

Efforts to Establish National and State
Land Use and Development Policies

I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss land use policy issues with you. You are part of a pretty aggressive program by Penn State and Kellogg Foundation, and you have been pretty aggressively looking around the mid-Atlantic this week. You're keeping quite a pace. But so are the problems of rural communities, and the efforts of agencies and organizations to do something about them.

I hope you will return home with a perspective on the kinds of help your communities can get, the kinds of decisions your communities must make, and the issues they must face...and some ideas on how you can help them get going.

One of the major issues any community must face is how its land and related resources should best be used. Some rural communities may well say, "we can wait awhile on land-use policy decisions." But you traveled to rural communities in another state this week, using major interstate highways and accommodations at major new motels. Along the way I'm sure you saw many evidences of rapid urban development along the highway corridors. Too many of the communities were not prepared to guide that growth and it is not all desirable.

Material for talk by Norman A. Berg, Associate Administrator, Soil Conservation Service, at a seminar for Public Affairs Leadership Program participants, Washington, D. C., March 21, 1973.

I'd like to discuss a few of the current land-use policy issues and actions, and some of the setting in which they are raised, with the help of slides.

LIGHTS OUT SLIDE RUN BEGINS

1. Of all the nations on earth, the United States is among the richest in terms of its land and water resources, its beautiful countryside, its tremendously favorable and varied climate.
2. The future of the land resource is in the hands of millions of people who daily make decisions--good or bad--on how it is used.
3. What is the ownership of our land? Fifty-nine percent of it is in private hands--owned by individual farmers, ranchers, businessmen, and industry.
4. From this land comes most of the food, fiber, and timber we consume and export.
5. One third of this land is in forests.
6. One third is in pasture and range.
7. And a little less than a third is in cropland.
8. Despite an almost 200 percent increase in population since 1900 these proportions in land use have changed very little.

9. The primary reason for this is research, extension, and agriculture-related technology. America's crop production per acre continues to exceed the demands of an increasing population and fast-growing foreign exports.
10. The second largest segment of land is under Federal management. This includes 34 percent of our total land area--759 million acres--half of it in Alaska and most of the remainder still west of the Mississippi. Some 187 million acres are managed by the USDA Forest Service. But the largest segment is public domain, under control of the Bureau of Land Management. Military land, national parks, and wildlife refuges add up too.
11. Some of those vast acres have been set aside as wilderness and primitive areas where timber is not harvested and most other uses are banned.
12. Much of the Federally owned land, however, is under multiple-use management, and one of the multiplying uses is for recreation.
13. With more spendable income, increased leisure time, and greater mobility, the demand for outdoor recreation has grown at a fantastic rate. In 1970, 128 million Americans participated in some form of outdoor recreation.
14. Land involved in recreation in some way affects 447 million acres under Federal management, 40 million acres under State control, and 3 million acres in county hands.

15. Private land also is used increasingly for recreational purposes -- especially for second homes and for hunting and fishing. Most of America's upland game find its home on the privately owned farm and ranch lands. By far the majority of hunters do most or all of their hunting on private land.
16. Another 5 percent of land in the U.S. is in State and local ownership.
17. And 2 percent is Indian land.
18. For the most part, America's land is sparsely populated. In the last 10 years, 1500 counties lost population.
19. To find the people, we ^{still} must look to the cities.
20. And primarily to the metropolitan areas.
21. Here, on 3 percent or less of our land, more than 70 percent of the population lives, works, and dies.
22. This includes land for cemeteries and for transportation--super highways, railroads, and airports. Although highly visible, land for transportation takes up only 1.4 percent of the total land area. But it took up some of America's prime agricultural land, irretrievably.
23. This briefly, is how we use our land... (recap the percentages).
24. The way in which we use land in America has been, for the most part, to our credit. Farmers and ranchers have had a big hand in that. So have homeowners and businesses and public land management agencies.

25. But we have used land and still use land in ways that are not to our credit. Thoughtless, unplanned, uncontrolled land use practices are costly to America, in terms of both economics and esthetics. These practices can no longer be ignored, and perhaps by the end of the 1970's no longer tolerated!
26. We still attempt to cultivate some land that is too steep and erosive--at least 50 million acres.
27. We still attempt to grow row crops on some land in the Great Plains, where the risk of land damage and crop failure is very high because of climatic conditions.
28. We needlessly burn some forest land each year.
29. We add to flooding problems through unwise land use practices, both upstream and in the flood plains.
30. Fifty percent of the annual flood damages still are suffered in small upstream watersheds.
31. America has already created unsightly scars on more than 2 million acres of land through stripmining.
32. And the mine acid that leaches out of the spoil banks pollutes streams for miles around.
33. Solid waste is one of the increasing by-products of our affluent society; we discard 250 million tons of it each year.
34. Two-thirds of it still goes into 40,000 open dumps, mostly in rural areas, where it pollutes air, water, and land.

