

Federal Parks & Recreation

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In this issue. . .

DoI lists Centennial projects.

Kempthorne, Bomar say response of NPS partners has far exceeded expectations. Congressional Democrats appear to be in no big hurry to move bill. Dicks will help but sees snags ... Page 1

Mount St. Helens park asked.

Washington State coalition of elected officials and others promotes transfer from Forest Service to NPS. Centennial money is one incentive Page 3

Baucus may move on fed fee law.

He is expected to introduce bill to address return of fee money to fed units and to limit FS's site review process Page 5

Still no park overflight plans.

Seven years after law ordered them. Reasons many. Advisory panels to meet shortly Page 6

Bush sides with hunters, but.

He orders fed agencies to give top priority. But sportsmen contest his energy policy .. Page 7

FS proposes new planning rule.

Would be virtually identical to rule blocked by courts. Still must do EIS, ESA tasks Page 8

Congress may not finish farm bill.

This year. Senate has not taken up yet. Maybe next year ... Page 9

Notes Page 10

Boxscore of Legislation Page 12

Kempthorne, Bomar optimistic about NPS's 'Challenge'

The Bush administration August 23 identified park-by-park projects it intends to undertake over the next 10 years to upgrade the National Park System for its centennial.

The administration hopes to use \$1 billion in guaranteed appropriations and \$1 billion in philanthropic pledges to pay for the program. For fiscal years 2008 and 2009 the administration identified \$364 million worth of projects - some for big parks, some for small parks, some for medium parks, some expensive projects, some inexpensive projects, and so on.

Secretary of Interior Dirk Kempthorne said at a press conference in Yosemite National Park August 23 NPS has selected a judicious mix of projects. "There was concern only the icon national parks would benefit," he said. "The distribution of this money will be to icon parks approximately 19 percent, the large parks 35 percent, medium parks 28 percent and small parks 18 percent."

Kempthorne said that philanthropic pledges have far exceeded expectations and far exceeded the \$20 million that doubters had projected as first year collections.

"I will tell you that a three-ring binder that is sitting in front of me contains 321 signed letters of commitment from the philanthropic community that equals \$301 million that has now been pledged," he said. "That is for fiscal 2008 and 2009 - so this is a stunning, stunning demonstration of the support of the American people for the national parks."

The proposals announced August 23 make up a small part of a \$3 billion Bush administration Centennial Initia-

tive. The partnership program called the Centennial Challenge would raise \$2 billion of the \$3 billion. The administration would have the Centennial Challenge financed by new legislation that would authorize \$100 million per year for 10 years from partner donations matched by \$100 million per year in guaranteed appropriations from Congress.

However, the future of that legislation is problematic. The Senate Energy Committee has no plans to address the legislation this year, although the committee did hold a hearing August 2 on an administration Centennial Challenge bill (S 1253, HR 2959.)

"The way the bill was done and some of the commercial aspects have aroused concerns over here," said a committee spokesman. "I don't anticipate that bill going to mark-up soon and I haven't heard any conversations about hearings." For good measure the staff member said he had not heard of any initiative to write a different bill in the Senate.

The Senate committee may be persuaded to address the issue if the House passes a bill. "If it comes over here, it might prompt some action," said the committee staff member.

Senior House Democrats have written a competing Centennial Challenge bill (HR 3084) that (1) would raise \$1 billion from unspecified fees on commercial users of federal lands and (2) would not require a partnership match. House Natural Resources Committee Nick Joe Rahall (D-W.Va.) and House subcommittee on National Parks Chairman Raúl Grijalva (D-N.M.) introduced HR 3084.

A committee spokeswoman said Rahall and Grijalva have not addressed the subject recently because they and their staffers have been on vacation for the month of August. If the two do schedule any action, it probably won't happen until later this month.

Democratic committee leaders in both the Senate and House had delayed action in part until NPS proposed projects for the Centennial Challenge.

Now those proposals are on the street.

One key Democrat is very much on board - Rep. Norman Dicks (D-Wash.), chairman of the House subcommittee on Interior appropriations. But at the August 23 press conference Dicks said formidable budget hurdles remain in obtaining that \$100 million per year guarantee from Congress.

"We're going to go back in the remaining days of this session and try to work on authorizing legislation that must be enacted in both the House and Senate," he said. "I'm very, very confident that we can get the \$100 million per year for 10 years in appropriated funds (for core operations), but the mandatory funding would be for \$100 million (for the Centennial Challenge) and we'd have to find an offset."

