

BETTER LIVING AND LAND BEAUTIFICATION THROUGH CONSERVATION

I welcome this opportunity to join you. I am deeply concerned about your problems. I want to be closely associated with your progress and your dreams for the future. There is the personal pleasure of meeting old friends again. And there is the professional pleasure of discussing soil and water conservation with leaders in the field. I always carry away from these meetings some new ideas and fresh viewpoints.

Words are the legitimate weapons of civilized man facing the issues of his time. Your podium, as I see it, provides for a timely discussion of vital issues.

This is the time to speak for the unity of the countryside in all its values and uses. It is the time to advocate the protection and development of our resources as a whole, in accordance with their capabilities and the goals of the community. It is a time to speak for action that will meet the oncoming demands of a growing Nation. It is a time to forestall premature and disorderly commitments of resource use.

We find ourselves in an age demanding instant satisfaction of ill-considered demands--often hypocritically made in the name of progress and society. Therefore, I believe it is a time to come forward, to be heard. It is a time to assist conservation district governing boards to assume fully **their responsibilities of leadership in soil, in water, and in related conservation work.**

In a steel mill a great bar of steel was suspended vertically by a delicate chain. Nearby a bottle cork was suspended by a silk thread. Could the small cork held only by a fragile thread set the steel bar into motion? The cork was swung gently against the steel bar. The bar remained motionless. But this was repeated again and again. In ten minutes the bar gave some evidence of feeling uncomfortable, and a "nervous chill" ran over it. Then ten minutes later the chill was followed by a tremor of vibration. At the end of an hour the great bar was swinging like a pendulum in concert with the tiny cork.

How many "potential" leaders "give up the ghost" and desert their goal because they stopped just before a "nervous chill" ran over their bar of steel?

There is an old Greek proverb that says, "Before you score, you must have a goal." Our goal is that the Nation's future lies in rural America. The vast countryside can offer relief from the teeming cities and their congested suburbs--provide ample land and water to serve the expanding needs of commerce and industry, and broad acres on which to build garden communities for tomorrow's generations.

Address by Norman A. Berg, Deputy Administrator for Field Services, Soil Conservation Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, at the Annual Conference of the South Dakota Chapter, Soil Conservation Society of America, October 27, 1966, Aberdeen, South Dakota.

If we act in time with wisdom!

We have become, in my lifetime, a nation of city-dwellers. Each day and each year, more and still more Americans concentrate in the towns, cities, and suburbs. To them life naturally centers where they work, make their homes--raise their families. And from these centers of population emerge a pattern of mutual interests, problems, and understanding. A kinship is growing up among these people of Albuquerque and Atlanta, of Baltimore and Boston, of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, of Memphis and Minneapolis.

This kinship derives from such typically metropolitan concerns as transportation, housing, crime, schools, and recreation.

What then happens to the countryside? Increasingly, it becomes an obstacle in time and space--merely landscape separating cities. It is to many--far too many--a "land in between" to be crossed as quickly as possible via superhighways, fast trains or faster planes. Among this new and urban oriented generation, there is danger that the land in between will be regarded increasingly as just "undeveloped" space.

The American countryside--that expanse of nature separating our cities and towns and rural hamlets--represents the land we have left to grow in, play in, and build on the American dream.

That is all we have; and when divided and divided again for the multiple needs of a Nation growing rapidly in population, in urban development, in highway mileage, in an array of man-oriented uses alien to nature, this natural landscape that once seemed so limitless shrinks before us at every turn--and we are made aware of the challenging crisis in the countryside.

J. B. Jackson, writing in the magazine "Landscape" said, "By now most of us have grown used to the idea that the urban world we live in is going on changing, and not necessarily for the better. We know what is in store: more tall buildings, more vacant downtown lots, more expressways and subdivisions and neon signs. . .

"Endurance as well as courage is needed if we are to keep on riding the wave of the future. Where do they come from? From many sources; among them the firm belief, passed on from generation to generation, that there is and always will be a part of the world remote from the city that we can retreat to and find ourselves. Here is where the ancient relationship between man and nature survives intact. The weekend trip, the summer vacation, the retirement years are set aside for the renewing of this bond--except that some distraction usually interferes.

