

Congressional Research Service Environmental Reports Online: A Service of the National Library for the Environment

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Congressional Research Service (CRS) reports provide a major link between the scientific and public policy aspects of critical environmental issues. The Committee for the National Institute for the Environment provides free, full-text, online access to the CRS reports dealing with environmental quality, natural resources, and general environmental issues.

The Committee for National Institute for the Environment (CNIE) <http://www.cnie.org/> began providing, for the first time ever, free online full-text access to technical reports produced by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) in 1996. The CRS reports were provided from the CNIE's National Library for the Environment (NLE) Web site <http://www.cnie.org/nle/>.

It was the desire by CNIE to identify a unique, major environmental information resource that was not readily available to the environmental research and policy communities (nor the public at-large), and provide free, direct access to that resource. Making these CRS environmental reports freely available was the first information component provided through the newly created NLE Web site, and serves as an example of the type of information resource that can be provided by this proposed library gateway.

The Congressional Research Service (CRS) is the public policy research program of the Library of Congress. CRS provides comprehensive and reliable analysis, research, and information services that are timely, objective, nonpartisan, and confidential. CRS was created by an Act of Congress in 1914 as the Legislative Reference Service. It was renamed by the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970, which expanded CRS's mandate to serve the needs of both Houses of Congress, especially service to its committees. CRS works exclusively and directly for all Members and committees of the Congress. Today CRS provides a full range of analytical and evaluative research and information services to both Members and committees of Congress.

CRS reports and documents undergo review for accuracy and objectivity

and contain nontechnical information that can be very useful to people interested in environmental and natural resource policy issues. CRS reports provide thorough and concise overview of the scientific and technical aspects of the reports' topics. These overviews are then woven into a more detailed analysis of the public-policy aspects related to the topics, and are used by congressional members and members' and committees' staff.

The Environment and Natural Resources Policy Division (ENRPD) carry out the CRS environmental efforts. ENRPD provides support in four core and interrelated areas: environmental protection, oceans and natural resources management, agricultural policy, and energy policy. Subject specialists in each area provide expertise on research results and programs, existing statutes, and legislative proposals. The CRS Science, Technology, and Medicine Division may also deal with environmental issues, such as those related to public and environmental health and global change issues. The division findings are summarized in the CRS reports and provide an assessment with regard to the topic's domestic and international implications. In many cases, CRS reports delve into the more complex and often controversial aspects of environmental, ecological, conservation, and natural resources issues.

Despite their potential value to a broad audience, CRS does not itself provide these documents to the general public. CRS provides their reports only to members of Congress and their staff. CRS documents are prepared specifically for Congress and are clearly in the public domain. However, the reports are not distributed to the public at-large upon request. Public access to CRS reports is typically facilitated by individual requests to one's Senator or Representative or by purchase from commercial distributors.

CNIE obtains copies of the CRS reports, converts them to an Internet-compatible format, and places them online. Table 1 shows the topical coverage of the [CRS environmental reports](#) provided by CNIE. Subject coverage provided by the NLE initiative is both broad and specific. Examination of the online contents of these categories reveals the level of specificity with which each category is treated.

Table 1. Topical Coverage of CRS Environmental Reports Provided in Full-Text Formats by the National Library for the Environment (NLE)

A. General and Broadly Defined Environmental Topics

Agency Profiles
Information Sources
International Issues
Legislation and Legislative Initiatives
Population
Public Lands
Regulatory Reform
Risk Assessment
Science and Technology
Trade, Taxes, and Economics
Transportation

B. Natural Resources

Agriculture and Grazing
Biodiversity
Energy
Forestry
Marine
Mining
Natural Resources (General Aspects)
Wetlands and Aquatic Resources

C. Environmental Quality

Air Climate
Pesticides
Pollution (General Aspects)
Stratospheric Ozone
Waste Management
Water Quality

As new or updated CRS reports related to environmental or resource issues become available, CNIE adds them to the National Library for the Environment Web site. Table 2 shows the contents of a single "Newly-added" inventory of CRS reports. This typical update demonstrates the wide variety of environmental reports produced by CRS and made publicly available via the Internet by the NLE.

Table 2. New and Updated Reports Added to the NLE inventory in April 1998

Fishery, Aquaculture and Marine Mammal Legislation in the 105th Congress (4/20/98 ~19p.)

