyze data provided by the NFIP about premiums and claims for both non-coastal and coastal policies.

Upon further analysis, we have determined that non-coastal policyholders have paid \$5.7 billion in premiums while approximately 600,000 non-coastal claims generated \$6.8 billion in payments to cover flood losses.

In contrast, coastal policyholders have contributed \$16.4 billion in premiums while coastal claims generated just over \$8.4 billion in payments to cover losses. This data covers a period of almost 30 years.

Offshore Energy Compromise Possible in the Senate

Senators from Louisiana and Florida are working on a deal enabling both states to support energy legislation that would open up close to 3 million acres in the Gulf of Mexico's Lease Sale 181 area.

The agreement would address the concerns of Florida Senator Bill Nelson (D) by imposing a 125-mile buffer zone between the exploration area and Florida beaches while also providing a larger portion of royalties for coastal states.

While this agreement would head

off Senator Nelson's threatened filibuster of the current bill, S. 2253, it must still win the approval of Senate Energy and Natural Resources Chairman Pete Domenici (R-NM) and Ranking Member Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM).

According to Senator Nelson's office, Chairman Domenici has seen the agreement and is willing to discuss it. However, Senator Bingaman, who co-authored S. 2253, is opposed to any changes to the current legislation. "He likes the bill just like it is and does not favor

changing it," said committee spokesman Bill Wicker.

S. 2253 passed the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources on March 8th. Chairman Domenici praised the committee's 16-5 vote stating, "This is the most important piece of energy legislation we have taken up since passing the energy bill last year. "

S. 2253 authorizes the Interior Department to sell 2.9 million acres of Lease Sale Area 181 for oil and gas development 100 miles off the Florida coast.

Report: 385 miles of Florida's Beaches Face Critical Erosion

The Bureau of Beaches and Coastal Systems of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) recently updated its Critically Eroded Beaches in Florida report, providing an inventory of Florida's erosion problem areas.

In its most recent update, FDEP estimates that 385.3 miles of beach in Florida are "critically eroded", while only 96.8 miles are "noncritically eroded."



FDEP defines critically eroded beaches as "a segment of the shoreline where natural processes

or human activity have caused or contributed to erosion and recession of the beach or dune system to such a degree that upland development, recreational interests, wildlife habitat, or important cultural resources are threatened or lost."

The report is available for download at: http://bcs.dep.state.fl.us/reports/crit_ero.pdf.

Enviro Group Threatens to Sue EPA Over Beach Water

To mark the Memorial Day start of the beach season, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) announced it will sue the Environmental Protection Agency for failing to adequately protect the more than 180 million Americans who go to the shore every year from waterborne disease.

The EPA missed its congressionally mandated October 2005 deadline to revise outdated health standards for beachwater quality. The agency now says it will not be able to finish updating the standards, as required by the Beaches Environmental Assessment, Cleanup and Health Act of 2000 (BEACH Act), until 2011.

"A day at the beach should not turn into a night in the bathroom, or worse, in the hospital," said Nancy Stoner, director of NRDC's Clean Water Project and supervisor of the group's annual report on vacation beach water quality, which will come out later this summer. "There have been significant advances over the last two decades that we should be using to

protect beachgoers. It shouldn't take the EPA 10 years to set new standards."

NRDC says the EPA should accelerate its timetable for proposing new standards, set standards that fully protect the public, and establish testing methods that will enable public health officials to make prompt decisions about closing their beaches and issuing advisories. As required by law, NRDC is giving the agency 60 days notice before officially filing the suit.

"The current standards focus on bacteria, because years ago we didn't know as much about other disease-causing organisms," explained Dr. Joan Rose, director of Michigan State University's Center for Water Sciences and chair of the EPA Science Advisory Board's Drinking Water Committee. "We now have methods that can detect viruses and parasites – which can cause serious health problems – but they're not being used."

An estimated 7 million Americans are sickened by contaminated water – including recreational and

drinking water – every year. And, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there is an upward trend in the number of waterborne diseases associated with recreational waters.

"In most cases, contaminated beachwater makes people sick for a couple of days, which is definitely no fun," said Dr. Jeffrey K. Griffiths, director of Global Health at Tufts University School of Medicine and member of the EPA Science Advisory Board's Drinking Water Committee. "But for as much as 25 percent of the population – older folks, small kids, and people with weak immune systems – exposure could mean something much worse, even death. There's a lot more that we should and could be doing to protect beachgoers."

