

DISTRICTS' VOICE IN FEDERAL PROGRAMS

I consider this opportunity to meet with you a pleasure and a privilege. Your theme, New Frontiers for Districts, is both timely and challenging.

Arkansas has a proud conservation record -- since the beginning, when you were the first State to pass Soil Conservation District enabling legislation. This early indication of a willingness to try new things has resulted in an impressive list of good work. To mention only a few items:

1. A consistently high record on conservation planning and watershed work.
2. Strengthening of conservation districts by providing for taxation and eminent domain authority for project action.

Material used by Norman A. Berg, Associate Administrator, Soil Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C., at the annual meeting of the Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts, Little Rock, Arkansas, January 13, 1970.

3. Increased State public financing for Districts.
4. Merging of "soil conservation" and "water" functions under the soil and water conservation commission to strengthen State leadership in both fields.
5. Innovative techniques for river basin planning, fish farming, woodland work and irrigation return flows.
6. An excellent start on emphasizing the benefits of multi-county planning and implementation--especially in the RC&D project areas.

Finally, at the national level we are appreciative for the volunteer work of men like (Sloan Rainwater and Monroe Samuel.) You are also a training ground for SCS Deputy Administrators. The other states thank you for Hollis Williams and William Davey -- And there are many others who have benefited greatly by their work experience in Arkansas, incl. Hamp. Burns & A. (Cana-illo,

If the past is of any value in predicting the future, we can continue to expect good things from this important state.

As we enter 1970, we can, indeed, be grateful. Look with me for a moment at our great Nation:

- Better schools, colleges, and universities.
- Expanding industry and commerce.
- Abundance in agriculture.
- Astounding medical advances.
- First and second manned landings on the moon.
- The highest wages in the world.
- Conveniences by the dozens--in the home, the office,
the factory, and on the farm and ranch.
- Recreation opportunities of every description.
- The arts--on canvas, record, film, stage, and printed page.
- Over 3,000 conservation districts and 18,000 members
of local governing boards.
- Government concern for resources that is reflected in
research, education, loans, cost-sharing, and technical
help for more than 2,000,000 cooperators.

As the
H. P. King
writes

We have many people who know that there's more to life than a bigger and bigger Gross National Product.

We are concentrating more and more on putting first things first. We realize that greater technology demands greater responsibility.

> However, at the same time newspaper headlines offer daily evidence of the challenges of change. Are we as responsible as we should be as caretakers of our land and waters?

For instance:

1. A trash dump (in Colorado) is suspected of causing serious pollution of groundwater in the area, causing the state to consider landfill regulations. Said a state health department engineer, "We might as well write off the wells because the ground water...is getting unusable."

2. Ohio's Cuyahoga River, near Cleveland, caught fire last year from an oil slick and several bridges were burned-- the river is a dumping ground for waste.

3. The Los Angeles County Medical Association estimates that air pollution forces 10,000 people a year to leave the area. During heavy smog conditions, students in the county are asked not to exercise strenuously or to breathe deeply.

4. Colorado Lieutenant Governor Mark Hogan last month said the nation must mount an immediate, all-out war against environmental pollution, or "the overwhelming body of evidence is that the human race has little chance of surviving past the year 2000..." He said no one should have "the right to poison people in the pursuit of profits."

5. The chairman of Humble Oil & Refining Company recently said that "we are now in a pollution revolt and society is demanding action." He urged businessmen to accept a code of social ethics regarding the environment.

6. Dr. Elvis Stahr of the National Audubon Society in a recent speech called for greater unity among conservationists.

He said conservationists must become "not only evangelical, but also ^{EK-U-MEN-I-CAL} ecumenical." He said conservation "is a war that has only

started...We will never keep a place fit for people or birds if we don't fight for it; (and if it weren't for conservationists' campaigns to date) we'd be worse off than we already are."

