

Mail to Mr. Berg
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CREATIVE CONSERVATION
FOR
COMMUNITIES OF TOMORROW

I welcome this opportunity to join you. I am concerned about your problems. I wanted to be associated with your Annual Convention and the future of the 37 soil and water conservation districts in Nevada and the 3,010 in our land. There is the personal pleasure of meeting with old and new friends again. Too, there is the professional pleasure of discussing soil and water conservation with those in the field. I always carry away from these meetings new ideas, fresh viewpoints--more than I bring.

Your conference, as I see it, provides for a timely discussion of vital issues. The accelerating demands of our time do place a premium on effort. Dedication and work are basic to soil and water conservation, to resource development, and to the basic welfare of our great Nation.

It is nothing new to say that a good community can be produced only by good men--or that we get out of life about what we put into it. Yet men of good will and their efforts are, indeed, essential ingredients of a useful, civilized community.

There are other ingredients, of course: skills, planning, and vision--sacrifice, determination and faith--encouragement, investment, and opportunity for self-expression and for accomplishment.

Material used by Norman A. Berg, Deputy Administrator for Field Services, Soil Conservation Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., for talk before the Annual Meeting of the Nevada Association of Soil Conservation Districts, December 14, 1967, Riverside Hotel, Reno, Nevada

Therefore, I feel 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.

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. Your record of over 2,700 district cooperators and more than one-fifth of the needed soil and water conservation work completed on ranches suggests you are in that former group--you care!

I'll take a few minutes to quote from three of our present Cabinet men. I promise you a moral when I finish.

Willard Wirtz, Secretary of Labor, had this to say on long-range planning in this Nation:

"What we are really doing now is flying the most powerful economic engine in history--and I mean to include all our scientific and technological developments--and we are flying it by the seat of our pants. We're flying by luck, by instinct, with almost no instruments at all in the cockpit. I'm not sure that on this basis we are going to be able to keep up, flying this blind, with the amount of technological development being brought about."

John W. Gardner, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, in his book "Excellence" writes,

"We must recognize that there may be excellence or shoddiness in every line of human endeavor. We must learn to honor excellence (indeed, to demand it) in every socially accepted human activity, however humble the activity, and to scorn shoddiness, however exalted the activity,

"An excellent plumber is infinitely more admirable than an incompetent philosopher. The society which scorns excellence in plumbing because plumbing is a humble activity and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy.

"Neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water."

Orville L. Freeman, Secretary of Agriculture, points out at every chance,

"The total cost to the Nation of our careless lack of planning in urban, suburban, and rural America is beyond our power to calculate. And it is growing. . . Today, 70 percent of our people live on one percent of the land; 30 percent, on the other 99 percent.

"Is that good for the people and the Nation? If not, why not? Should we have a clearly defined policy of urban-rural balance or should we let matters drift? Should we give a high investment priority to building opportunity in rural America, or should we resign ourselves as a Nation to larger and larger cities?

"These questions demand an answer."

I promised you a moral from these three quotations. Perhaps as good a way as any of expressing it is to recall what John Glenn said when a reporter asked him how it felt to take the first manned space flight:

"Well," Colonel Glenn replied, "In those final minutes, when the liquid oxygen is smoking. . .and the gantry falls away. . .and I hear the flight control officer counting. . .4. . .3. . .2. . .1 . . .I think to myself what a marvelous bird this space vehicle is . . .literally millions of separate parts. . .valves, pipes, wiring, combustion chambers. . .and every one of them supplied by the low bidder!"

The Colonel, of course, was kidding. The vehicle he rode was the culmination of literally millions of man-hours of planning, the result of an advanced aero-space technology that has surpassed in fact a generation of science fiction. . .the result of billions of dollars of national treasure.

Every piece in that rocket had to perform perfectly the first time. Like a parachute jump, there is no "second time" if it doesn't. It was produced by hundreds of thousands of brains, all perfectly meshed and pointing toward a single target, a technology that will take us to the moon in the nineteen seventies, to the planets in another generation; someday, even to the stars. And so John Glenn was kidding.

As a Nation, though, we have apparently been dead-serious in the belief that random conduct of our affairs--a system which has worked fairly well in the past--will produce desired results into the indefinite future.

It just won't happen!

Reshaping the total urban environment to make our cities livable can't possibly take place under laissez-faire demography if another 80 to 100 million people pour into the Nation's cities, and this is where they will pour in if present trends continue over the next three decades.

In short, it isn't enough, as Mr. Wirtz said, to "fly by the seat of our pants," or to "nibble away at the far edges of great problems. . ." as George Gallup recently put it.

We are, in fact, 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 is 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 the man?"

These are questions demanding answers, and the demands come from the urban society that is now in the majority, that now decides 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 now is to survive. But people cannot properly accept a responsibility if they are ignorant of what it is or how they can help.