When Kempthorne was asked what would happen to philanthropic pledges if Congress failed to come up with the guaranteed, matching \$100 million, he said, "I do not believe that they would evaporate but they would not materialize in the time frame we are talking about."

NPS Director Mary Bomar was confident Congress would come through. "Shame on us if we can't get this done," she said. "Our friends in Congress have introduced the legislation from both sides of the aisle and we are working with them to get the legislation that we need. And we will get it done. I truly believe that when the history is written the National Park Service Centennial Initiative will be ranked second only to the creation of the National Park Service itself."

The skeptical Democrats, such as Rahall and Grijalva, don't agree with major aspects of the administration's Centennial Challenge bill, such as the infusion of so much private money into public facilities. And the Democrats have criticized the legislation for giving the Interior Department leeway to name all projects for the \$2 billion without Congressional input.

Nevertheless, the Democrats claim to be just as eager as the administra-

tion to put more money into the Park Service. As the Senate Energy Committee staff member said, "We're conceptually all for the Park Service getting more money. We always have been. We have always supported providing the Park Service with as much money as we can afford."

In fact, both the Senate Appropriations Committee and the House have accepted the administration recommendation that Congress provide NPS an extra \$100 million per year for core operations in fiscal year 2008. The Senate committee and the House included the extra \$100 million in a fiscal 2008 Interior appropriations bill (HR 2643, S 1696.) And the House also threw in \$50 million as a down payment on the Centennial Challenge program.

Recreation industry officials pledged to cooperate in the Centennial Challenge program. Said Homer Staves, president of the Travel Industry Association of Montana, "Yellowstone National Park and Glacier National Park are the cornerstones of Montana's tourism industry and as such proper maintenance of both parks is extremely important to all of us in tourism. The Centennial Initiative proves that the private sector is willing to partner with the National Park Service to preserve, protect and make our national jewels available to all Americans and deserves the financial support of the federal government for matching funds."

Other advocates of the national parks, such as Bill Wade, former superintendent of Shenandoah National Park, would have NPS limit the amount of infrastructure work in the Centennial Challenge. Wade, chairman of the executive council of the National Park Service Retirees, said such projects create a drag on NPS core operations.

"The big problem with continuing to add brick and mortar to the National Park System is that it continues to add to the maintenance backlog and even to the operations deficit," he told *FPR*.

Wade said he would prefer that the Park Service spend more of the \$2 bil-

lion on broad programs, such as global warming. "Potentially, there are really good programs that might involve several parks in regional programs," he said. "One thing that would be helpful would be to look into the potential effects of climate change."

The Centennial Challenge list released by the Interior Department August 23 identifies \$281 million in projects for fiscal 2008 and \$88.2 million for fiscal 2009 and beyond. Additional projects would be identified in the future.

The early list would contribute \$150.9 million to ongoing projects and \$218.4 million to new projects. The big winners include a Flight 93 National Memorial in Pennsylvania (\$44.7 million), replacement of the Old Faithful visitor center in Yellowstone National Park (\$26.1 million) and replacement of the USS Arizona Memorial visitor center in Hawaii (\$24 million.) All three are ongoing projects and all three are mostly brick-and-mortar projects.

Said National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) President Tom Kiernan, "This is an impressive list of projects that demonstrates the deep and enduring commitment Americans have for our national parks." NPCA has campaigned for an additional \$800 million per year for the National Park System. Kiernan called the administration's Centennial Initiative and Challenge "important first steps" toward that goal.

On May 31 Interior published a *Vision for the Future* report that laid out five overarching goals for the initiative over the next 10 years. On August 23 Interior identified projects and programs to reach those goals, park-by-park. The report, *The Future of America's National Parks*, is available at <http://www.nps.gov/2016>.

Mount St. Helens park may be offshoot of NPS Centennial

A coalition of Washington State mayors, legislators and conservation

groups last month began a drive to add Mount St. Helens to the National Park System.

The coalition told Rep. Brian Baird (D-Wash.) that Mount St. Helens, now managed by the Forest Service, could receive help as a national park not now available to it.

"Elevating Mount St. Helens would also provide resources currently not available for a site managed by the Forest Service, such as educational programs and increased visitor protection," said the coalition that includes two mayors, four state representative and senators, and six conservation groups.

It doesn't hurt the campaign that the Bush administration has recommended an infusion of an additional \$3 billion into the National Park System over the next decade, said Sean Smith, Northwest regional director of the National Parks Conservation Association.

