

CONSERVATION NEEDS IN MONTANA

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ok Being back in Montana is like a homecoming for me. While I was attending the University of Minnesota, I worked a couple summers at Glacier National Park. Later *when* the Soil Conservation Service offered me a job in Idaho, *in the work* and the summers I had spent *out here* were a strong influence on my decision to accept. I also worked in South Dakota for a few years. I have bracketed this State pretty well - *its a big State!*

tough I like *this* country -- and *you* the people who live in it. You have *a lot of* conservation challenges *ahead* such as reclaiming surface-mined land, planning for effective land use, controlling saline seep, and maintaining rangeland acreage. You have to stay on top of them if Montana is to stay the land of the "big sky." The environment here is well worth *protecting* preserving, not only for ourselves, but for the generations that will follow.

You are fortunate to have a lot of people in Montana who recognize the dimensions of the job and what is required... People like *Boe* Chuck Lane and your area directors, who did some hard work in reorganizing the Montana Association of Conservation Districts to strengthen your position in meeting today's resource challenges. People like Governor *Thomas* Judge, who is strongly supportive of land-use legislation, and Lieutenant Governor Christiansen, who takes an active interest in the reclamation of strip-mined land.

Material for talk by Norman A. Berg, Associate Administrator, Soil Conservation Service, at a meeting of the Montana Association of Conservation Districts, Lewistown, Montana, November 12, 1974.

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And people like Ave Linford, who has served SCS as State Conservationist in Montana for a decade. Ave is a long-time friend of mine whose 35 years of ^{USDA} experience in soil and water conservation have made him a real asset to programs here and across the country. We ^{have} relied heavily on his judgment and on his assessment of the work that needs to be done.

We need friends like these.

Montana shares ^{same imp} many conservation needs with other areas of the country. Among these are problems associated with the nationwide effort to achieve full farm ^{growth} production, efforts to protect and preserve energy the environment, efforts to conserve and find new sources of...and efforts to do all these things with fewer people and less Federal money than any most of us would like to see.

Produce and Protect

The need to keep up ^{increase} agricultural production is a current thrust, with a parallel concern about maintaining the soil and water resource base. There are millions of acres of land in the United States that can be added to the cropland total without posing any ^{serious} threat to soil and water resources... land that has no significant hazards or can be ^{adequately} protected easily with familiar conservation practices. But there is other land that should not be put to the plow, that should remain in permanent cover because the soils are subject to severe erosion from wind or water.

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Conservation districts have responded admirably to this challenge, aiding our "produce and protect" campaign and moving out on their own to guide farm and ranch decisions and offer accelerated help. I hope you'll continue a monitoring job to see that additional cropland acres are selected judiciously and are then promptly put under conservation plan and protected *while producing.*

Your quick action in guiding the plow is a good indication of a fact that not enough people understand: The conservation district movement is the only environmental program in America that can claim 2.3 million voluntary cooperators willing to do something more than talk about the condition of the environment.

District cooperators have improved the environment, as anyone should be able to see who bothers to look ^{*and understand*} at the face of the land. You and your ^{*U.S.*} neighbors have created two million ponds, many of them stocked with fish and attracting wildlife and human visitors. You have built more than a million miles of terraces and 2 million acres of grassed waterways to slow down water and prevent land damage, which have added superb natural beauty to the landscape. You've brought proper grazing use to almost 275 million acres, assuring red meat and a green countryside. You have worked to keep sediment, animal wastes, and other pollutants out of lakes and streams.

You've accomplished all these things and more, and I think you

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Energy Problems

Maintaining environmental quality is hard work. It has been particularly difficult with the push for higher farm and ranch production. Further, in the recent past, it has been complicated by energy shortfalls.

Energy difficulties have hampered nearly all farm and ranch operations to some extent, even with agriculture's top priority for fuel and the fact that ^{ranch} farm fuel supplies are generally good. ^{though costly} Recent energy-related problems have ranged all the way from the scarcity and high ^{cost} price of some fertilizers to spot shortages of pesticides, machinery parts, and ^{farm equipment} even tires.

^{temporarily} The energy storm has abated, but it has not blown away. Farmers and ranchers still need guidance in energy-saving practices. You can help -- because many conservation practices save energy as well as soil.

* You can help in another issue related to energy -- land use.

Take your neighbors in the Pacific States, for example. Some 34 percent of the total cropland harvested in the Pacific States is contained within Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas. As recently as 1964, 71 percent of the vegetables sold in these States were grown in the metropolitan areas. But thousands of acres ^{of prime & unique lands} are being transformed yearly to housing subdivisions, freeways, and shopping centers.

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It doesn't take an expert on energy to figure out that if these vegetables are going to be grown farther from market, farther from the ultimate consumers, then it is going to take more gas and oil to deliver them. If farming is pushed up the slopes, it is going to take more gas and oil to grow the vegetables.

For energy reasons and other considerations, districts need to help develop full information about these areas and to involve themselves in local discussions of zoning, taxation, and other approaches to preserving these lands for agriculture.

Your land-use interest needs to go beyond agriculture. Montana has one of the strongest growth potentials in the country. Montana's interest in recreation areas, wildlife preserves, and second home sites is greater than the national average.

That the people of Montana recognize the urgency of these interests is evident in a just-concluded series of public meetings on the possibility of State legislation regarding land use.

Inflation

As a current national headache, energy and land use probably are eclipsed only by inflation. Just about everyone is feeling the inflationary pinch -- food industry, the construction industry, consumers, and others.

As far as the Federal Government is concerned, one of the most standard -- if not most potent -- weapons against inflation is reduced spending.