In the time I have, perhaps I can help--in a modest way--to identify and to clarify three major aspects of the national resource conservation and community scene. Understanding the broader picture can aid you as you make decisions for districts at the local and State level. 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 do recognize 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?

There is a new resource and community climate. What are the central issues?

First, creative conservation--challenge or confusion--the quest for a common bond, needs clarification.

Second, concern for conservation--expanding public awareness and involvement--this is District Outlook--at all levels, and

Third, communities and conservation, the cornerstone for a quality countryside, USA--the key to assuring the rural resources contribute their full measure for the benefit of all the people.

Creative Conservation

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Elsewhere on this excellent program you will hear what conservation district leaders at all levels are doing about their future role in conservation and resource development. Others tell their story of progress from their own particular point of view. Mine has been the unique one of counseling with the NACD District Outlook Committee while carrying forward the day by day duties of an Administrator's Deputy dealing with widespread Service activities intimately connected with District work.

Our Service agrees with the District Outlook report that a great and exciting future lies ahead for the District movement if only we are collectively equal to it. Our impression is that local leaders are assessing the future role of conservation districts with realism.

In performing old jobs in conservation and in expanding District programs to meet new needs and in getting additional help on a broad array of new problems they are again showing that they are a major force for action.

We have demonstrated for a third of a century that we can meet change with realism and vision. We have kept abreast of new methods--alert to new ways of doing old jobs. Fundamentals that determine success or failure of soil and water conservation have not been neglected in the world of change.

The term "soil conservation" has been effectively broadened. But not without some confusion.

The founders of our Nation regarded water and air the way the Indian did the buffalo. There was always more where the last supply came from, and nature took away whatever people didn't need. However, smog and polluted streams have again sharply reminded our generation that nature's bounty is not infinite. The same realization occurred earlier for soils and still earlier for forests, parks, and wildlife.

However, any serious concern in the United States over any aspect of environment is largely a phenomenon of the 20th century. This is so chiefly because too few before had taken account of the fact that the resources--and even the space of the American continent were limited. When men saw that space and resources were indeed finite, the concept of "conservation" was born.

At first the word meant primarily the wise exploitation of material resources with some regard for the future. Then some men began to include in it preservation of the natural environment for its intellectual and aesthetic as well as utilitarian values. Confusion inevitably resulted and it has increased with the further inclusion of the need to provide for what is somewhat more precisely designated as "recreation" and "natural beauty."

The confusion is partly a matter of words. But more importantly it arises out of a difference of opinion concerning the extent to which non-material values should be recognized and what the non-material values are. It is perfectly possible to dislike billboards without caring whether or not wildlife disappears, and perfectly possible to consider recreation facilities important without believing that the preservation of any aspect of the natural environment is also important. Superhighways, suitably

landscaped, are to some people simply nature improved; to others they isolate the tourist from the land he traverses and make nature itself seem artificial,

When our plight is examined, we resemble somewhat a country described by Wilford Owen of the Brookings Institute:

"At the national level the inhabitants were very rich but at the local level they turned out to be quite poor. And, as luck would have it, they all lived at the local level."

Conservation has become increasingly competitive. . .

- . . .as to meaning
- . . .as to function
- . . .within government
- . . .outside government.

Conservation means many different things to many different people!

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Even within the realm of renewable natural resources there are many highly specialized interest groups:

- Those interested mainly in hunting and fishing--1,558,755 migratory waterfowl stamps were sold last year.
- Those interested mainly in flowers and birds. There are now 8,000,000 bird watchers.
- Those interested mainly in hiking, or boating, or nature study, or picnicking or swimming.
- Those interested mainly in preserving wilderness and wild rivers.
- And those interested mainly in soil--and water--and plants and forests.

Conservation is all these things and more!

It is a complex matter. It has great diversity. It is little understood in its broad totality because "conservation" now has so many adherents who see it from so many different viewpoints--who view it in many different lights.

Most basic resources are in the ownership and under the care of private citizens. About three-fourths of the area of our 48 mainland States is privately owned.

The conservation practiced on these lands makes it possible for all citizens to ultimately enjoy their own particular form of conservation.

Far too few realize that the principal guardian of our heritage of forests, soil, water, trees, grass, and wildlife is not the Federal Government, nor the State conservation departments, but the millions of individual landowners throughout the Nation.

The Federal and State conservation agencies can counsel and assist the private owners, but the responsibility and the initiative are theirs. Their collective response is the reality of conservation.

Conservation also has a common denominator. Underlying conservation in all its varieties and forms--and upon which all kinds of conservation depend completely--is the land itself and its soil and its water and its plants.

From these basics spring all forms of conservation. Without them conservation by any definition has no form or substance. Without them conservation is only a meaningless word.