"Visitation is stagnant at Mount St. Helens," he said. "It doesn't get the recognition it deserves. As a national park it would bring new visitors to the park. There would be an infusion of news funds. The National Park Service has access to lots of funds. The NPS Centennial will bring in billions of dollars."

The coalition said that budget cuts in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest have reduced visitor services and protection of the volcano's natural attributes. Because of those cuts, said the August 23 letter to Baird, "the undersigned believe to properly preserve, interpret, and promote this superb national landmark, Mount St. Helens should be elevated to a national park and placed under the care of (NPS.)"

Rep. Baird has not taken a position on the request, his office said this week. And there is no time line for a decision. But Baird did hold a forum last month to listen to his constituents' recommendations.

President Reagan designated the

Mount St. Helens National Volcanic National Monument in 1982, two years after a May 18, 1980, eruption killed 57 people and eviscerated miles of forests. The monument extends over 110,000 acres.

The Gifford Pinchot National Forest now spends about \$1 million per year on Mount St. Helens, according to NPCA's Smith. As a Park Service unit he would hope Mount St. Helens would receive around \$4 million per year.

"We're looking basically to quadruple spending," he said. "The Forest Service is running everything on a shoe string. There would be 50-to-75 employees. Now there are at best 30 or so employees."

Rep. Mark Souder (R-Ind.), a major supporter of the National Park System, brought up the idea of transferring Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument to NPS in November 2005. Citing an article from the *Columbian* newspaper that discussed the idea, he said, "When I visited the monument earlier this year, the same idea occurred to me. Perhaps it is time we look into it."

Coincidentally, Baird and Souder are cosponsors of legislation (HR 1731) that would authorize the establishment of an NPS improvement fund financed by income tax check-offs.

The Bush administration position on the designation of new national parks has been simple - no. At least not until Congress finds the money to manage existing national parks. Still, the idea of adding major new parks to the system continues to bubble, often in unexpected places. Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument is one example. The designation of a \$1 billion Maine Woods National Park is another example.

For now they are not much more than ideas. The combination of the long-standing Bush administration position against adding new national park units and a federal budget crisis suggest any new park requiring expensive land acquisition is out of the question.

But the transfer of the 110,000-acre Mount St. Helens would, by definition, not require expensive land acquisition, although it would probably require additional operations appropriations from Congress.

The idea of a Maine Woods National Park and Preserve is being driven by the conservation group, RESTORE: The North Woods. RESTORE says a park is needed because timber companies that once owned 10 million acres of Maine forest are rapidly selling off their lands.

And, RESTORE says, the buyers are often developers who will place the land off-limits to hunting, fishing, hiking and snowmobiling. In a grand trade-off the old timber companies made their lands available for hunting, fishing, hiking and snowmobiling in return for a right to harvest timber with minimal state regulation.

But some sportsmen and communities adjacent to the proposed park, such as the communities of Greenville and Millinocket, trust the federal government even less to keep the lands open than developers. In fact the RESTORE group would ban hunting, trapping and snowmobiling, although the conservationists would allow those uses to continue in a preserve portion of a federal unit.

At 3.2 million acres the Maine park and preserve would be larger than Yellowstone National Park and Yosemite National Park combined. At this point no legislation has been introduced and RESTORE is asking just for a study.

Baucus may introduce bill to revise fed rec fee law

Sen. Max Baucus (D-Mont.) is expected to introduce legislation shortly that would reshape - if not repeal - a landmark law that governs entrance and user fees on federal lands.

While he is at it Baucus is also expected to try to order the Forest Service to revise an agency administrative review of recreation sites. Critics say that review is leading to the

closure of hundreds of campgrounds.

Baucus's office did not return repeated phone calls from *FPR* over the last week on the status of a bill.

Baucus reportedly has two main targets. First, is the overarching rec fee law - the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (PL 108-447) of Dec. 8, 2004. The act is known variously as FLREA and REA. Its critics call the law the RAT, as in recreation access tax.

Second, those critics, such as the Western Slope No Fee Coalition, have recommended that Baucus modify or halt the ongoing Forest Service review of recreation sites called a Recreational Facility Analysis. The critics say the review is nothing more than a pretext to close campgrounds and other recreation facilities to save money.

"Of all the plans we've seen, the Forest Service intends to close 18 percent of the facilities," said Kitty Benzar, co-founder of the Western Slope No-Fee Coalition. "And that is continuing."