"The more the city expands and absorbs us, the firmer the belief in a rural paradise becomes. Our ties with the countryside . . . even the annual return to the family farm, a tradition still alive a generation ago, has now all but vanished. Without personal involvement we are in the dark as to what is happening on the farm--any farm. And the result is a popular image of rural America which bears a decreasing resemblance to reality.

We see it as a pleasant, drowsy region where old fashioned people are engaged in a kind of work less essential and less profitable with every passing year, but where life has an elemental simplicity and truth. On a more sophisticated (though no better informed) level the countryside is seen as a vast wildlife preserve resounding with birdsong, threaded by sparkling streams--ideal for recreation and something environmental designers like to label 'open space'. However we look at it, this hinterland is held to be the great antidote, spiritual as well as physical, to the evils of the city. As long as it survives unchanged we ourselves can hope to survive; urban existence is a kind of purgatory.

"It so happens that the American rural landscape is composed not only of forests and lakes and mountains, but of farms and feedlots and irrigation ditches and orchards and tractor agencies and rangeland. It is a place of work, and because it is a place of work, hard and not always rewarding, it is at present undergoing a revolution in its way as radical as the revolution in the urban environment. Moreover this revolution is taking place entirely without help from environmental designers. No one, outside of a handful of government agencies from the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior, is trying to direct it and give it form. Thus while we keep on counting the days until we can return to the family homestead, the homestead itself has vanished and along with it much of the 19th Century landscape. Quite a different rural America is emerging, and while there are still great changes in store it is not too soon to discern its rough outline. What does it look like? How does it differ from the one we used to know and still dream about?

"It can be briefly described: It has far fewer people living in it, its work is largely mechanized, and it is evolving its own attitude toward the environment.

"Half a century ago there were thirty-two million Americans living on farms. Today there are less than thirteen million, and in another twenty years there will probably be not many more than ten million. An obvious result of this decline is an increase in the number of abandoned farms. In the last fifteen years more than half of these have been in the East--particularly in the Southeast. Americans have long been familiar with the sight of deserted farmsteads of country roads; barns and houses sagging, fields choked by a second growth of trees, lanes overgrown. These have become part of our rural picturesqueness. Abandonment of this sort is on the increase; all that prevents the complete desertion of many older countrysides is the wave of exurbanites and vacationists and retired people who are willing to restore old houses in places which either have esthetic appeal or the appeal of proximity of some city.

"Well it is pleasant to have the woods back again, even though it usually means that some unlucky farmer has had to give up the fight to make a living on his own. But it is a grievous mistake to assume that every abandoned farm automatically increases the area of forest and wildland. That is an illusion common in the East, where the cult of the tree reaches almost pagan proportions. West of Missouri, roughly speaking, abandoned farmland does not revert to forest; it reverts to rangeland, 'open space'

or even desert, a prey to erosion and blowing soil. If the thousands of acres withdrawn and scheduled for withdrawal in the middle regions of America are ever to serve any future use--whether as wildlands or recreation tracts or even farming--they will have to have expensive care."

The crisis we face in the countryside is a crisis of quality in a Nation whose people demand quality in the marketplace but have failed to provide for it in the natural environment.

It is a crisis of quantity in a land whose rich natural endowment has been vandalized to a degree of grave proportions.

But most of all it is a crisis of people--the tragic loss of young minds and spirits, of evolving skills and talents.

The recognition of this crisis in the countryside has given birth to a new concept of conservation.

The concept of new conservation says that as populations grow and people live in greater and greater concentrations, we must consider the total environment and not just those values that can be measured in dollars and cents.

When we consider the total environment, we must take account of what conservationists call the "vulnerable" values. These values--including wildlife, the beauty of nature, space for growing and living, pollution control, and recreation--are especially vulnerable because it is hard to measure them in dollars and cents.

We are seeing a definite blossoming of concern for such benefits--benefits that are essential if we are to enjoy an environment of real quality. The President has dramatized the importance of these values in his call for a Great Society. The First Lady has directed our attention especially to the importance of beauty in the environment. And throughout the Nation there is a growing feeling that our generation has a special responsibility, in a world of change, to protect the qualities of environment that have enduring value in our civilization.