35. Animal waste can have a serious negative impact on the local environment. Large concentrations of beef cattle--feedlots with as many as 125,000 head at a time--produce hundreds of tons of manure a day.
36. This waste pollutes the air, and messes up the streams, ponds, and lakes it reaches.
37. Sediment still is America's most costly water pollutant. About half of it comes from soil erosion on crop and pasture land.
38. The other half comes from highways, streambanks, and urbanizing areas; forests; and geologic erosion on public lands.
39. Urbanizing areas are especially severe sediment polluters because of the large acreages laid bare for long periods of time.
40. Unplanned, checkerboard development also squeezes the farmer, often making him an offer he can't refuse.
41. Does it have to be that way? Can proper land-use planning help protect and develop natural resources in both rural and suburban areas?
42. The local people that SCS works with can testify that conservation practices greatly reduce erosion and flooding on agricultural land.
43. Strip mine spoils can be reclaimed and revegetated.
44. Solid waste can be disposed of safely in properly located and managed sanitary landfills.

45. Suburban sediment can be drastically reduced by adopting proven practices--such as this temporary silt trap like those that farmers and ranchers have used in protecting their farmlands over the past 30 years.
46. And land suitability for nearly everything can be determined long before construction is started.
47. More and more Americans are determined to have a high quality environment, whether it's a vista one might see only on vacation...
48. Or right in town...
49. Or right at home.
50. They want high-quality food, dependable in quantity and reasonably priced at the market place...
51. And that means that land-use planning must first and adequately consider the needs of a high-quality sustained agriculture.
52. They want space and facilities for recreation...
53. They want space and habitat for wildlife...
54. They want the red-carpet treatment for fish.
55. All these needs should be considered in setting national, state, and local land-use policies and in making state land use plans. The individual and his community have much to gain if land use is properly planned and land is used according to plan. They have a great deal to lose if it isn't.

56. The signs are slightly encouraging that America's local governments and their state and federal counterparts are beginning to move on land-use planning. It's costly, it's complex, and it's too slow.
57. One effort to get all the ducks in a row has been Federal legislation to give States financial aid in developing methods to control the use of land within their boundaries.
58. Senate Bill 924, for example, would provide grants, administered by the Department of the Interior, to States for developing land use planning procedures within three years and implementing them within 5 years.
59. Areas of critical environmental concern are just one item in a list of 18 ~~that the bill would~~ require States to consider in their planning process.
60. States would also need to cover recreation needs, population densities and trends, economic factors, and related data; and
61. The kinds of help available to State and local agencies in setting and implementing land use programs.
62. The bill would call for controlling development in flood plains or other areas subject to natural hazards...
63. It would call for controlling the location of new communities and the use of land around them.
64. It would call for public hearings and other communication efforts relating to the State plans.

65. Exchange of information and data among agencies and the public would be important, too, as a way of trading experience and techniques.
66. The bill would require that Federal projects and activities that affect land use, such as water and sewer system aid, be consistent with State land use programs.
67. The bill also would provide for some sanctions against States that did not get going on a land-use plan fast enough. These would be primarily withdrawal of grants made for planning, as well as for airport and highway and recreation developments.
68. A National Advisory Board on Land Use Policy would be established, drawing its members from several Federal departments.
69. There are other bills, and other provisions, being discussed here in Washington and at Harrisburg and elsewhere. An important point to make about all of the bills is that...
70. They're not going to see how far they can split the land use decision making. They would leave most land-use decision making powers right where they are now--with local governments. In most cases, that's where they belong.
71. That means you have a responsibility and an opportunity to help make sure that your communities take hold of their land use challenges, to meet both local aims and those of the region or the Nation.
72. It does mean that land-use decisions may increasingly be based on regulation and control and ~~litigation~~ as well as private decisions in free-market system.

73. It does mean that the private landowner has duties as well as rights in the matter of using and caring for the resources he manages.
74. Whenever the decisions are made about land-use patterns and changes, natural resource facts should be on hand as a helpful guide. SCS and other agencies will work to provide these facts to the people who need them, and help interpret the information and make use of it.
75. Land-use planning begins at home.
76. It begins and ends with people. It is for people.
77. As you become more capable leaders back home in Pennsylvania, you can help make daily life better for people. That's the assignment we all have.