Benzar said her group has reviewed 17 plans of forests that contain 2,182 developed recreation areas and the Forest Service planned to delist 398 of them as developed recreation sites. And she said the forests intended to either reduce hours or reduce activities in another 445 sites.

Last fall Baucus complained to then Region I Forester (and now Forest Service Chief) Abigail Kimbell that forests were closing campgrounds without full public input. Although the forests were going through the Recreation Facility Analysis process, they had identified campgrounds to close ahead of time, he complained.

"I'm not going to let the Forest Service make decisions about our campgrounds without full public input and scrutiny," Baucus said then. "Limiting access to our public lands for hunting, fishing and camping is something Montanans don't take lightly."

To soothe Baucus the Forest Service took several steps to insure the public was consulted and that closure decisions were transparent. On July 25 the service announced a new action plan that directed field offices that are preparing Recreation Facility Analyses to consult with the public every step of the way.

Critics of rec fees on federal lands, other than for major national parks, have also recommended that Baucus revise FLREA/REA/RAT. If Baucus doesn't attempt to repeal the act, critics at least want him to remove a provision that allocates 80 percent of fee revenues to a collecting federal land management office.

"The trouble is that provides an incentive to forests and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) offices to charge higher fees and to invite more people than the carrying capacity of the sites can stand," said Benzar. "We hope they change that. We briefed Baucus on it."

In a broad generalization FLREA/REA/RAT gives the Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) leeway to establish entrance and user fees as they have for decades. For three other federal land management agencies - BLM, the Bureau of Reclamation and the Forest Service - the law bars entrance fees and places tight restrictions on where use fees may be imposed, limiting fees mostly to developed recreation sites, such as campgrounds.

The law does not specify the amount of fees agencies may charge, leaving the agencies to adapt fees to individual circumstances.

The Bush administration's fiscal year 2008 budget request estimates the law will collect about \$244 million, with NPS providing about \$175 million, the Forest Service \$50 million, BLM \$15 million and FWS a little less than \$5 million.

Postscript on Robert Funkhouser.

As we reported in the last issue the Western Slope No-Fee Coalition lost one of its champions in August when Robert

Funkhouser, president of the organization, died of a heart attack at the age of 50. "We intend to carry on," said Benzar this week. "We can't let Robert down."

Park overflight committees to meet; no plans completed

When a National Parks Overflights Advisory Group (NPOAG) rulemaking committee meets later this month it will hear what it already knows - no national park unit has completed an overflight plan. Even though Congress ordered the Park Service and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to prepare the plans seven years ago.

The blame is widely distributed. FAA said the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks diverted attention and money away from national park issues. NPS has not received adequate appropriations from Congress. And FAA and NPS acknowledge they have sometimes been unable to resolve disagreement over regulations.

Further, for the seven national park units where work had begun or was contemplated only three appear to be proceeding: The agencies anticipate completion of draft EISs in mid-2008 for the Hawaii Volcanoes National Park and Haleakala National Park, both in Hawaii.

And Grand Canyon National Park anticipates completing a draft EIS in July of 2008. (That could also lead to work on a Lake Mead National Recreational Area plan.)

As for Grand Canyon, before FAA and NPS write an overflight plan, they are negotiating an acceptable approach with interested parties. "We're trying to figure out the needs of stakeholders and come up with a win, win, win solution," said Karen Trevino, head of the natural sounds program for NPS.

"We have had institutional issues, such as a new department director, a new Park Service director, a new assistant secretary and a new superintendent," she said. "But I think we are on the right track."

Is an overflight plan still a priority for park units? For many it may not be. At Mount Rushmore National Monument for instance the largest air tour operator this spring cancelled his request for a permit, reducing demand from 5,608 flights to 408. Similarly, in Kalaupapa National Historic Park in Hawaii and Lassen Volcanic National Park air tour operators are no longer interested in flying within tightly-regulated air space over or near the parks.

Although Congress has historically provided minimal appropriations to the NPS natural sounds program, it almost tripled the ante in fiscal 2007, increasing the appropriation from \$900 million in fiscal 2006 to \$2.4 million. Trevino said her expectation is that Congress will continue the \$2.4 million funding level in fiscal 2008.