Conservation begins with soil, water, and plants. They are the base.

These basic resources form the common bond joining the varied interests of all resource users, whatever may be their specialized definition of what conservation means.

Concern for Conservation

Concern still 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.

Our history has been one of steady and progressive evolution. As new problems have appeared, districts have moved to help solve these problems. At first you worked mostly with individual farmers; next came work with groups of farmers. Later, programs expanded to include whole communities--in watershed and resource conservation and development projects, river basin work and other area-wide activities.

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

A look at progress in Nevada tells the story:

--Nearly 2 million acres have basic soil and water conservation plans

--3 percent of the needed soil and water conservation work on farms and ranches is being completed annually

--11 watershed projects have been authorized for planning

--4 watershed projects are approved for operations

--338 non-farm landowners received technical help in 1967

--32 districts have updated their long-range programs.

--Nevada's Northeast Elko Soil Conservation District, through its designation as a pilot district was among the first in the Nation to emphasize what is known today as coordinated ranch unit and allotment planning.

Significant progress was made this year in coordinated ranch unit and allotment planning with the Bureau of Land Management and Soil Conservation District Cooperators throughout the State.

--Operating under a national interagency agreement, supplemented to fit Nevada conditions, you successfully completed five plans involving some 369,000 acres of intermingled public and private land in the past year.

--Since nearly all of the range-livestock enterprises in Nevada involve both public and private resources we are confident that the solution to orderly and efficient development and management is through this medium of coordinated effort. With the continued cooperation of BLM and SCS people and the concurrence of soil conservation districts we are assured of even greater accomplishments this current year. Conservation Districts have set high priorities on 23 operations for for planning during this fiscal year. The Bureau of Land Management in some of its administrative districts have tentative schedules for this type of planning projected through 1974.

Pure air, clean water, stable soils, productive grasslands and forests, abundant wildlife, natural beauty, and the opportunity for man to live in harmony with his natural environment are essential. They are interrelated and mutually supporting objectives.

We can do those things in creative conservation that have been born of local initiative and cooperation, and advanced by the dedication and wise efforts of wise ^{prudent} government at all levels.

Upon this base is built a policy of cooperation between the U. S. Department of Agriculture and the owners and operators of three-fourths of the American land--a policy that recognizes the legitimate ends of resource use for the benefit both of the individual and of the larger society.

Now, I want to make a most significant point as clear as I can.
The original mission of Soil 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.

This is likely to be especially true in agricultural areas where aggressive action by soil conservation districts has made real progress in altering patterns of land use and reducing erosion damages. Satisfaction with ^{past} success sometimes dims awareness (of failure and oversights.)

of problems & needs.

But the job of erosion control has not been completed, and the need for it has not disappeared. The Conservation Needs Inventory revealed that two-thirds 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.

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, and
3. Placing more emphasis on broad-based resource planning.

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 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 and should!

In many cases, however, conservation districts could perform some of the work being taken on by 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. And, of needed work there is no end.

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 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 woodlands to be protected against destruction. 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 for greater financial support at all levels to extend the benefits of this effort throughout the land.

There is urgent need for strong leadership in conservation districts, in farm organization and rural community chambers of commerce--among conservationists, tradesmen, bankers, and newsmen--to identify the array of new issues now facing the countryside and the soil, and devise constructive programs for dealing with them.

The late Adlai E. Stevenson said something once that has recently become pertinent to me. In March of next year, God willing, I'll attain that age of which he spoke so eloquently,

"What a man knows at fifty that he did not know at twenty years, for the most part, is incommunicable. . . The laws, the aphorisms, the generalizations, the universal truths, the parables and old saws--all the observations about life which can be communicated readily in handy verbal packages--are as well known to a man at twenty as at fifty. He has been told them all, he has read them all, and he has probably repeated them all before he graduates--but he has not lived them all.

"What he knows at fifty that he did not know at twenty boils down to something like this:

"The knowledge he has acquired with age is not a knowledge of formulas, or forms of words, but of people, places, actions--a knowledge not gained by words, but by touch, sight, sound, victories, failures, sleeplessness, devotion, love--the human experience and emotions of this earth and of one's self and other men. Perhaps, too, a little faith, a little reverence for things you cannot see."

The point I want to make is that we have become, in my half-century, (half has been as a Service career employee), a nation of city dwellers. Each day and each year, more and still more Americans concentrate in the towns, cities, and suburbs.

Many rural people--especially the younger generation--have found urban communities more attractive and have migrated to the cities. A recent University of Illinois survey of 2,929 of the State's rural high school juniors and seniors showed an astonishing 95 percent want no part of farming as their life's work. In the battle for jobs have the cities been winning? Each year, 3 million more Americans jam into our already over-crowded cities. Why? What is there about the city that attracts people?

