

11.1

CONSERVATION AND COMMUNITIES--THE CHALLENGE OF THE FUTURE

I remember when I was a senior and speculated a bit about the future. The other day I received a USDA pin for 25 years of work.

And in this past quarter century we have begun the age of space travel. We have orbited the earth; we have sent objects orbiting the sun; we have placed instruments on the moon and have directed and controlled them so that they dug into the surface of the moon and sent back photographs to us to study; and we are getting ready to place men on the moon. All this has been made possible by astonishing progress in physics and in mathematics, and at the same time, in biology. And now, we find ourselves simultaneously capable of making enough hydrogen bombs to destroy all life on our planet.

Only recently we have succeeded in duplicating the chemical structure of DNA in a test tube. We have learned how to create a virus that seems to be a living organism because it can reproduce itself. And we have created it in a test tube.

All this technology has burst into rapid growth transforming the whole face of American society and life and world life and expectations. Naturally enough, the impact on society is now and will be tremendous--shattering and hope creating. But the impact, you know, takes time to register. We haven't yet been able to see even the broad outlines of what the immense changes in this next quarter century will bring to man on earth.

Remarks by Norman A. Berg, Deputy Administrator for Field Services, Soil Conservation Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture to the State Resource Conservation Workshop for Youth, Sponsored by South Carolina Association of Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisors, Clemson House, Clemson, South Carolina, June 19, 1968

In spite of all of the great technological discoveries that have happened; the remarkable transformation that has been going on in this past quarter century, historians will probably say of the 20th Century that it will go down in history as the age in which mankind first arrived at the conviction that perhaps we could abolish poverty and want and create and distribute to the whole human population an abundance of food, shelter, clothing, transportation, education, and leisure.

Why then should we be surprised that throughout the world there has grown a tremendous demand, a rise of expectations without a concomitant awareness that it takes centuries of education, of training, of growth in self-control and in political responsibility to use this technology in civilization? Why should we be surprised that this becomes a new disruptive force in our world?

Our own Nation's 200 million citizens, with all their new demands on natural resources, have recently brought into sharper focus at home the intricate interrelationships of rural and urban people, of business, industry, and agriculture, and of plants, soil, and water. Today, we all live in a world where our physical, mental, and environmental oneness is more apparent than ever. Urban and rural activities affect each other more and more. The boundary fences between rural and urban America are rapidly coming down--if in fact they were ever a formidable barrier.

Most Americans, rural and urban, have always believed in the ideal of individual fulfillment. What is new in the past few years is the breadth and penetration of our efforts to make that ideal come to pass. Never before in our history have we worked so hard to open the avenues of opportunity.

This is a timely happening for far-reaching changes are taking place on the farms and in the towns and cities. Clean air and water, green forests, and open spaces that we once took for granted now assume new meaning. They are more appreciated as they become more limited. We become increasingly aware of the need for better stewardship of the productive land that has been entrusted to us as we see our land misused and our waters degraded. D. A. Williams, Administrator of the Soil Conservation Service, expressed it this way. "Clean water and air, productive and beautiful land, and space for relaxing need not be endangered. We have the knowledge and the ability to do whatever is required to protect and improve these resources. We have the capacity to assure not only food and shelter, but also hope and dignity and opportunity for all men."

This is the new resource development and conservation climate.

Recent projections of the Nation's Gross National Product estimated \$815 billion for 1968 and \$1,014 billion in 1971.

George Stewart's new book, "Not So Rich as You Think," had these lines:

"When some future historian sits down to summarize what the present generation of Americans has accomplished, his climactic sentence could read: 'Of the waters, they made a cesspool; of the air, a depository of poisons; and of the good earth itself, a dump. . .'"

A facetious remark would be that when the United States has an annual trillion dollar gross national product, it may have to spend most of it to return the environment to that quality level found when the U. S. was new and had no Gross National Product. And Gross National Product is colorblind as to quality. Somewhere in the Nation \$20 million may be spent to make a "mess" and both that amount and the \$20 million spent to

clean it up, add equally to the Gross National Product.