At least one source close to national park superintendents offered another reason for a delay - the overarching demands of NPS headquarters for field input on recommended projects for a \$2 billion Centennial Challenge. This source said parks had no time or money to put into overflight plans. *(See related article page one on the Centennial Challenge.)*

With that as a background both a rulemaking advisory committee to the NPOAG and a Grand Canyon Working Group of the NPOAG will meet this month, the Grand Canyon group on September 20 in Scottsdale, Ariz., and the rulemaking subcommittee on September 25 and 26 in Fort Collins, Colo.

Congress wrote the National Parks Air Tour Management Act of (PL 106-181 of April 5, 2000), to guide the FAA and NPS in coping with ever-larger numbers of tour flights over the national parks, and in reaction to high-profile accidents. FAA says it has received applications to fly over more than 100 national parks and six tribal lands from 91 different air tour operators.

The 2000 act exempted Grand Canyon National Park and parks or tribal lands in the state of Alaska because a separate law guides them. The act also

prohibits air tours over Rocky Mountain National Park.

The 2000 act ordered FAA and NPS to work together to write air tour management plans for more than 100 park units. No plans have been completed, although the Park Service says it is working on at least seven.

In addition to preparing environmental documentation for several parks, FAA and NPS are conducting preliminary sound tests in other parks where air tours are now authorized, said Trevino.

For Grand Canyon National Park Congress passed a National Parks Overflights Act in 1987, directing FAA and NPS to work together to restore the natural quiet over the park. Since then, FAA has issued a series of regulations that restrict air tour operators to specific routes and at increased heights.

NPS and FAA are now working on an air tour management plan for Grand Canyon. The agencies intend to complete a draft EIS in July 2008, a final EIS in February 2009, and a final decision document in March/April 2009.

But that won't be the end of it. Beginning July 2009 NPS will begin work on a regulation to implement the plan and insure quiet in the park.

Bush sides with hunters, despite energy complaints

The Bush administration last month put itself on the side of sportsmen by issuing an executive order directing federal agencies to favor hunting at every turn.

The executive order may help put the administration in the good graces of sportsmen after increasing protests from the sportsmen against administration oil and gas leasing policy in the Rocky Mountains.

But for now hunting groups are counting their blessings. "It's important that the White House recognizes the

full significance of the relationship between wildlife conservation and our hunting heritage," said Ducks Unlimited (DU) Senior Group Manager for Conservation Programs Alan Wentz.

Echoed Secretary of Interior Dirk Kempthorne, "The Executive Order from the president recognizes that outdoor activities, like hunting, can provide tremendous benefits to both individuals and to wildlife conservation. Hunters connect with the environment and become stronger stewards in their efforts to conserve that environment."

But the environmental group Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) called the executive order a policy that favors a single use on the public lands, not multiple uses.

"This may amount to no more than meaningless pandering to the 'hook and bullet' vote but, if vigorously implemented, has the potential to change what happens on the ground," said Jeff Ruch, executive director of PEER. "There appears to be no shortage of hunting opportunities; perhaps the reason for the decline in hunting licenses lies elsewhere."

Executive Order 13443 of August 16 is comprehensive. Its purpose is "to facilitate the expansion and enhancement of hunting opportunities and the management of game species and their habitat."

The order also directs the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and the Sporting Conservation Council to convene a White House Conference on North American Wildlife Policy. After the conference the order gives CEQ and the council one year to come up with a recreational hunting plan that would last for 10 years.

Former Secretary of Interior Gale Norton established the Sporting Conservation Council in March 2006. The council consists of about a dozen conservation leaders who advise the Interior Department about hunting and wildlife policy.

Council members include represen-

tatives of the Boone and Crockett Club of America, the National Wild Turkey Federation, Safari Club International, the North American Grouse Partnership, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the National Rifle Association, and the Ruffed Grouse Society.

But all is not well between sportsmen and the Bush administration. An alliance of conservation groups that are similar to those that are represented on the council has opened a broad legal attack against the administration oil and gas development policy. Called the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, or TRCP, the alliance has for the last several years protested to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) the inclusion of specific parcels of land in proposed oil and gas lease sales in Wyoming, Utah, Colorado and Montana.

On August 20 TRCP upped the ante and went over BLM's head. It filed a lawsuit in federal court to block a BLM decision to allow energy development in the Atlantic Rim area of southern Wyoming. In the suit TRCP complained that BLM's oil and gas decision put at risk habitat for game, such as sage grouse, mule deer, elk and proghorn antelope.

TRCP Energy Initiative Manager Steve Belinda summed up objections of hunters and anglers to the BLM decision, "In these actions, we see a federal agency acting on behalf of only one user group, the energy industry."

