

## CONSERVATION CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

The story is told about a psychologist who placed two small boys in two different rooms for a period of five hours. The first was surrounded with all the toys and games imaginable. The other was placed in a room with only a small pile of horse manure. At the end of the period each was asked how he felt. The one stoically said, "The games were dull. The mechanical toys all did the same thing over and over." The other said enthusiastically, "There has to be a pony around here someplace, and I'll find him."

This story illustrates one of the great struggles of life: optimism versus pessimism. There are some who are in this world but do not become involved in it. They look at their surroundings and bemoan their existence. They see sickness, suffering, anxiety, wars, and riots. Their personal lives are fraught with financial problems, rebellious children, long working hours, sickness, atomic weapons, and even competition for friends. And then they turn their backs on life and attempt to escape, wishing they were hermits in a desolate place.

What would have happened to America if Columbus had assumed a defeatist attitude? Where would we be if Lincoln would have been content simply to collect his salary as President? Where would the world be had Winston Churchill been satisfied to merely represent his district in the House of Commons? Where would we be if the thousand nameless who have quietly

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Address by Norman A. Berg, Deputy Administrator for Field Services, Soil Conservation Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, at the Annual Meeting of the New York Soil and Water Conservation Districts Association, Utica Hotel, Utica, New York, December 2, 1965

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Yes, there have always been, and always will be, problems, disillusionments, disappointments, and failures. But the other side of the coin is this. I say this is the most vibrant, exciting, and challenging period in all history!

We live in a new kind of world. It is today--and is rapidly becoming--a world of urban centers, of technological monsters, of political suspense, of population pressure, of competition for space. It is a world in which knowledge, research, and science have come into their own. Nine out of ten of the men who might ever have identified themselves as scientists are alive and practicing today.

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We have in this century made London closer than Washington, D. C., was in the last one. We have brought the farthest man in the world within the range of a whispered word. We are almost at a point where we can read into a man's mind and extract that which he would never express voluntarily. We have brought the highest leaders of distant nations into daily and momentary confrontation. We have made the genes of the world's finest livestock available in the lowliest stables in the farthest corners of the land. Three out of five of the men in the world today are living in the first generation of any genuine quality of political independence.

Truly, there was never a world like this! Suddenly it's tomorrow! What answers do we give as a God loving, God serving people in a world like this?

We as conservationists are now in our fourth decade of carrying out the mandate of the 74th Congress--that passed P. L. 74-46 creating the Soil Conservation Service.

A method--the soil conservation district--was devised in 1937 by which we could say to farmers and ranchers and others, "You must take the initiative. You must decide. You must want to do something about erosion. You must do the planning and the operating, the policy thinking, and the acting."

More than a quarter century of experience is proof that America has delegated to the local landowner, the local organization, the power of self-government in conservation.

Has it been successful? Has this faith been justified?

There is no question that Conservation Districts have made remarkable progress in achieving physical conservation objectives. But they have made an even greater contribution. They have brought into being a throng of informed and concerned people who have given freely of their time and efforts to learn about their resource problems and to help make the decisions needed to solve them. Districts have by their actions exemplified the principles of democracy and Federal-State-local cooperation. They have achieved great things in the American tradition. They have proven again that democratic government controlled by the people themselves liberates the powers of the

people into creative growth and plenty. But success and fame are fleeting. What would have been sufficient for yesterday is apt to be too little and too late for tomorrow.

The trends for conservationists are fairly easy to discern. Our Nation is facing the prospect of unlimited demands on its limited resources. All the evidence of our times supports a forecast of ever increasing needs for intensive management of its limited resources. This includes their planning, development, use, and conservation.

There can be no turning back--change and its effects press heavily upon us. New problems roll over the horizon in increasingly complex numbers. Districts see the need for better and more representative governing boards. Planning for "conservation" by farms, <sup>non-farms</sup> ~~ranches~~, and communities must be accelerated--putting the plans into operation must be speeded up. A proper role must be carved out for conservation districts in watershed and river basin work in rural and non-rural areas, in community development, in recreation areas, in Appalachia, in land use adjustment, and in regional planning and development.

The expansion of urban and suburban areas, now tending toward great metropolitan regions, is another dramatic instance of change with real meaning for conservationists. Partly it is a matter of intelligent, planned transfer of land from agriculture, grazing, forestry, and other uses into living space.

