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Interviews with Chiefs of the Soil Conservation Service: Williams, Grant, Davis, and Berg

Edited by Steven E. Phillips and Douglas Helms

Cover contains photos of the four SCS chiefs interviewed in this volume:

Top left: Donald Williams

Top right: Kenneth Grant

Bottom left: Mel Davis

Bottom right: Norm Berg

Cover designed by Jimmy Todd, SCS

Photos: courtesy of the SCS Office of Public Affairs

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**Interviews with Chiefs of the
Soil Conservation Service:
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**Economics and Social Sciences Division
Soil Conservation Service
United States Department of Agriculture
Washington, D.C. 20013**

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Introduction

Here, with varying degrees of candor, is the story of the Soil Conservation Service, told by four men who ran the agency from the Eisenhower to the Reagan administrations, a period of about thirty years. First came the late Donald A. Williams, who had the formidable task of managing the long-term development of the Service after the tenure of its crusading founder, Hugh Hammond Bennett. Next Kenneth E. Grant led the agency as environmental concerns grew and urban or suburban citizens demanded more assistance. Under Mel Davis, the Service attempted to cope with the expansion of land in production agriculture (largely a consequence of large grain sales to the Soviet Union) even as budgetary pressures increased. Finally, Norman A. Berg steered the agency during a time of renewed interest in environmental concerns. He was also the last "career chief," that is, he worked his way up the ranks of the Service to the top position. (Note: the title for the top position in the Service has switched between "chief" and "administrator.")

We edited these interviews with a light hand so as to give the reader a feel for the conversational style of each man. We endeavored to transmit not only what they said but also how they said it.

Several themes tie their tenures together. From its initial emphasis on soil conservation on agricultural land, the Service has steadily expanded into areas like flood prevention and rural economic development. Each chief sought to accomplish these new tasks while maintaining the agency's traditional role of service to farmers. Perhaps the most contentious issue was, and is, the perceived conflict between economic development and environmental protection. This is clear in disputes over the use of structural measures for flood control, channelization, and agricultural chemicals. Other common issues include the organization of the Service and relations with Congress and the White House.

Readers seeking to learn more about specific issues or programs discussed in these interviews are advised to turn to *Readings in the History of the Soil Conservation Service* (Historical Notes Number 1, 1992) by National Historian Douglas Helms.

We would like to thank Messrs. Williams, Grant, Davis, and Berg. Each graciously gave of their time, both for the interviews and to review the transcripts. Barbara Cook and Sheree Gross of the Economics and Social Sciences Division (ECN) cheerfully helped with the tedious task of transcribing the interview tapes. Nancy Mathews and Anne Henderson of Strategic Planning Division, as well as Jennifer Harr and Leigh Ann Mays of ECN made valuable suggestions for improving the readability of the text. Finally, we greatly appreciate the efforts of Claudette Hayes of the Service's Publication and Printing Branch, who has managed the printing of this and earlier volumes in the Historical Notes series.

Steven Phillips
Historian

Douglas Helms
National Historian

Norman A. Berg

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Biographical Sketch

Norm Berg was born in 1918 in Burlington, Iowa, but grew up on his family farm in Pine County, Minnesota. After receiving a B.S. in agricultural education from the University of Minnesota in 1941, he briefly taught vocational-agriculture to adults in St. Louis County, Minnesota. In 1943 he joined SCS, but his early career was interrupted by three years of service in the Marine Corps.

After World War II, Berg held various SCS positions in Idaho and South Dakota. In 1956, he obtained a Masters in Public Administration from Harvard. He was tapped for the post of assistant to the administrator in 1960. In 1962, Berg took a leadership role in the Great Plains Conservation Program. In July of 1965, he rose to the post of deputy administrator for field services and in January of 1969 he became associate administrator. During this period, he became a member of the first graduating class of the Federal Executive Institute. From September of 1979 to April of 1982 he was chief of the SCS, making him the last career employee to hold that post.

Berg played a key role in many USDA projects, including chairman of the U.S. section of the Great Lakes Land Use Reference Group of the International Joint Commission, chairman of the USDA Land Use Executive Committee, leader of the Resource

Conservation Act Management Group, and member of the Secretary of Agriculture's Coordinating Committee for the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act.

