

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

Background Brief

H.R. 3176 Kealia Pond National Wildlife Refuge

SUMMARY:

This legislation would direct the Secretary of the Interior to study ways of restoring the natural wetland conditions in Kealia Pond National Wildlife Refuge.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS:

H.R. 3176 directs the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study on restoring the natural wetland conditions of the Kealia [KAY-AH-LEE-AH] Pond National Wildlife Refuge on the Island of Maui, Hawaii. The bill authorizes \$250,000 for a study to be carried out by the United States Geological Survey (USGS). The refuge was established in 1992 to provide nearly 700 acres of habitat for migratory waterfowl and shorebirds, particularly for three endangered Hawaiian birds. Kealia Pond is the central feature of the refuge. Water levels vary drastically in the pond. In the winter, the pond may cover up to 400 acres to a depth of several feet. In the summer dry season, the pond may be no more than a few inches deep covering less than 50 acres. The pond contains brackish water and is periodically flooded by seawater. Seasonal fluctuations in the pond acreage are important for maintaining biological diversity at the refuge. However, in recent years, the fluctuations in the refuge have been so severe that the wetland areas have dried up completely, resulting in fish kills and the loss of aquatic habitat. In other years, a nonnative insect -- the spotted wing midge (a small fly) -- hatches in numbers so great that it is a nuisance for neighboring landowners and towns. The cause of these fluctuations has been attributed to changes in the watershed surrounding the refuge. The local citizens have criticized the Fish and Wildlife Service for not acting to remedy the unacceptable midge, blowing dust, and fish die-off problems that are affecting neighboring landowners and tourists. H.R. 3176 attempts to provide the necessary funds to begin to address these serious problems.

SUBCOMMITTEE ACTION:

The Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans held a hearing on H.R. 3176 on March 30, 2000.

ADMINISTRATION POSITION:

The Fish and Wildlife Service testified in support of the bill, and recommended an amendment to extend the study period.

AMENDMENTS:

None are expected.

STAFF CONTACT:

Jeff Ripp 6-0200.

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