"Not only has EPA failed to do its job, Congress routinely shortchanges programs designed to clean up the pollution that contaminates beachwater," Stoner added.

Coastal Group Marks Start of 2006 Summer Beach Season

Following is the statement of Mayor Harry Simmons, President of the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association, at the Jersey Shore Partnership's Summer Event, May 22nd, in Sea Bright, New Jersey:

As Americans prepare for Memorial Day weekend and the traditional start of the beach season, our nation's beaches and coastal communities are also preparing for another summer of fun and record crowds. Americans have a strong attachment to our beaches. They truly are a national treasure.

However, our coastal resources – these national treasures – are facing critical threats to their health like no other time in recent history.

Our nation's shorelines are eroding. Beaches are still being closed because of poor water quality. Coastal inlets are being closed or are dangerous to navigate because of poor maintenance.

The sad truth is that Congress is far more eager to build new roads that get people to the coast than in restoring and nurturing America's precious coastal beaches, waterways, and environmental habitat.

The American Shore and Beach Preservation Association has been working for the past 80 years to protect and restore our nation's coastal resources.

I want to express how grateful ASBPA is to the New Jersey congressional delegation for its long and effective history of supporting not only what's good for New Jersey's coast, but what's good for the



shorelines of America. There is not a coastal funding or policy issue in Congress where the members of the state's delegation – Republicans and Democrats – have not taken the lead.

We must continue to invest in beach restoration. In less than two weeks, the 2006 hurricane season begins. Unfortunately, the House Appropriations Committee last week missed the opportunity to fund projects that can reduce the loss of life and destruction of property caused by severe storms.

America's coasts are not in a condition to handle the damage to communities or the loss of life that these storms bring. Yet the committee adopted an appropriations measure that takes a treacherous turn by reducing funding for storm damage reduction projects along America's coasts by a third!

ASBPA supports preventive measures that help to reduce the impacts of serious hurricanes. These measures reduce the high cost of disaster relief and promote the cause of human safety.

We must continue to improve the quality of our recreational waters. It is not enough to combat beach erosion. We have to make sure

that states and communities do everything they can to monitor beach water and to alert the public when pollution makes going into the water unsafe. ASBPA was a leader in the effort to establish a federal program that aids states in their efforts to assure clean beach water. This year and last, we have been leading the fight to get this program reauthorized by Congress and to increase the amount of funding available to states under the program.

As we begin the 2006 beach season, I challenge all of you to send postcards from your favorite beach this summer to your Members of Congress, your Governor, your state legislators, and the President. Include a simple message on the back: "I treasured my visit to this beach and want you to help protect this precious natural resource." Urge your friends, neighbors, and family members to do the same thing.

We have worked hand-in-hand with Members of Congress, the Corps of Engineers, the EPA, and other state and federal officials to focus attention and direct resources to the issues important to all of us who live and visit America's beaches. These partnerships will continue and get stronger with all of your help.

We have done so much that we can be proud of ... but we must do a lot more to make future generations proud of us.

<http://www.asbpa.org>

Status Chart for FY 2007 Appropriations Bills

Bill	House Subcommittee	House Committee	House Floor	Senate Subcommittee	Senate Committee	Senate Floor	Conference Version Approved	President
Agriculture	5/3/06	5/9/06	5/23/06					
Science-State-Justice-Commerce (House)				_____	_____	_____		
Commerce-Justice-Science (Senate)	_____	_____	_____					
Defense								
DC (Senate)	_____	_____	_____					
Energy & Water	5/11/06	5/17/06	5/24/06					
Foreign Ops (House)	5/19/06	5/25/06		_____	_____	_____		
State & Foreign Ops (Senate)	_____	_____	_____					
Homeland Security	5/11/06	5/17/06						
Interior	5/4/06	5/10/06	5/18/06					
Labor-HHS-Education								
Leg Branch	_____	5/25/06						
MQL-VA (House)	5/4/06	5/10/06	5/19/06	_____	_____	_____		
Mil Con & VA (Senate)	_____	_____	_____					
Transportation-Treasury-HUD-Judiciary-DC (House)	5/25/06			_____	_____	_____		
Transportation-Treasury-Judiciary-HUD (Senate)	_____	_____	_____					