Along with the new concept has come an awakening--a greater awareness--in conservation today.

Conservation has moved from the province of the few to the embrace of millions. This is as it should be. Yet we cannot help asking, with considerable anxiety, is the awakening sufficient? Is the awareness adequate?

Conservation of America's natural resources must have new and challenging meaning for all of our citizens.

Today we must be concerned with building and renewing and developing as well as preserving and protecting the irreplaceable lands and waters upon which a great Nation depends for its sustenance and its growth.

It is a crisis of quantity in a land whose rich natural endowment has been vandalized to a degree of grave proportions.

But most of all it is a crisis of people--the tragic loss of young minds and spirits, of evolving skills and talents.

Biologist-philosopher, Rene Dubos said, a few weeks ago, "One of the most painful dilemmas of our times is that we still regard nature as the ultimate source of beauty and other fundamental blessings, yet exploit it for the sake of wealth and power. We place the highest qualities of nature and its beauty in the parts of it that are not yet economically useful, but paradoxically accept that economic profits justify the creation of ugliness. The sense of guilt comes from the knowledge that it is crudely hypocritical to praise the values of wilderness, while converting the land into a gigantic dump. The sense of collective guilt in the United States comes in large part from the awareness that the immense and romantically exciting grandeur of the primeval wilderness is rapidly giving way to an immense ugliness. Brush is overgrowing mountain slopes that were once covered with majestic forests; industrial sewers are sterilizing streams that used to team with game fish, air pollutants generate opaque and irritating smogs that dull even the most brilliant skies. The price of the power symbolized by super highways and giant factories is a desecration of all aspects of nature."

This is the new conservation which assures future Americans of a bountiful country not only in the produce of the fields but also in the majesty of great forests, the broad sweep of well-managed landscapes, the reservations of parks and playgrounds to renourish the spirit of a dynamic people.

The new conservation must assure the flow of clean waters to quench the thirst of a growing population. But it must also satisfy the human longing for a quiet stream, allow the humbling experience of standing on the banks of a great unspoiled river, give the satisfaction of knowing that the lakes and waterways are a safe and proper habitat for the fish and the wildlife that are a benefit and a pleasure to man.

For now we realize that we must nourish not only the body but the spirit as well.

Resource conservation once meant preservation against heedless exploitation. It was a slowing-down process in order to keep more of our natural resources for a longer time. This remains a basic aim today, but we know that this is not enough. The new conservation must build and develop, drawing upon nature to give its full measure to the purpose of creation.

What will this mean now--and in the future-- to members of the SCSA? Frankly, we don't know yet. But we have some ideas. In the past, many have considered soil, water, and related resources basically in terms of agriculture and farming. These remain of the utmost importance. But today people look to resource development to fulfill more basic needs--to create more jobs and increase their economic opportunities and improve their environment so beauty can be a daily experience.

We in the Soil Conservation Service believe that we have kept abreast of new methods and alert to new ways of doing old jobs. But at the same time, we have not forgotten the hard-learned fundamentals that determine the success or failure of soil and water conservation.

The term "soil conservation" has come to signify those combinations of skills and practices needed to develop and sustain the productivity of each kind of soil for whatever purpose it is used--whether that use is for crops, for forest, for recreation, or for housing.

Soil conservation means choosing the appropriate use for each piece of land as well as protecting and improving the land after the use has been chosen.

Soil conservation means the careful planning and treatment of entire operating units be they farms or ranches or entire watersheds.

Every community in every region of the country contains land units needing some adjustment in use in order to better serve economic and social needs, but in many instances these are clustered and associated with the quality of the resources as it affects present use. Good examples are found in Appalachia, the Northern Lake States, the Ozarks and parts of the South. These are merely the better known areas of this kind but do not by any means contain all such situations. The condition is common to many other

areas where historic farming or ranching practices simply cannot compete with modern efficiency of agricultural production on the better lands. In many of these same areas we find excellent to superlative natural characteristics that could be classed as desirable amenities for living. Mountains, streams, scenery, and climate are the more important of these. Among the several limitations governing their use and enjoyment by people are proximity to non-farm populations, accessibility and lack of man-made facilities for comfort and pleasure.