7. Robert Finch, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, has said that the greatest domestic challenge facing America in the last third of the 20th Century is overcoming "our reluctance as a nation to come to grips with the need to plan for, work for and pay for a wholesome environment." He said that pollution-control measures, although very costly, should be compared with annual costs of environmental damage, and "the expenditure would seem to be not only a necessity, but a bargain."

And finally, President Nixon's first official act of
the 1970's was to sign the bill creating a Council on Environmental
Quality (in the executive office of the President.) He has told the
governors that when he speaks to them in February, he will discuss
how to challenge young Americans "to move forward on the whole
subject of the quality of life in America," including environment.
And he has intimated that a major domestic theme in his State
of the Union address will be the environment.

These examples, diverse as they are, indicate strongly
that when rivers become fire hazards and we can't take a deep
breath in safety we will replace apathy with a readiness to act.

Rural towns and the countryside are also challenged
by a changing society. We in agriculture need to face this
problem--to replace isolation with involvement in the needs of
people.

In addition to heavier demands on our resources in both urban and rural areas, we can see changing demands, even as we ourselves change.

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good growth
In my own experience, my Dad pioneered on a Minnesota farm, originally forest, that probably should never have been cultivated. That land, in my lifetime, has gone from original forest cover into row crops and from there into its present use-- primarily for outdoor recreation. These changes occurred in part because, as the growing productivity of American farmers dictated less land use for one purpose, the growing popularity of outdoor recreation dictated another land use.

These land-use changes are paralleled by "people" changes. Again in my own experience, I grew up in a rural Midwest and worked as a career conservationist in a number of Western rural areas. Today my family and I live in a very urban area -- metropolitan Washington, D. C.

We've worked there for several years now, but when I retire we may again seek a rural or semi-rural area in which to live. This transient way of life is common to many Americans today.

7 In the lifetime of many of us we have personally seen farming (agriculture) go from about 6 million small, horse-powered units to less than 3 million largely machine-powered farms and ranches. We've witnessed--in fact, caused--major shifts in land use. Even the vocabulary is different--remote sensing, eutrophication, no-till, laser, chlorinated hydrocarbons, pelletizing.

These changes in land, people, and agriculture are signs that any demarcation between town and country is fading fast. In this more crowded world, one man's junkyard can become another man's backyard. Today we are either downhill or downwind from someone else no matter where we live.

Therefore, can we any longer have only a small group of dedicated conservationists worry about the Nation's future, while American society as a whole tacitly agrees to shift the results of their land and water use onto the shoulders of the next generation? In some ways that's what our collective ancestors did and now many Americans are finding that we are the "next generation" that conservationists talked about 30 years ago.

We are the generation for whom the air is more polluted, the water still silting up, the underground reservoirs lowering.

Suddenly, good resource use is not only something vital to our grandchildren, but vital to us. Suddenly, that vague tomorrow, (when all of the chickens come home to roost -- to use an old phrase --) is today. And the real tomorrow -- that we had better start planning for right now -- is only the rest of this century.

(Now at this point) I want to make one important point very clear. The original mission of conservation districts and the SCS has not been abandoned -- and never will be. Soil erosion and sediment problems are still with us.

For example: Every year sediment still displaces about a million acre-feet of storage space--space that costs about \$100 per acre foot to build. This reduces the Nation's water supply capacity by enough to serve a city of $5\frac{1}{2}$ million people.

You can still go into the countryside today and see barn-swallowing gullies, while the amount of sediment moving into the streams, rivers, and lakes of our country each year is in the magnitude of 4 billion tons--not all of it, by any means, from agricultural land.

So districts, the SCS, and others still need to help clean-up and patch-up old and current land-use mistakes. Let's look now beyond the clean-up and crisis stage to the planning and prevention period.

We can use the kinds of up-to-date knowledge we have on soils, watersheds, and water resources to help shape the kinds of communities we want and need for a good life. And we should recognize not only that land and water use are tied together, but also that the needs of different resource users--farmers, builders, John Q. Citizen--are also tied together and must be planned for together.