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Belt-tightening is always painful: Which projects ought to be maintained? Which cut back, postponed, or eliminated?

I know that many of you have been concerned by the reduction in the past few years in Soil Conservation Service employees. You'd like to see more Federal funds available for various kinds of conservation work.

Whatever the future may hold in this regard, you would be wise to continue to seek non-federal sources of help.

State governments have recently made substantial increases in their contributions to soil and water conservation, particularly to accelerate soil surveys. County and municipal governments are another possibility. In some instances, counties are making contributions directly to districts; in others, the counties are adding soil conservationists or soil scientists or other professionals to their own staffs.

The best bet for districts is to tap all sources of conservation funds available -- Federal, State, local, and private -- and to accept whatever help is forthcoming. Districts in past years have proven themselves adept at working out all sorts of relationships to get the conservation job done, and I'm sure your imagination and good humor will continue to stand you in good stead.

These are some of the most pressing national conservation problems ~~that we are currently dealing with~~. Montana shares in them and has a substantial stake in any solutions that are ultimately developed.

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Reclaiming Surface-Mined Land

Reclamation of surface-mined land is a potentially major problem in many States, and one which you have in common with your neighbors in North and South Dakota and Wyoming. This 4-State area contains some valuable seams of coal that lie close enough to the land surface to permit mining by surface methods. With America's great need for energy resources, it is very likely that a more intensive effort will be made to get at least some of this coal out.

Conservation district officials and others, including the Department of Interior's Bureau of Land Management, have recommended speeding up the job of getting soil surveys for the entire area. Lieutenant Governor Christiansen is supporting this proposal.

The surveys will provide valuable information for developing the kind of mining operation plans that will assure efficient harvest of the minerals, a minimum of temporary and long-term effects on the environment, and good land use after the mining. I hope we can work together with the mining industry and state officials to stay on top of this situation.

Saline Seep

Montanans, particularly you district supervisors and your state association and the Highwood Alkali Association, also are giving considerable attention to the saline seep problem in the northern Great Plains. Without the foresight you displayed in passing the first saline seep resolution at your 1970 annual meeting, and your persistent action through the National

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Many others have joined in the saline seep concern, and we're going to get somewhere. Be proud of this accomplishment. With one supervisor and a former president of MACD on the Saline-Alkali Advisory Council, you are in a good position to exert further influence in finding adequate solutions to this serious conservation problem.

Rangeland Resources

Conservation of rangeland is another area in which Montanans have an opportunity to protect a valuable State resource, while contributing to a national goal. Rangeland, after all, is the basis of the largest income-producing industry here. Your state's grassland potential will probably give you a major role in national efforts to increase red meat production.

SCS has several basic objectives in working with farmers and ranchers on rangeland conservation. We want to restore the original rangeland composition as much as possible to yield the most forage, best wildlife habitat, and best conservation of soil and water resources. We also try to help farmers and ranchers to stop farming on land that is much better off under grass than under the plow. Over the years, we've helped convert more than 27 million acres from cropland to grassland. In Montana, through the Great Plains Conservation Program, you've brought conservation plans and management systems to almost 10 million acres.

Under the Montana Rangeland Resource Plan, the range program here continues to progress. The past few months have seen considerably more activity than has been generated in years past. Some outstanding accomplish-

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Soil and Water Conservation Program -- FY 1975

These match other achievements and successes of the soil and water conservation movement as a whole. One outstanding reason why the movement has been able to achieve these goals is that its leaders have taken strong positions of advocacy.

We have been for conservation of soil and water. We have been for the stewardship of our resources. We have been for flood control and the enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat. We have been for the use of soil surveys in land-use planning.

So we have a very strong cooperative program that is moving ahead aggressively. Last month, SCS Administrator Ken Grant set forth six major points of emphasis for SCS work during Fiscal Year 1975. Let me conclude by passing them on to you.

First, we do not anticipate any significant increases in manpower, even though we face continuously enlarging responsibilities. To get the job done, we and districts will need to approach the conservation job in the same way that we allocate our personal budgets and resources: Decide what is most important and what is least important, and either prune off those low priority items or find somebody else to help do them.

Second, we do need to devote more time to helping farmers produce and protect. We need to help them select the right acres for crops and show them how to protect those acres from erosion. We want to help make those acres as productive as possible. We also want to make sure the land can bounce back after flood, drought, or other adverse conditions for agriculture.

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Third, in order to help bring real quality to the landscape and America's standard of living, we need to deliver a quality product in technical assistance. This means accurate published soil surveys; useful conservation practices that fit the way farmers and ranchers operate in the seventies; relevant help to planners; and sound engineering advice.

Fourth, all kinds of people who have an interest in the use of land and water resources are clamoring for accurate information on which to base rational decisions. Soil surveys can be important contributions -- if we get surveys finished, if they are accurate and in useful formats, and if they are in the hands of the people who need them.

Fifth, we will work to move the watershed program forward by concentrating our help in projects that offer the best hope for quick action. Our role in every watershed project is to help the local sponsors understand the things they're going to have to get themselves, from land rights to community agreement on problems and solutions. The harder they work, the quicker they'll get SCS help and the better the projects will be.

Sixth, SCS people and district leaders have successfully completed watershed projects and many other conservation actions because they took the time to establish personal, face-to-face relationships with people. There is a world of difference between imagining what agency personnel, organization leaders, businessmen, and university staffs think about soil and water conservation -- or even finding out about their views secondhand -- and

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These are the kinds of things that we'll be working hardest at in the coming months. They aren't the only things competing for our attention, but they are the areas where we will be focusing our efforts. I hope we'll be able to achieve some degree of success. With your help, I know we will.