The development of outdoor recreation, tourism and vacationing to, and within, such areas offers a vast opportunity. ORRRC studies and other findings strongly indicate an unmet demand for these activities. Certain of these areas are also attractive for development of second homes or weekend cottages or retirement settlements. Land and water amenities plus climate and geographic location make such developments a real possibility. These are areas where natural resources may be highly conducive to both public and private outdoor recreation development and use, but often they are areas of present unemployment, underemployment, and low incomes. They are areas where, with appropriate resource development and enterprise management, part-time farming and the provision of recreation facilities and services could become desirable companions.

Soil conservation then means working out land use and treatment in full recognition of the essential relationships between soil, water, plants, animals, and--yes--man himself.

The greatest danger, as conservation technology advances, is that we may fail to involve the human element. Conservation must be people-centered. It must not only be carried out for people. It must be carried out by people.

To be fully effective, conservation decisions must always be made by the people who will be responsible for carrying them out. Conservation will never be accomplished by edict. Government can, and must, be an active partner, but should do for people only what they cannot do for themselves.

Conservation will move forward if it is viewed and accepted by landowners and operators as a means of making more efficient use of their soils, and better management of water with higher yields per acre or hectare, with lower costs per ton, with better net income for the farmer or rancher.

It will go forward if city people are made partners, if they are helped to see their stake in soil and water resources, and if they are invited to work with rural people in soil and water conservation endeavors.

We in SCS are now in our fourth decade of carrying out the mandate of the 74th Congress-- that passed P. L. 74-46, naming the Soil Conservation Service and giving it statutory authority. National policy was thereby enacted which stated, "It is hereby recognized that the wastage of soil and water resources on the farms, grazing and forest lands of the Nation, resulting from soil erosion, is a menace to the national welfare."

The future of our resources resides in the continued wise application of such proven Federal legislation. Now we also have the small watershed act which provides for dams and land treatment measures to prevent floods and impound water for recreational, municipal, industrial, agricultural, and wildlife needs, and the Great Plains Conservation Program which is responsible for restoring to original use the vast rangelands in the Great Plains States.

The potential of our lands and waters is bound to such legislation as the Resource Conservation and Development program, the Water Pollution Control Act, Public Works and Economic Development Act, and Rural Water and Sanitation Facilities Act, among many other recent Acts of an interested and far-seeing Congress.

Over thirty years ago the dust blew out of the plains that once had grown lush grasses, and this irreplaceable topsoil was carried to the eastern States and out to sea. Today, most of the great land again is rich grazing country.

The hard years of the Dust Bowl era led us to understand how to use our priceless land and water resources wisely, just as today the mounting pressures for clean water and useable land emphasize the need to make our basic natural resources serve their highest possible purpose for the greater benefit of all the people now and in future years.

Nature must often be guarded against itself.

Our conservationists have learned to tame the wild streams, save the irreplaceable topsoil from washing off the land, improve the woodlands for better growth and greater beauty, and build the most efficient agricultural economy ever known to man.

Now we must come of age in America as resource conservationists.

In the broad area of resource conservation, we have discovered the key to an abundant and purposeful and satisfying life. Indeed, we have yet to perfect our advance so that it reaches out to every American and into every corner of the land, but we are moving resolutely in that direction.

We may look with confidence and enthusiasm on the task that lies ahead. We see across the Nation the product of a tradition that can only be strengthened with time.

The accomplishments of our conservationists attest to the imagination and determination of agricultural leaders in their home counties; to the understanding and cooperation of thousands of land owners and operators in every part of the country; to far-sighted State and national government which over the years has promoted and supported land and water resource conservation.

Conservation begins on the land, on each individual acre. As a Nation, we have developed our resource conservation policies on the firm basis of essential involvement at the local level, for we are a people wedded to the concept of individual initiative and grass-roots participation

in the public affairs that concern us.

But we must understand, too, that our State and Federal governments also represent the interests of the individual and the local community. And we have wisely and properly drawn upon State and Federal resources to support the local effort. We have done this in the National interest because the summation of local interest is national interest. That is how we have advanced for more than a quarter of a century in the conservation and development of the Nation's lands and waters.