We hear more these days about the so-called "ecological systems" approach.

As a reminder, ecology is the science concerned with:

(1) the relation of living things to their environment, and (2) the factors which influence that environment. It is an expression of man's need to realize that he shouldn't try to mold the rest of the natural world to his wishes without adequate understanding of the laws that govern it.

Nature has been at work for a great many millions of years to get things as they are. Cause and effect are as bricks in a well-built wall. Without careful investigation we can never tell which is the key element, the removal of which will bring down a large section of the structure in ruin.

Man is a late-comer and it is probably imperative to his survival to recognize that nature is a total of the conditions and principles which influence the existence of living things. Nature's laws were so contrived that land, water, plants, and animals should, and under natural conditions do, exist in harmony and interdependence for perpetual productiveness.

Man is also a comparatively small -- although most important -- element in this massive system. It has been said, "the system developed without him, determined his evolution, and shaped his dependence on life cycles which, in turn, were already dependent upon complex living and chemical relationships in a relatively stable environment."

History is rich in examples of the disappearance of one species after another of both animal and plant life, and examples of one culture after another passing to oblivion--primarily because of inability to adjust to environmental change.

What should we know to avoid a similar fate?

Broadly, the quality of our natural environment has become the central focus of a "conservation" that is more widely accepted as a concern of our total citizenry than ever before.

As Dr. Michael L. Brewer of Resources for the Future told us in September, this fact "implies several radical departures from past thinking. Conservation in the earlier decades was primarily concerned with the particular commodities the environment could provide for the productive processes on which the American economy rested...(it) dealt with unambiguous resources--whether it was the amount of nitrogen or phosphorus in a soil horizon, or boardfeet of timber, or tons of a particular mineral. The ^{new} concern with environmental quality does not lend itself as well to unambiguous measures, and certainly contemporary conservation objectives are much more difficult to identify."

Dr. Brewer said, "Our earlier concern with environmental issues frequently (was) debated and discussed by 'experts' who, the general public usually assumed...were able to speak with authority about environmental deficiencies and their implications to society and its economy. Our contemporary concern with environmental quality opens the field to everyone--the community and its citizens will increasingly demand--and should be provided opportunity to participate."

Brewer continued,

"Communities differ in their perception of the environment and the way they evaluate its quality. Their enthusiasm for management programs will be influenced by the values created or the costs imposed...These costs and benefits will differ among various options for environmental management open to the community. The public must be helped to perceive the quality of the environment and to understand its consequences for their welfare. The community must establish its objectives for environmental quality. New skills and forums are needed which will foster discussion, debate, and dialogue among the different components of a community. New techniques for discovering common cause and negotiating tradeoffs among different interest groups are now a very real part of coming to grips with environmental quality problems. These types of activity frequently are considered 'political,' and indeed they are in a very real sense.

"In the past, the Soil Conservation Service and affiliated organizations have largely been in the business of promoting beneficial agricultural practices by subsidizing farmers. In some instances subsidy took the form of management recommendations and instructions; in other instances it took the form of cash subventions for the installation of conservation practices on the farm or the small watershed.

"While these measures have been appropriate in light of a traditional objective of the Soil Conservation Districts--namely to enhance farming practices so that farmers would receive higher incomes, they may not be fully consistent with a future focus on environmental quality."

He suggested three general categories of environmental problems which the Soil Conservation Service and (Soil)

Conservation Districts can, and must, deal with in the future.

The first is excess production of waste materials and residuals generated by production and consumption activities.

The local community needs relevant information and analysis of waste-producing and waste-disposal processes.

The second is uncontrolled growth of towns and small cities that creates visual blight and economic loss through irrational and haphazard patterns of land development. (On the other hand, an excessive number of communities in sparsely populated areas -- especially those rural areas which are losing population -- are provided public services through a large number of small local communities which are hard pressed fiscally and often outmoded technically.