Many inside and outside of the government have recognized his service. In 1973 he received the USDA Distinguished Service Award and in 1980 the National Wildlife Federation honored him with its Conservation Award for "outstanding contributions to the wise use and management of the Nation's natural resources." Also in 1980 he was among the first group of Senior Executives to receive the Presidential Rank Award of Meritorious Executive. Berg received the Hugh Hammond Bennett Award from the Soil and Water Conservation Society and is charter member and fellow of that organization.

Since his retirement from SCS, Berg has served as Washington representative of the Soil and Water Conservation Society and senior advisor to the American Farmland Trust. In 1992 the Soil and Water Conservation Society, with the support of Ken Novak and Frances Robinson Novak, established the Norman A. and Ruth A. Berg Fellowship. Each year, it enables about fifteen experts to meet and discuss conservation policy.

Part One: April 9, 1992

HELMS: Norm, my idea about this is to go in chronological order. We may need to do this more than once and not really rush. We'll just start out with the basics, when you were born and something about early childhood and growing up.

BERG: I started life in Burlington, Iowa, a town on the Mississippi River. It's also the home of Aldo Leopold. My dad worked for a railroad as a machinist. He had been in the Navy as a chief petty officer and came back to Burlington and worked for the shop that kept the steam locomotives running. My mother had been born in Burlington. My dad came from Sioux City, Iowa, and his ancestors came from Norway and settled in southeast South Dakota and moved to Iowa. He eventually ended up at Burlington. My mother's background goes back to her mother being a Rohleder. Her grandmother was a Kelly having come from Ireland. There's a mix of backgrounds in my family, including some German background along with the Irish. Both of my parents were American born. My mother lived until she was ninety-three. She'd be one hundred and one as of the end of March 1992 had she continued to live.

My dad had bought a farm in Minnesota about eighty miles north of Minneapolis/St. Paul, close to the Wisconsin line. He bought that farm in 1914, four years before I was born,

with help from his dad in terms of financing it. As I remember our summers, when he had a break from working he would drive me and my brother, who was two years younger, up to that farm in Minnesota. We would go across Iowa and up through southern Minnesota heading for the farm in a Model T Ford. The land that he bought was originally forested as was all of northern Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan. It had been logged-over in the late 1800s and most of that land came back to second growth timber. If it was cleared it became agriculture. That was the objective of the farm that he had purchased--to clear it of the second growth and make it into a combination livestock and grain farm. It was really and truly a family farm.

I don't remember much about Burlington, Iowa, except that I think I started a preschool activity there and maybe a little bit into the third grade before we were moved permanently up to the farm in Minnesota, probably in the mid-1920s. By that time, there were four in the family, myself, a brother two years younger, a sister two years younger than that, and a sister eight years younger than me.

I do remember the hills in Burlington that we had for sledding. Obviously, we were able to have a sled. I can remember sledding on the hills close to where Aldo Leopold's family lived. I did not know that at the time, but since I have gone back to Burlington to honor Leopold at a city function I

have noted how strategically located they were up above the Mississippi River in a very affluent area compared to my background.

As we moved up to the farm permanently, the first task was to clear that land. Somehow my dad had been able to get enough together in terms of cropland that he could have some Holstein cows, chickens, and pigs. All the power was literally horsepower. We had at that time three horses. I can remember in the early days having to help do some of that land clearing. It required cutting down the trees that had gotten, in some cases, to be fairly good sized. They could be made into fence posts that we needed to fence the farm and firewood for the following winter. It used to take about one acre of cut wood that was sawed and split to provide the fuel for the heating and the cooking. All of the cooking and heating during the winter was done by wood. He had also managed to construct a small home there along with a partially built barn, a silo, a chicken barn, and a place to have the hogs corralled.

The farm itself, if I had known then what I know now, was not good land to move into agriculture. It had a mix of very heavy soil. They told me in my early days it was called gumbo. The roads were unpaved in those days and in the spring when the snow melted and the ground thawed, the

wagon wheels picked it all up. They just ballooned in size. That is the way it was out in the field when it was wet.