Too harsh--perhaps so. But I am very much afraid that future generations will judge severely a race of men who had all the technical knowledge, all the resources they needed to provide clean water, air, and land, but lacked the will to do so.

If we let that happen, then future generations will so judge us.

As the Secretary of Agriculture points out at every opportunity,

"It is no secret that we are facing an environmental crisis. It affects every one of the basic elements of the biosphere--air, earth and water, and every one of us."

Dr. Jerome P. Pickard, former research director for the Urban Land Institute in Washington, D. C., now is directing a program evaluation staff at the Department of Housing and Urban Development. He is publishing a two-volume work, "Dimensions of Metropolitanism," which projects, or at least predicts what America will look like at the turn of the century.

The image is the megalopolis (we need a better word)--it's a by-product of urban decomposition, which in the pursuit of nature denatures the countryside and mechanically scatters fragments of the city over the whole landscape. They are regions crowded with cities and towns--with tens of millions of people seeking food, clean air and water, and housing.

Going back to 1960, Dr. Pickard says 100 million Americans--56 per cent of the population--lived in five great urban regions and 11 smaller regions. This concentration took up 7 per cent of the land in the District of Columbia and the 48 States within the continental boundary.

the Nation on about 11 per cent of the land. The total percentage of Americans living in any kind of an urbanized area will be about 85 per cent at that time, he adds.

The strain this will put on natural resources of the areas will be tremendous. And the planning and careful regulation of these areas--in natural resources, in sociological problems, in industrial development and housing is the key to whether this population shift creates a wholesome society or a monster which will destroy itself.

Communities and Conservation

Underneath much of the talk about our future runs a basic question: Are there too many of us and will we be swamped by a wave of people?

Naturally a lot of us may think so because two out of three of us live in a crowded, metropolitan area. We see streets that are packed and jammed with daily traffic, schools, and even hospitals, that overflow, recreation spots, beaches, and resorts that are almost solid masses of human bodies on holidays and weekends. But there are still millions of less crowded acres or areas into which people can move. And our food and fiber productive capacity is even more than keeping up, despite the fears and hazards of overcrowding.

Therefore, in contrast, the U. S. Department of Agriculture's Communities of Tomorrow statement envisions an American landscape dotted with communities that include a blend of renewed small cities, new towns, and growing rural villages. Each community is seen to be a cluster with its own jobs and

Hundreds of such communities could make it possible for 300 million citizens to live in less congestion than 200 million live in today.

The community of tomorrow must be a functional and viable economic area. This alternative to mass migration lies in developing new and better planned communities which can serve as locations for a larger share of job opportunities in rural America. There are many resources upon which we can build. Rural USA not only contains considerable space but has both natural beauty and recreational opportunities--priceless assets. The focus is on total resources and total human needs. This will, of course, demand the development of the best institutional arrangements for meeting these needs, for creating human satisfaction that makes life worth living.

There are diverse opinions as to how to strengthen rural growth and development. Obviously, no community seeks oblivion. To hold people--or attract them--a community has to have jobs--good jobs. Job creation means that a community must develop economically. Economic development must be generated in terms of the resource base that is present in the area. In many parts of the U. S. the resource base that is present is almost totally agricultural. Therefore, in many cases, successful planning for economic development in rural America is of necessity going to be tied to the soil and water.

As I hear the Secretary of Agriculture, no one is advocating that we abolish our cities. The USDA is not, emphasis not, suggesting a back-to-the-farm movement. The USDA is interested in what can be called a more rational

growth could take place in areas where we have and can preserve more open space for both aesthetic quality and greater recreational opportunity.

Communities of Tomorrow need not reach the size, population, and industrial density that brings traffic congestion, smog--that prices space, land, and privacy beyond the reach of the ordinary inhabitant.