Wetlands Issues in the 105th Congress (4/20/98 ~10p.)
The Research and Experimentation Tax Credit (4/17/98 ~11p.)
Global Climate Change (4/17/98 ~13p.)
Federal Regulatory Reform: An Overview (4/16/98 ~15p.)
Maritime Economic Regulation and the 105th Congress (4/16/98
~9p.)
The Law of the Sea Convention and U.S. Policy (4/15/98 ~12p.)
Superfund: A Brief Comparison of the Chairmen's Bills (4/13/98
~11p.)
Magnetic Fusion: The DOE Fusion Energy Sciences Program
(4/13/98 ~15p.)
Immigration Legislation and Issues in the 105th Congress
(4/10/98 ~14p.)
Water Quality: Implementing the Clean Water Act (4/9/98 ~14p.)
Environmental Protection Legislation in the 105th Congress
(4/8/98 ~10p.)
The Natural Resources and Environment Function in the FY1999
Budget: A Description of Programs and Funding (4/6/98 ~6p.)
Air Quality and Transportation Enhancement Provisions in the
Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency (4/3/98 ~6p.)
Science, Technology, and Medicine: Issues Facing the 105th
Congress, First Session (4/3/98~6p.)
The Budget For Fiscal Year 1998 (4/2/98 ~16p.)
Superfund Reauthorization Issues in the 105th Congress (4/2/98
~10p.)
Agricultural Research, Education, and Extension Issues (4/1/98
~15p.)
Agricultural Issues in the 105th Congress (3/31/98 ~16p.)
Food Safety Issues in the 105th Congress (3/30/98 ~22p.)
The Strategic Petroleum Reserve (3/30/98 ~11p.)
The Budget for Fiscal Year 1999 (3/27/98 ~14p.)
Cooperative R&D: Federal Efforts to Promote Industrial
Competitiveness (3/27/98 ~10p.)
Research and Development: Priority Setting and Consolidation in
Science Budgeting (3/27/98 ~7p.)
Forest Health (3/27/98 ~4p.)
Research and Development Funding: Fiscal Year 1999 (3/26/98
~17p.)
Tobacco-Related Programs and Activities of the U.S. Department of
Agriculture: Operation & Cost (3/19/98 ~6 p.)
The Role of Risk Analysis and Risk Management in Environmental
Protection (3/19/98 ~13p.)
Automobile and Light Truck Fuel Economy: Is CAFE Up to
Standards? (3/19/98 ~8pe.)

Federalism Legislation in the 105th Congress (3/18/98 ~16p.)
Naturalization Trends, Issues, and Legislation (3/17/98 ~11p.)
Agricultural Export and Food Aid Programs (3/9/98 ~13p.)
The 1872 Mining Law: Time for Reform? (3/4/98 ~12p.)
Environmental Reauthorization and Regulatory Reform: from the
104th Congress to the 105th (2/10/98 ~5p.)
Summary & Comparison of the Major Agricultural Provisions of the
Tobacco Settlement Policy Proposals (2/5/98 ~3p.)
Global Climate Change Treaty: Negotiations and Related Issues
(11/21/97 ~8p.)
Highway Fund Sanctions for Clean Air Act Violations (10/22/97
~5p.)

The Committee for the National Institute for the Environment (CNIE) has proposed the establishment of a National Institute for the Environment (NIE). The mission of the NIE is to improve the scientific basis for making decisions on environmental issues. The proper flow of information links science to decisions. Thus, a major component of the NIE is a National Library for the Environment (NLE). A committee of interested information specialists has worked over the past two years to develop this framework for the NLE. In general, discussions have centered on the need for a library somewhat analogous to the National Library of Medicine (NLM). The NLE will not be a large centralized collection of environmental information, but instead will electronically link users to major collections and centers of expertise in a network that can be accessed through a telephone, fax or computer. The NLE will provide leadership in building and serving the nation's environmental information infrastructure.

The [Electronic Green Journal](#) has provided several articles about the proposed NLE:

[The National Library for the Environment - An Update \(December 1996, No. 6\)](#)

[The National Library for the Environment - An Update \(April 1995, Vol. 2, no. 1\)](#)

For additional information about the Congressional Research Service contact:

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