These questions call for public debate, and the values (entailed) in alternative lines of action need to be established. Communities need information about trends in regional population size and location, public services demands, and the relative costs of consolidating such services as recreation, water supply, and sewage disposal.

Dr. Brewer's third category relates to environmental preservation. How do we assess the scarcity and social value of scenic amenities, of rare species of wildlife, and of wild areas which are not scarred by access roads and by the same token are not readily available to a general population which appears less and less ambulatory? Increasingly we will have to look to private rural lands to provide these amenities. This will (entail) new techniques of private land management and new forms of organization which can facilitate repayment to private owners of rural lands.

All of these problems, Dr. Brewer said, "can be considered within the scope of soil conservation for the coming decade. Intelligent response will be difficult to prescribe, and certainly there will be broader grounds for disagreement and conflict regarding specific objectives within the local community. However, issues of conservation will increasingly be issues of conflict. If this is not recognized, if our conservation organizations deal only with problems that can be dealt with by providing inputs to agriculture, these organizations will have missed the critical conservation issues of our times."

The role Dr. Brewer and others see for Soil Conservation Districts in the future is more heavily one of ¹⁾ identifying environmental problems to the constituents of the district and ²⁾ promoting debate and discussion of them in order to help the district communities establish specific objectives for enhancing environmental quality. (Soil) Conservation Districts must have access to individuals well grounded in the empirical nature of those activities and processes which have substantial environmental efforts--and especially detrimental effects. Districts must have available within their staffs some analytical capability. Special information concerning present practices must be collected and analyzed to ascertain the extent of those consequences, their susceptibility to change, and their relative economic significance.

Finally, he said, the SCS must have among its members individuals who are capable of discerning the kinds of values that are relevant in assessing alternative ways of interacting with the environment, as well as individuals skilled in the techniques which can be employed to help district communities reveal those values. The market mechanism frequently does not provide reliable indicators of important values that ultimately will decide the way we go about managing our environment.

In previous comments Brewer used the term "district community." It holds special significance, for there must be a constituency behind efforts to understand environmental problems, diagnose them, and pursue programs of action to enhance environmental quality. The constituency must do more than simply lend political muscle to a specific program; it must participate directly in identifying the goals environmental management seeks to achieve, and must actively help select the most effective lines of action to pursue.

One of the serious defects in our structure of government is that we have very few organizations which encompass the interests and factions that jointly represent a "community" for considering specific environmental problems. We have encountered this difficulty in our efforts to manage river basin development over the past decades. How much more complex is the task for welding together a community of interested parties to undertake programs to enhance environmental quality. Polluters and those suffering the consequences of pollution frequently are separated geographically, yet both must be parties to resolving the problem. Existing affinities to political parties and the historic role of state capitols frequently concentrate community affiliation with the state or county of residence, even though the relevant "community" for responding to environmental problems may extend over several states or county jurisdictions. What is needed is some unit of local government which can coalesce a relevant community for our environmental problems.

It is on this score that we see conservation districts having a comparative advantage over many other forms of local government.

These have been competently staffed, well organized, and generally enjoyed reasonable consensus on what they were trying to do.

Widespread confidence has been expressed in the viability and potency of Conservation Districts in most of the rural areas in the country. This legacy of confidence and performance provides the Soil Conservation Service with a potentially powerful unit which can and should be used in efforts to enhance the natural environment of our country.

In the past, conservation districts have participated in local governmental efforts to coordinate programs in a particular region. They have been an effective vehicle for executing past programs, they should be now viewed as a vehicle which can be used to articulate and secure grassroots support for much broader types of programs than those in which SCS has previously been engaged.