FS proposes new planning rule; EIS and ESA first

The Forest Service August 24 proposed new, agency-wide planning regulations designed to overcome a judge's objections to the last set of planning rules the service issued in January 2005.

The Forest Service says the new proposal is virtually identical to the rule it is designed to replace.

However, the Forest Service still has not complied with the judge's order to prepare an EIS on the environmental

impact of the 2005 planning rule and to document the rule's impact on endangered species. A Forest Service spokesman said the agency will prepare the documents but won't complete any of them - the plan, the EIS or the endangered species evaluation - until 2008.

In a March 30 decision a federal judge ruled the Forest Service failed to document impacts of the 2005 planning rule on the environment and imperiled species. The Forest Service has now proposed a new rule with virtually no changes from the 2005 rule.

Said the Forest Service in an August 16 statement, "The rule, now referred to as the 2007 planning rule, is essentially the same as the enjoined 2005 planning rule."

The proposed reiteration of the 2005 rule has such environmental groups as the American Lands Alliance up in arms. "The 2005 Rule instituted policies that undermine wildlife, clean water, and other environmental protections by exchanging goals and standards for unenforceable 'desired conditions' and guidelines," said the alliance in a press release.

But the Forest Service argued that the rule would enable individual forests to write new plans in two-to-three years, instead of the five-to-seven years required now, at a cost saving of 30 percent. The plans are designed to last 15 years.

Individual forests would be able to move faster in the writing of plans because of fewer requirements imposed by Washington and more delegation of responsibility to the field, the Forest Service said.

In the substance of the 2005 rule the Forest Service reversed several major thrusts of Clinton administration rules of Nov. 9, 2000 (which the Bush administration suspended on May 17, 2001.) In one, the Bush rule would effectively eliminate "ecological sustainability" as the paramount goal of national forest management. Instead, the service said it would balance pro-

tection of the environment against economic and social values.

In a second issue, the Bush rule would not mandate an EIS for each forest plan and would allow individual forests to decide whether they will prepare an EIS or a simpler environmental analysis for their plans. The idea is to leave detailed environmental reviews for specific projects, such as ski resort expansions. Three, the Bush rule would ease a Clinton requirement to maintain viable populations of native wildlife species.

U.S. District Court Judge Phyllis J. Hamilton in Northern California, in the March 30 decision delaying implementation of the Bush rule, did not address the substance of the rule. Instead she focused on process and held that the Forest Service should have prepared an EIS before issuing the rule and should have assessed its impact on endangered species.

Hamilton rejected an administration argument that a separate Forest Service regulation granted the 2005 rule a categorical exclusion (CE) from preparation of an EIS or an environmental analysis. "The court finds that the USDA violated NEPA both by invoking the particular CE at issue here and because the invocation of any CE is inappropriate if the agency action may have significant effects on the environment as defined by the CEQ regulations," she said.

Congress may not complete farm bill this year

With at best a dozen weeks left in the 2007 session of the 110th Congress, Congress and the Bush administration will be hard pressed to reach agreement on a huge, multi-year farm bill (HR 2419) this year.

In one major hurdle the Bush administration threatened a veto of HR 2419 just before the House approved the bill July 27.

In another hurdle Senate Agricul-

ture Committee Tom Harkins (D-Iowa) has yet to introduce a Senate bill. Finally, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) has criticized the House for attempting to pay for the bill in part with taxes on foreign companies, and not by direct spending offset.

For all that Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns told the Tennessee Farm Bureau August 9 that he anticipates the Senate will approve a bill in a "couple of months." And he said President Bush "wants to sign a farm bill before the year is over."

If Congress fails to complete a farm bill this year, it will have precedent. Congress didn't complete the last two farm bills (in 2002 and 1996) on time. The measures weren't finished until late spring of the following years. If that happens in this Congress, the previous farm bill will govern, in this case the 2002 law.

In approving HR 2419 July 27 the House included most of the conservation programs advocated by hunters and fishermen. However, sportsmen said spending levels could have been higher and they hope to make up ground in the Senate.

The House farm bill would extend basic conservation programs for five years. It includes at least one new one - an Open Fields program that would authorize \$20 million per year to private landowners to open their properties to hunters and fishermen.

The basic programs include a conservation reserve program, a wildlife habitat improvement program, a wetlands reserve program, a grasslands reserve program, and an environmental quality incentives program.