On many of these matters I feel that we may no longer have a black-and-white kind of decision. The kind of complexity that we're going to face in

the future suggests no more black than white, nor vice versa. We're going to have to begin choosing from several colors of gray.

How do we as a Nation go about making such decisions?

What we do too often is make the decision by answering much less demanding questions. Already, we're making many of these decisions by default. My wife and I were allowed to purchase a plot of ground with a house on it a few years ago. The only question asked was, "Do you have the money?"

At that moment, a decision was made about population level, because as long as my home and trees are on that plot, it cannot be used for producing food. The same is true every time a super highway is built; a decision is made about future population level. At the moment, somewhere between three and five percent of the arable land in this country is covered by asphalt and concrete. That's an area the size of Georgia. And so decisions are being made, but they're being made by default. It is important for us to realize that we will answer not the big question of why we're here, but rather, much more immediate questions.

We think we live in three eras of time--past, present, and future. This is not true. The present is merely a fraction of a second. None of us is emotionally capable of operating with fractions of seconds in our daily routine. This leaves us two eras of time--past and future. In all creation, everything is geared for forward movement (future-ward). Seasons come and go. Everything, including humanity, is moving toward eternity. This is natural law. If we live in the past, we fight natural law and hence become frustrated people. The past is only useful in history. It contributes to the future only in educative values. It is not for us to live in it. We are to anticipate the future and accept its challenge. This in itself breeds optimism.

We attained our present position by refusing to accept the status quo, by refusing to fear change, by ever pushing forward. If we stalled, it was only for a moment until we could either go over or around the obstacle or push it out of the way.

Times do change, and swiftly, and those who would maintain their portion of leadership and discharge their responsibilities must change with the times. Needs do not remain the same. Problems alter. New solutions develop. To stand still is eventually to turn back.

It would be foolish indeed to believe that the problems of conservation districts are exactly the same today as they were in 1937--or that the solutions to them are the same, or that farming ~~and ranching~~ have not changed, or that the social pattern of our population is the same as it was.

A rural and limited soil conservation concept will no longer suffice in a society that has become increasingly urban, a society in which the interests of the users of resources have become equal to those of the owners of resources.

This increasing urbanization is as apparent here as it is in any part of our Nation. You are aware of the trend, just as you are aware of the lessening numbers and influence of rural people--even on the basis of representation in your State legislatures and the Congress. Do you realize, for example, that 40 percent of the Congress is from the Northeastern States?

As cities enlarge, serious problems of land-use erosion, sedimentation, pollution, recreation and the like spring up around urban areas. This is a whole new series of major conservation problems affecting large numbers of people that simply did not exist a few years ago.

These are problems demanding solution, and the demands come from the urban society that is now in the majority, that now decides what programs we shall have, including conservation, and how much financial help they shall receive. And these people, as I have said, are looking at the picture from the standpoint of resource users.

The late, great Adlai Stevenson capsuled the changing scene when he said: "There is a new America every morning when we wake up. It is upon us whether we will it or not. This new America is the sum of many small changes--a new subdivision here--a new school there--a new industry where yesterday there had been vacant swampland--changes that add up to a broad transformation in our lives. Our task is to guide these changes, for though change is inevitable, change for the better is a full-time job."

This is the new America that we face. This is the new resource climate in which we exist. What are the central issues?

First, there are steeply increasing demands on resources.

Second, the kinds of demands on resources are changing. The quality of resources is becoming more important, and the location of resource problems is shifting.

Third, it is apparent that resource matters are growing more complex. We face new problems of conflict and competition. A given resource may have to do double--or triple--duty. Concurrently, the interests of resource "users"--as well as resource "owners"--are assuming greater importance. Somebody is going to have to make decisions--unpopular decisions in many cases--about the allocation of resources to any given uses.



This raises another significant problem--the effect of resource demands on local self-government and our democratic system. As the Nation grows, will the requirements of larger economic units and higher levels of government take precedence over smaller units and lower levels of government? Is this the basic economic and social trend reflected in the replacement of smaller farms with larger ones and small industries with industrial giants? Is it the trend which has sent more and more power to central government?