We are increasingly concerned as a people with eliminating stream pollution increasing water supply, assuring sound land use, and conserving beauty in the landscape.

This trend to urban living described earlier has caused a revolution in land use--not only in the urban centers and in their immediate surroundings, but in the countryside that must serve the greater population more broadly and intensely than in the past. The new conservation is a town and country outlook.

The urban explosion coincides with the new technology that has brought increased efficiency to agricultural production. We still have more land for purposes other than crop production, and we have learned to make the land and waters serve multiple uses.

We can do those things in the new conservation that have been born of local initiative and cooperation, and advanced by the dedication and wise efforts of an enlightened state and national government.

Let us not, however, erroneously assume that all is now well with the land.

There remains a serious backlog of conservation projects to be initiated and accomplished. There are dams to be built and land measures to be applied. There are studies of soil types to be made so that we may be assured of building our country on a sound footing. There are rivers and streams to be protected against siltation and cleansed of pollution. There are lakes to be established and others to be restored. There are ranges and forests to be protected against heedless destruction and wildlife benefits must be recognized, improved and made more useful for public and private benefit.

There remains a need for more professional conservationists to guide the Nation's conservation work. And there is need of greater financial support at all levels to extend the benefits of this effort throughout all of the land. There is greater need than ever for a strong SCSA.

Today, with rising demands upon the undeveloped acres of this Nation, the American people must support determined, concerted action to preserve the values that remain, to restore those desired values which have vanished through waste, thoughtlessness, and selfish design, and to develop for the benefit of all the people the great natural resources that have been allotted to this fortunate land.

We must work even harder to prevent the disastrous floods that still plague many of our river valleys--the tragic wash of good soil into the river beds and down to sea--the mutilation of the landscape that destroys the natural beauty that is meant for all to enjoy.

In Chicago a year ago Secretary Freeman said,

"No longer can there be separate compartments in the conservation world--no compartment for soil conservation apart from beauty preservation, no longer a wall between wildlife protection and agricultural conservation, no longer a forestry objective separate from the interests of the grasslands, no longer a policy question as to multiple use of water resources and, finally, no more a disunity between city and open country. . . ."

"The true conservationist of today sees the union of resources and values on which humanity depends, and he would preserve that union! He sees the world of conservation as one world. . . ."

"Cooperation at the local, State and Federal levels has brought us a good piece along the road to sound conservation. Now we must build on that cooperative effort, and multiply it by heaping success on success as we have been privileged to do in the past.

"To succeed in this mission we will have to carry the word far and wide that conservation--the wise use and development of our environment in the countryside and the city--is everybody's business. . .

". . . It is everybody's problem when greedy or heedless people waste our land, our forests, our fish, our wildlife--dump raw sewage into our streams--pollute the very air we breathe.

"Let the word go forth that America as a whole has a stake in the proper use of soil whether privately or publicly owned. . .

--has a stake in fish, game, and other wildlife on private as well as public preserves. . .

--has an interest in parks, playgrounds, and other recreational areas in private or public hands. . .

--is interested in natural beauty in our cities, along rural roads, beside a creek or mighty river. . .

--is increasingly interested in having clean water, adequate water, but not floods.

"The new concept of conservation cannot be achieved by government--can be achieved only by people--people like you. Government can help--government must help--government in all areas--local, State, and National.

We must end the deep poverty that afflicts some of rural America. We must breach the urban wall that seals off countless city youth from the richness of their heritage in the open countryside.

We are committed as conservators of the great American estate to honor the blessings of a generous Providence, to respect the gifts of a bountiful nature, to provide for the future as we draw upon the resources that are available for our use and that are committed to our care. We, as a Nation, have reached the first stage--that of the "nervous chill" experienced by the steel bar.

With continued dedication to the task of conserving our vital land and water resources we will insure the future prosperity of this great Nation. The full swing of the pendulum. To this challenging and rewarding task your national government is dedicated. Working together we can achieve our loftiest goals.

We enjoy a period of grace--even now--before the remaining vestiges of nature unspoiled by man are erased. We still have time to protect, restore, and develop the lands and waters of rural America--if we act with resolve and dispatch.

We can--and must--return to an alliance with nature. It is simply a matter of desire, of discipline, and of dedication.