The Bush administration has recommended significant funding in a new farm bill for conservation programs, including the merger of a number of programs under the environmental quality incentives program for spending purposes.

However, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) July 25 threatened a veto because of the tax on companies

using off-shore tax havens and criticized the bill for "failing to consolidate the (conservation) programs."

Notes

Interior approps may be guinea pig. The fiscal year 2008 appropriations bill for the Interior Department and related agencies may serve as a test case in the budget war between President Bush and Congressional Democrats. That's because some House Democrats are eager for Congress to complete an Interior bill (HR 2634) by the end of September, according to well-placed sources, before any other money bill. And President Bush says domestic appropriations bills approved by the House, such as HR 2634, far exceed his recommendations. In fact HR 2634 as passed by the House June 27 exceeds the administration request by \$2 billion. Nonetheless, it is understood staff of the appropriations subcommittees could sit down in the next two weeks to hammer out details of a bill, making way for members themselves to meet later in the month, if they so choose. The Senate Appropriations Committee approved a counterpart to HR 2634 (S 1696) June 21. The Senate committee bill exceeds the administration request by \$1.5 billion.

Feds may buy 19 inholdings. Four federal land management agencies this week said they are in the process of acquiring 19 parcels of land from a special conservation fund. Many of the 19 parcels, worth an estimated \$18 million, are located in federal conservation systems in seven western states. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) would acquire 10 of the parcels, with the Forest Service, the Park Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Service acquiring the rest. The money would be drawn from revenues generated by federal land sales under the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act of 2000 (FLTFA.) That law allows agencies to use proceeds from federal land sales to acquire conservation lands. The act is due to expire in 2010. Deputy Secretary of Interior Lynn Scarlett asked Congress to extend it. "I urge Congress to support this administration's proposal to extend the law from 2010 to 2018 so that more

Americans may benefit from these types of land acquisitions," she said. The proposed acquisitions include properties in the North Platte River Special Recreation Management Area in Wyoming and the La Cienega Area of Critical Environmental Concern in New Mexico. The agencies didn't identify the location of most of the proposed acquisitions because negotiations with private landowners are not completed.

FWS closes in on duck regs. The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) August 30 prescribed frameworks for late season migratory bird hunting that are even more generous than liberal prescriptions of recent years. States are expected to accept the FWS prescriptions and set bag limits and hunting season lengths for the fall-winter hunting season as generous, or more generous, than last year. That translates into a 60-day season in the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways, a 74-day season in the Central Flyway, and an 107-day season in the Pacific Flyway. In addition FWS would allow for an extra canvasback a day (an increase from one to two) in the Atlantic, Mississippi and Pacific Flyways. An annual survey conducted earlier this year by the United States and Canada indicates duck populations are almost 25 percent greater than a 50-year average. And FWS said the count was 14 percent above the 2006 total. FWS and the Canadian Wildlife Service conduct the duck population survey each year by sampling 1.3 million square miles of north central United States, central Canada and Alaska. They do a separate survey of Maine and north-eastern Canada.

Yellowstone posts snowmobile analyses. Yellowstone National Park said August 31 that it is making available to the public several studies that it is using to prepare snowmobile regulations for this upcoming winter season. The park has posted at its website an analysis of snowmobile and snowcoach noise, an assessment of possible avalanche hazards, an air quality study and a review of the impacts of road grooming on bison. The documents are at: <http://www.nps.gov/yell/parkmgmt/winterusetechnicaldocuments.htm>. NPS intends to complete an EIS, a final

decision and a rule this fall before the winter seasons begins on December 19. NPS would allow up to 720 machines a day in Yellowstone and 140 per day in Grand Teton National Park and the John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Memorial Parkway. NPS would also limit the number of snowcoaches in Yellowstone to 78 per day. Snowcoaches would not be required in Grand Teton and the John D. Rockefeller parkway. Lawyers for environmentalists who oppose snowmobile use and for snowmobilers who support it, are gearing up for the publication of the rule and decision. Environmentalists may attempt to obtain an injunction from a federal court to block the decision and/or rule. Then again, they say they may not.