In a single word--jobs! Although that is simplification. There are, of course, additional human, cultural, and aesthetic factors as well as variety and economic values.

For this, though, they pay a heavy price. It's farewell to old friends, family homes, and familiar surroundings. In the cities we face further sacrifices. Increased traffic, smog, inner city decay, loss of individuality, rising taxes, more demands, and less incentive to response.

What are the social and economic consequences of current trends toward intensive urbanization for the: (1) Nation, (2) cities, and (3) rural areas. Can we afford to continue our present course of trying to deal with problems of cities and rural areas separately? Is there now need for a national policy position on rural-urban balance?

And what then happens to the countryside? Increasingly, to many it becomes an obstacle in time and space--merely landscape separating cities. It is to far too many a "land in between" to be crossed as quickly as possible via superhighways, fast trains, or faster planes. Among our young and urban oriented generation, there is real danger that rural America will be regarded increasingly as just "undeveloped" space, the "hinterland," only there for nourishment of the urban center.

We know, but many do not, that the American countryside--that expanse of landscape separating our cities and towns and rural hamlets--represents the land we have left to grow in, to feed and clothe our people, to play in, and to build on the American dream.

then
Finally, on this most critical question. Is the congestion, the tensions, the urban sprawl to continually worsen? The USDA says, "No." We are taking direct issue with the notion that continued mass migration from country to city is inevitable. That tomorrow's America need not be a few huge megalopolitan complexes strung together by super highways running through miles of rural land--depopulated, lacking in business and industry, without the tax base to support roads, schools, and other public services needed for adequate living.

The community of tomorrow must be a functional and viable economic area. The alternative--a solution to these problems--lies in the development of new and better planned communities which can serve as the location for a larger share of job opportunities in rural America. There are many resources upon which we can build. Rural USA contains considerable space with both natural beauty and recreational opportunities--an almost priceless asset. The focus is on total resources and total human needs. This will demand the development of the best institutional arrangements for meeting these needs, for creating human satisfaction that makes life worth living.

This is rural areas development with depth. It is not simply a matter of attracting new job possibilities to rural towns. It involves an array of programs. Improved quality of education, community facilities, job training, social services, cultural and recreational facilities--and an interworking of private as well as public resources--including local leadership with an enthusiasm and zest for the task.

As I hear the Secretary of Agriculture, no one is advocating that we abolish our cities. We are not, emphasis not, suggesting a back-to-the-farm movement. We are interested in what can be called a more rational or planned process of urbanization. As population increases, it should take place in areas where we have and can preserve more open space for both aesthetic quality and greater recreational opportunity. They 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--and turned around--the fight to save the cities can never really be won.

Countryside, U.S.A., 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 offer relief from the teeming cities and their congested suburbs, 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.

New Conservation and Community Charters for USDA

Two of the most important conservation and community documents of our times are now available. Resources in Action and Communities of Tomorrow are the product of Department-wide studies under the direct leadership of Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman. They redefine the resource

conservation and community missions of USDA in light of needs today and for the rest of the century. They outline timely new policies and goals. They point to ways these policies and goals will be implemented.

The publications have threefold significance:

1. Spelling out the nature and dimension of action urgently required to meet the resource and community needs of American people between now and the year 2000.
2. Demonstrating that, by the very location and character of these problems, USDA has major responsibility for leadership, and
3. Finally, charting for USDA the essential steps we must take in our cooperative efforts with other agencies and units of government, and with citizen groups, to achieve the goals.

The unmatched performance of the successful commercial farm, ranch, and forest enterprises in this country is eloquent testimony to the outstanding job you have done--and continue to do.

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

We, too, know that success and fame are fleeting. What would have been sufficient for yesterday is apt to be too little and too late for tomorrow.

Speaking in Chicago, the Secretary said that agriculture's job is far from done and never will be. For example:

"We expect that remote sensing equipment in spacecraft will be linked with computers to identify and measure land use... detect plant diseases, insect infestations and drought... assess crop stands and vigor and to predict future yields... and determine whether soils are suitable for growing needed crops... We are also hard at work to devise better methods for disposing of farm and processing wastes."

In closing the Secretary said:

"Today's world, much hungry and despairing, needs all that science can give, and more."

Then he told the story of a student who came upon Louis Pasteur bent over his microscope:

"Pardon me," said the student, "I thought you were praying."

Replied Pasteur, "I was."

The challenge of creating a quality of civilization that fully reflects man's aspirations suggests we too should seek Divine guidance from he, who in a world of change has placed eternity in our hearts and has given us power to discern good from evil: Grant us sincerity that we may persistently seek the things that endure, refusing those which perish, and that, amid things vanishing and deceptive, we may see the truth steadily, follow the light faithfully, and grow ever richer in understanding which is the life of men.