They may be among our more potent vehicles for initiating a host of rural community services which in the past have been provided for through county government or district governments of various kinds. The direct linkage of conservation districts to the federal government is an important asset in this regard. Increasingly the problems of local government are to provide various services to the local community. In rural areas this means the typical services of education, health, sanitation, etc. In the 1970's it will also include programs to enhance environmental quality. At the present time we have relatively weak local governmental units for pursuing this environmental mission. This mission holds both a challenge and opportunity to the conservation districts and SCS.

Local people working together with state and Federal agencies can shape and plan the environment on their terms. Changes are inevitable. The only question is, on whose terms and under what criteria?

The Soil Conservation Service is well aware that we have embarked on a new decade where change will accelerate, where problems will multiply and pressures will mount. Therefore, we held a state conservationists' meeting last fall that was different from any we have held before.

Instead of trying to solve present problems -- however pressing -- we focused our full attention on what the Service should be doing during the 1970's.

We are now making a critical scrutiny of all of our present operations. The more of a sacred cow the operation, the more we feel it probably needs a critical review.

We haven't formulated the specifics for our work in the 1970's, but I think perhaps you will be interested in some of the general recommendations made by our state conservationists.

Sprinkled throughout all of our discussions was the thought that we ought to look at and strengthen our relationships with conservation districts and their associations, and with other organizations in the conservation field.

A major point was that we strengthen our inventory capabilities to provide better data, faster, on a wider variety of resource conditions and problems. It was recommended that SCS--

-- Speed up work on the national cooperative soil survey and reduce the time lag between mapping and publication;

-- Continue to modernize snow survey equipment and procedures for knowing quickly what is happening in the mountains;

-- Broaden the perspective of our river basin surveys to deal more fully with water quality, pollution abatement, municipal and industrial water supply, and other needs;

-- And undertake other comprehensive surveys of erosion, sedimentation, pollution sources, flood damages, water impoundment sites, scenic areas, and other resource concerns.

In the area of conservation planning, we need to streamline our assistance; be more flexible; and relate planning on individual land units to planning for neighborhoods, communities and multi-county areas.

We discussed the total watershed project and RC&D project needs, including how to provide for more flexibility in planning and for greater coordination with special interest groups such as wildlife agencies.

It was the consensus of the group that state, local, and private interests may have to continue to provide a larger proportion of the technical assistance for installing conservation work on individual land holdings. We in SCS will need to continuously evaluate how to provide the best overall direction and technical assistance.

To summarize, SCS in the 1970's will probably move toward better and more comprehensive planning, and closer involvement in controlling pollution from all sources.

Also at the national level, the whole business of conservation and environmental improvement is being studied by a number of departments. This includes specific policies all the way up to the institutional arrangements for carrying out those policies. More than 150 bills were introduced in the U.S. Congress last year that would change some of the present arrangements -- that would shift whole agencies around, or shape new agencies and departments.

We may neither understand nor agree with some of the new arrangements being suggested for conservation work, but we are firmly convinced that the process of questioning current methods is a very healthy one. We cannot assume that any of us are making the highest and most effective contribution at the "old stand." Let's look at ourselves and our work and when we see where an improvement can be made we ought to make it.

We believe that conservation districts can play a strong role in the accelerated local resource conservation work that lies ahead. We hope districts and the SCS can each help the other to do its part of the job. If we don't always see eye-to-eye, then let's talk it over and iron out the problems and get on with the challenge. If you have suggestions on how SCS can better help Arkansas, tell us.

Meanwhile, there remain the old and newer jobs of conservation. There are eroded lands to be made green again, and watersheds to be protected. There are soils to be stabilized and land use changes to be made. There is planning to do so that we, the people today and the greater number tomorrow, can live a decent life on our part of the spaceship earth.

Today's frontier is our own community. Today's challenge is to improve life where we are, using our special skills and knowledge, and the help of state and federal groups and agencies.

On behalf of the Soil Conservation Service, we pledge our continued support for your activities on behalf of the land, the water, and most of all, the people of Arkansas.

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