Enviros, feds jockey over Yellowstone herds. Environmentalists and federal agencies disagreed last month about the protection of grizzly bear and bison in and around Yellowstone National Park. In one action the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) August 17 rejected a petition that it designate the bison as a "distinct population segment" under the Endangered Species Act (ESA.) FWS said a 2000 Joint Bison Management Plan of 2000 provides protection for the herd. In the other action Defenders of Wildlife August 15 petitioned the Forest Service to freeze road construction in roadless areas near Yellowstone to protect the grizzly bear. Defenders said it agreed with a FWS decision announced March 22 to delist the Yellowstone population of grizzly bears as a threatened species under the ESA. But Jamie Rappaport Clark, executive vice president of Defenders of Wildlife, said the Bush administration continues to support a national forest roadless area policy that could lead to the construction of roads that would harm grizzly bear habitat.

SNPLMA aids Tahoe, southern Nevada. The Interior Department last month allocated more than \$132 million to the Lake Tahoe area and to southern Nevada counties from a fund that raises money from the sale of public land around Las Vegas. The Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA) has provided almost \$3 billion for various

federal, state and local conservation purposes since it was enacted as PL 105-263 of Oct. 19, 1998. Secretary of Interior Dirk Kempthorne announced the allocations at an event hosted by Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.), author of SNPLMA, and that included other dignitaries, such as former President Bill Clinton. Of the \$132 million, \$45 million will be used for Lake Tahoe projects and \$87 million for projects in Clark and Lincoln Counties.

Craig ouster affects outdoors.

Under pressure from Senate Republican leaders Sen. Larry Craig (R-Idaho) last week announced he will resign at the end of the month. Craig has been a major player in park and rec policies. He served as ranking Republican on the House subcommittee on Interior appropriations. There Craig co-wrote a fiscal year 2008 Interior and related agencies appropriations bill with subcommittee chairman Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) Sens. Ted. Stevens (R-Alaska) and Thad Cochran (R-Miss.) are next in line to take over the ranking Republican slot. Craig, acting in response to a furor caused by his highly-publicized arrest in Minneapolis in June, also had served as ranking Republican on the Senate subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests. Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) may be next in line to replace Craig.

Conference calendar

SEPTEMBER

22-26. **The Wildlife Society** annual meeting in Tucson, Ariz. Contact: The Wildlife Society, 5410 Grosvenor Lane, Bethesda, MD 20814-2197. (301) 897-9770. <http://www.wildlife.org>.

25-29. **National Recreation and Park Association** congress and exposition in Indianapolis, Ind. Contact: National Recreation and Park Association, 22377 Belmont Ridge Road, Ashburn, VA 20148. (703) 858-2158. <http://www.nrpa.org>.

OCTOBER

2-6. **The National Trust for Historic Preservation** annual conference in St. Paul, Minn. Contact: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1785 Massachu-

setts Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20036. (202) 588-6100. <http://www.nationaltrust.org>.

3-5. **Watchable Wildlife** conference in Tucson, Ariz. Contact: Watchable Wildlife, Inc., PO Box 319, Marine on St. Croix, MN 55047. 651-433-4100. <http://www.watchablewildlife.org>.

3-5. **Outdoor Industry Association** rendezvous in Vancouver, WA. Contact: Outdoor Industry Association, 4909 Pearl East Circle, Suite 200, Boulder, CO 80301. (303) 444-3353. <http://www.outdoorindustry.org>.

3-6. **Land Trust Alliance** rally in Denver. Contact: Land Trust Alliance, 1331 H St., N.W., Suite 400, Washington, DC 20005-4711. (202) 638-4725. <http://www.lta.org>.

7-11. **National Scenic and Historic Trails** conference in Duluth, Minn. Contact: Gary Werner, Partnership for the National Trails System, nattrails@aol.com, 608-249-7870; Kent L. Wimmer, Florida National Scenic Trail Liaison, kwimmer@fs.fed.us, 850-523-8576, Fax 850-523-8578.

10-12. **Sportfishing Summit** at Sanibel, Island, Fla. Contact: American Sportfishing Association, 225 Reinekers Lane, Suite 420, Alexandria, VA 22314. (703) 519-9691. <http://www.asafishing.org>.

17-19. **RV Park and Campground Investment** conference in McLean, Va. Contact: David Gorin at (703) 448-6863 or go to <http://www.parkinvestmentconference.com>.

NOVEMBER

7-8. **Western Governors' Association** winter meeting in Tucson, Ariz. Contact: Western Governors' Association, 1515 Cleveland Place, Suite 200, Denver, CO 80202-5114. (303) 623-9378. <http://www.westgov.org>.

11-14. **Council of State Governments** state trends forum in Oklahoma City, Okla. Contact: Council of State Governments, P.O. Box 11910, Lexington, KY 40578. (859) 244-8103. www.csg.org.