Until the forced influx of people into megalopolis living is stopped or even reversed--and there is some evidence that this is happening--the fight to save the cities can never really be won. The rural and urban problems are two sides of the same coin.

Countryside, USA, is a promising alternative that permits us to solve the problems of both city and rural living with one vigorous stroke.

Our collective goal should be that the Nation's future still lies in rural America. The vast countryside can provide ample land and water to serve agriculture and the expanding needs of commerce and industry, and finally the broad acres on which to build garden communities for tomorrow's generations.

We are, perhaps, on the edge of one of those rare, turbulent division points in the affairs of man which decisively separate one era from another.

It is an uncomfortable period, full of uncertainty, full of gropings--for it's difficult to part with the realities of the past.

We're still asking the question--an important one--"What is man doing to the environment?" But now we're also asking a much more profound one, "What is the environment doing to man?"

These are questions demanding answers. These demands come from our urban society, now in the majority, who now decide increasingly what programs we shall have, including soil and water conservation, and how much financial help we shall receive. And these people are looking at the picture from the standpoint of resource users.

The Soil Conservation Service has long recognized that erosion, floods, inadequate drainage and water shortages do not stop at property lines or at city limits! Conservation must be everyone's responsibility, if the species man is to survive. But people cannot properly accept a responsibility if they are ignorant of what it is or how they can help.

Understanding the broader picture can help as we make decisions at all levels. There are no certain answers to complex problems. But we do need to at least pose intelligent questions and to discuss trends and alternative actions. People don't always know what they want--until they understand what they can get. There is also a caution that we may be wise not to plan at all if the long-range planning is wrong.

You know from experience that decisions ahead will not be easy, for right is not always evident, nor are the alternatives necessarily wrong. Key issues are interwoven with shades of good and bad. They provoke doubt and ready-made standards of judgment do not always apply. We do know, for example, that conservation is moving from the province of the few to the embrace of millions. This is as it should be. Yet we cannot help asking, with considerable concern, is the awakening sufficient? Is the awareness adequate? Are the alternatives clearly articulated?

The key, as always, is people, and their desire, urge, or will to achieve. Psychologists tell us most people in this world can be divided into two broad groups. There is first that minority challenged by opportunity and willing to work hard to achieve something. Second is the majority who really do not care all that much. South Carolina's record of over 45,000 district cooperators and more than 44 per cent of the needed soil and water conservation work initially completed on farms suggests that you are in the former group--you care!

Therefore, I sense that you feel, too, that 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. Above all, it is a time to help conservation district governing boards to assume fully their responsibilities of local leadership in soil, in water, and in related conservation and resource development work.

Conservation still begins with soil, water, and plants. They are the base. But no one I know believes that the problems of conservation districts are exactly the same today as they were when they started nor that the solutions to them are the same, nor that farming has not changed, nor that the social pattern of our population is the same as it was.

A rural and limited soil conservation concept no longer suffices 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.

Conservation today encompasses the full sweep of interrelated natural resources and their management and use. Use, restoration, and preservation are compatible aims. Man is but one element of the ecological whole.

Emerging now is a special challenge to fit the activities and needs of man harmoniously into his total environment. The recognition of this crisis in the countryside has given birth to a new concept of creative conservation.

This concept of "full use" conservation says that as populations grow and people live in greater and greater concentrations, we must consider the total environment.

However, the original mission of conservation districts and SCS has not been abandoned, however much it has been broadened to include new responsibilities.

Our continuing concern with new aspects of resource conservation--development of outdoor recreation, enhancement of natural beauty, economic development of rural communities, and other important problems in the use and management of land and water resources--could without proper understanding cause responsible landowners and conservationists to lose sight of the fundamental problem of soil erosion.