These are the challenges that conservation poses in our age as we confront the new America. The question that concerns us today is the role of conservation districts in this more complicated resource picture. What should districts attempt to contribute, what responsibilities would district boards seek to fulfill? How can districts strengthen their capacity to meet the challenge of the times?

The history of districts has been one of steady and progressive evolution. As new problems have appeared, districts have moved to help solve those problems. At first they worked mostly with individual farmers. Next came work with groups of farmers. Later, programs expanded to include whole communities--in watershed projects, resource conservation and development projects, and planning and zoning programs.

In other words, as the times have changed, districts have changed.

Now the question becomes one of the next step. Are districts ready to move ahead? Are they ready to make further adjustments in their programs and legislative authorities to enable them to do an even better job?

The NACD believes that this is a question which must be faced by every district in the Nation. To help explore its ramifications, NACD President Marion Monk appointed a Special Committee on District Outlook two years ago to look beyond the events and programs now current to the probable needs and developments of the years ahead, not only in terms of the resources involved, but in terms of districts as serviceable units of government; also, to anticipate future needs, identify potential problems associated with meeting the needs, and chart a course most likely to bring about the desired results.

John Wilder, of Somerville, Tennessee, NACD Treasurer, is chairman of that committee. It includes supervisors, <sup>directors</sup> representatives of State Soil and Water Conservation Committees, and others closely associated with the district program. The Committee has discovered that many districts across the country have already geared up to make a useful contribution to the solution of modern resource problems. By analyzing the experience of these districts, as well as examining the problems faced by other districts, the Committee has studied a number of questions that appear significant in the development of broader and more effective district programs. Let me list some of these briefly:

1. Do districts effectively use all the technical, financial, and educational help now available to them from Federal, State, and local agencies? Have all districts developed this kind of cooperation at the local level in order better to coordinate natural resources work within their jurisdictions?

2. Do districts have sufficient funds and administrative assistance to carry on expanded programs? How long can they get along without a staff to carry out their decisions?
3. What role does the district play in helping with community planning and zoning? Can districts perform work in non-rural, transition, and rural fringe areas where needed?
4. Are districts sufficiently representative of all community interests involved in resource programs? Increasingly, these are the people who will vote the taxes to pay for conservation programs.
5. Do districts have available to them techniques that allow them to band together to solve problems that are multi-district or regional in nature?
6. Are the powers that districts possess adequate for the performance of their new and increased responsibilities? Are they able to conduct watershed and other project-type programs without recourse to complicated administrative and legal arrangements? Do they need access to the powers of taxation and eminent domain in order to advance watershed work, resource conservation and development projects, and other community programs?
7. Are district responsibilities defined sufficiently broadly in State enabling laws? Today's conservation programs must be truly comprehensive in order to be effective. Land and water

considerations cannot be divorced from forest and recreation considerations; and recreation and fish and wildlife resources can only be treated in relationship to all the other resources.

8. Do the State Soil and Water Conservation ~~Commissions~~<sup>theirs</sup> themselves across the country need strengthening? Are there adequate funds for districts; do the ~~Commissions~~<sup>theirs</sup> conduct effective training programs for supervisors?

> And, finally, does the general public have sufficient opportunity to participate in the total district effort? Do the people have a chance to approve and modify district programs? Is conservation work presented to the public in such a way that it becomes as vital and significant to them as new highway plans, school, and education policy, and health and welfare issues?

Now, with these questions in mind, let us consider a few examples of ways districts are working right now to find creative techniques to help solve the new and more complex resource problems that they face:

1. In Nebraska and Virginia they have changed election laws so that district ~~supervisors~~<sup>directors</sup> are elected at general elections, thus affording all citizens an opportunity to participate directly in the program.
2. In Massachusetts and the Virgin Islands, district responsibilities have been redefined by legislation in broad terms.
3. In Pennsylvania, <sup>a New York</sup> a new law makes it possible for districts to have some non-agricultural ~~supervisors~~<sup>directors</sup>, rather than solely farmers.