The job of erosion control and sediment reduction has not been completed. The need has not disappeared. The Conservation Needs Inventory revealed that approximately two-thirds or 62 per cent of the non-federal rural land still needs soil and water conservation treatment of some kind. The seriousness of this need is recognized by the task force that formulated the recent Department statement on Resources in Action/Agriculture 2000.

Significantly, the new blueprint of USDA action does not set up erosion control as an objective to be sought for its own sake. It is, rather, a means of implementing stated policies to attain objectives of broad economic and social significance.

Soil conservation today means many things unthought of in the early days but it still means, among all the others, keeping the soil in place and in productive condition under agricultural or nonagricultural uses to meet human needs. District Outlook fully examined and endorsed this concept!

The key to the new approach, in a nutshell, seems to be that of:

1. Involving more people in resource work,
2. Extending district services to additional people,
3. Placing more emphasis on broad-based resource planning, and

At the same time continuing the original purpose of the district as an effective local action organization to get as much total conservation on the land as fast as possible!

This is fortunate, for there is evidence that if districts do not assume these responsibilities and carry out truly active and comprehensive natural resource programs that meet 1968 needs, somebody else will and should!

In some cases, though, conservation districts could perform some of the work being taken on by new groups. The result would be 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 of digging into the work that remains undone, and that needs to be done. And of needed work there is no end!

There is urgent need for strong leadership in conservation districts, in farm organizations, in rural community chambers of commerce, and among conservationists, tradesmen, bankers, and newsmen to identify the array of new issues now facing the countryside and the soil, and to help devise constructive programs for dealing with them. Concern for conservation requires that we each feel deeply a new call to initiative and involvement.

Let us never again assume that all is 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 soils 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 woodlands to be protected against destruction. Wildlife benefits must be recognized, improved, and made more useful for public and private benefit.

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

We hear and read about the communication gap between generations. In my own family--our third daughter who is just now a June High School graduate is in her own way a person unique, but not that much different from her older sister and brother-in-law who are now college graduates.

Their high school principal has again reminded them this year that although the world they inherit has many real and complex problems, there are many good, solid progressive actions that occur each day--though unheralded by press or TV (See Utah Newsletter).

The examples of 18,000 governing board members, serving voluntarily, without salaries in 3010 conservation districts, the sponsors of watershed projects, of resource conservation and development activities, 4-H leaders, church groups and many others are proof that some things are also right with the world. Your work here the past three days is eloquent testimony to your concern for the future.

The history of human relations within our society is largely a process of balancing and adjusting conflicting interests. The balancing and adjusting is usually achieved by voluntary agreement or through establishing legal processes. With the many and varied interests in our society, the Nation cannot continue to play it by ear. This nation now must realize that advance planning is needed to cope with a future that advances so rapidly upon our daily lives. Agriculture and natural resource fields can be attractive careers for men and women as we move toward the 21st Century.

However, in early June, those attending the National Watershed Congress in New Orleans were concerned that, in the scale of National priorities, the protection and development of the natural resources which sustain us

are being dropped to lower levels. Conservation districts pointed out that this is a dangerous trend, with grave implications for the Nation's social and economic health. A forced slow-down not only prolongs pollution and other hazards, but invites the prospect of increased costs at a later date because of inflation and further complications of resource problems.

There is one America with one set of interlocking natural resource problems. They can be solved. But it won't just happen.

There are other problems afflicting the country now--other challenges, other needs, new priorities.

We all know that success and fame are fleeting. What would have sufficed yesterday is apt to be too little, too late for tomorrow. The past is prologue. South Carolina conservation history is a proud chapter--but only a chapter. There are many more chapters to be written. There is no set deadline to complete the book. Urgency, yes! Urgency to get man and his environment in harmony. And as long as we have millions more who will depend on the land, we will have new chapters in the book.

The years ahead offer no easy successes, no effortless victories over age-old problems. The obstacles now dimly perceived may prove to be immense. Yet who would be willing to forfeit the challenge?