4. In Montgomery County, Maryland, the district has helped to establish a sediment control program whereby builders and developers will be required to install erosion control devices in accordance with an approved conservation plan.
5. In one district in Arkansas, the <sup>directors</sup> supervisors have hired a full-time executive secretary to provide administrative assistance. State associations, also, are beginning to employ staff help because their programs are growing so rapidly. North Dakota, Colorado, Texas, and California have already taken this step.
6. In Massachusetts the State Soil and Water Conservation Committee approved hiring an information specialist by Conservation Districts.
7. And in Louisiana the State Association of Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisors now has an Outlook Committee to follow up on NACD recommendations. In other places, <sup>including New York</sup> districts are working with planning and zoning organizations to provide information on resource potentials, with highway departments to minimize land damage and erosion hazards during construction and maintenance, organizing <sup>or participating</sup> in Neighborhood Youth Corps programs, ~~developing and operating recreation facilities where needed~~, and joining with other districts in multiple-county economic development programs.

*Some districts are now developing & operating recreation facilities where needed.*

8. The Ischua Creek Watershed, Cattaraugus County, which is nearly complete, is truly a "showcase" not only for soil and water conservation; but for economic improvement in a rural community and beautification of an area.

All fifty two conservation districts in this State *now* have ~~updated their~~ long-range programs *that* to include service to rural fringe areas, recreation interests, and to the non-farm public.

The key to the new approach in a nutshell seems to be involving more people in resource work, extending district services to additional people, placing more emphasis on broad resource planning *and at same time* as well as program promotion, *continuing the original purpose of* and using the district as a local, broad-based, effective action organization *much* to get as many aspects of the total conservation job *on the* ~~land, especially~~ accomplished as possible.

*There are* This is a fortunate development, for there is evidence that if districts do not assume these responsibilities and carry out truly active and comprehensive natural resource programs that meet today's needs, somebody else will. For example, since 1954, over 700 special-purpose water improvement districts have been formed to perform responsibilities under Public Law 566, responsibilities that conservation districts were either unwilling or incapable of assuming. In several States, including Arkansas and North Carolina, laws have recently passed authorizing establishment of "rural development authorities," many of whose powers and

responsibilities duplicate those of conservation districts. In New England, town conservation commissions are being organized to carry out recreation and open space planning and development work that was not being done by established groups or agencies. And in the new regional economic development programs, special-purpose groups called "economic development districts" can be formed.

In many cases, conservation districts could perform some of the work being taken on by these new groups, the result being less duplication, better coordination, and a more efficient and useful program. But if this is to be so, districts must take the initiative. It is not a case of taking on responsibilities already being performed effectively by others; but rather, digging into the work that remains undone, and which needs to be done. (Repeat this)

The challenge that lies ahead is an exciting one. Whether it will be met depends on local district leadership--it does not depend <sup>alone</sup> on the NACD, the State associations, the State Soil and Water Conservation Committees, the SCS, or any of the other agencies with whom they work. Local leadership is the key to moving ahead; and the opportunities are restricted only by the state of people's minds.

The new America offers the same opportunities for resource management that it always has--and they are the objectives of the district movement: conservation, development, and self-government.

What will this mean now--and in the future--to the Soil Conservation <sup>+ other agencies</sup> Service? Frankly, we don't know yet. In Chicago a few months 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."

Now it may be that we can't restyle the world. Chances are it wouldn't be a much better world if we did! And it would constitute a grievous idolatry if we were to insist upon proposing our own blueprint. But there are devices of study and discussion and earnest quest that can reveal to us glimpses of what ought to be. And there are many points at which we can see deviations from what ought to be--what clearly ought to be. And there are many points at which we are the only ones, or we are among the ones who could have some impact in effecting correction. We are not asking for perfection--now--for a nation cannot remain free if it is in too big a rush to achieve perfection.

No single person--public or private--is going to make the judgments that will have to be made if conservation districts and their advisors are



going to rise to the challenges that really face them in the decades that stand so glaringly in front of you and me. We will rise to these challenges together--or we won't rise.

Men are more likely to fight with each other for noble than for base motives. The most powerful personal motive is not gratification of the senses, or the acquisition of mere wealth or power, but the conviction that one's skills and knowledge have a special contribution to make to the salvation of humanity. We hope you are interested in engaging in this kind of earnest search and encounter with like-minded, similarly concerned men. The stakes are too high--as a community of free men--to turn our collective backs to a promising future. ~~It is a promising future.~~

Thus far the viewpoints of the optimists have prevailed--everywhere I go I see no signs to the contrary among conservationists. It will simply take the same sort of deep commitment and dedication and hard work that I know you can--and will--do. Good luck.