We also had some wetland--swampland--primarily peat that was being moved into agricultural use. That was very difficult because it required getting rid of the excess water. But on that farm we also had some very sandy soils that tended to blow when it was windy. In helping to clear the land, I can remember as a boy helping my dad set dynamite under the tree stumps to loosen them up so we could get them out of the ground. He would vary the length of the fuses on the dynamite under maybe a dozen different stumps. Then he would take half of the fuses to light and I would take the other half, light them, and run for cover behind the nearest standing big tree. So that was pretty exciting for a young man to have the Fourth of July practically every day.

I entered a school there and my dad drove the bus. We had to build the bus. He was successful in winning the bid to transport the children to school. We were at the end of the line. I can remember when he bought a Whippet truck and we built the school bus, that is, the carriage itself. The school board provided what was called a bus that would go onto a snow sleigh if the roads were so bad that you couldn't get through. The horses would then be used to pull the sleigh and this so-called "covered bus" that fit on the sleighs. That was used quite

often during the winter in northern Minnesota because the roads were not that well kept at the time I started school.

The school was a consolidated school, which was fairly rare in that time, in Grasston, Minnesota. It was a school that had the first and second graders in one room, the third and fourth graders in another room, the fifth and sixth graders in another room, and the seventh and eighth graders in another room. Then in the high school, all four classes were in one large room. In the back of that room was the school library. There was a separate facility that would be used for some of the chemistry and other experimental work that they did, but otherwise that was the extent of school activity. A consolidated school in Minnesota was pretty progressive because there were other counties fairly close by that still had one room schools where the people going there would spend all eight years in the same room. My class, as I remember it now, diminished considerably at the end of the eighth grade. Many children did not go beyond the eighth grade. I don't think my dad had an education beyond the eighth grade. My mother did. The high school class that I ended up in had six boys and six girls. We stayed together for the full four years and all of us graduated.

HELMS: Had your father grown up on a farm in South Dakota?

BERG: No. He had no farm background. He was eager to learn. I can remember him getting literature from Iowa State, not the University of Minnesota, but Iowa State in terms of farm research and that sort of thing. He was very concerned about the production of each of the dairy cows. We kept measurements on the butter fat content from each cow and tried to weed out the ones that weren't producing as well. He was also concerned about getting a high grade bull to upgrade the calves. It was pretty primitive. I do remember that he was able to get from Iowa State University a grass that did well on wetlands called reed canary. During years when we had a pretty droughty summer, it was those lowland reed canary fields that provided the hay that we needed for the cattle and the horses. We also had rotations on that farm. It was a good mix of alfalfa mixing with the years that we had grain or we tried corn. We had the silo that we put silage in. He actually had a pretty good farm management scheme. We did not see any technical assistance or Extension help or any other kind of help.

We did not have electricity all the time that I was on the farm. We did not have anything but a hand pump that drew the water, the wood to cook and heat, and kerosene to light the lamps. We didn't consider ourselves underprivileged because as we came into the Depression we could hear and read about the economic stresses in the big cities and the people who were

unemployed. We had all of our own resources in terms of food, butchered hogs and calves. Of course, we had chickens. The only cash we had came from our cream that was separated from the whole milk. We used to turn the separator by hand. The cream was the only thing that was salable. The skim milk went to the pigs and chickens and we even gave some of it back to the calves. The cash came from a Land O'Lakes creamery in Grasston where we would bring our butter fat. That kept us going during the Depression days.

My dad was active in politics. He was engaged in the county government activity and in the elections in terms of those sorts of things that had to be monitored. I can remember hearing the conversations with the adult farmers regarding the politics. Minnesota at that time went through the initiation of what they called the Farm-Labor movement. That produced some very outstanding people like Hubert Humphrey and others.

My days on the farm, though, were very difficult in terms of hard work, but we had the advantage of living in northern Minnesota with the lakes and the wildfowl where I had good hunting and fishing. My dad taught us how to fish. He let me take his twelve-gauge automatic Remington to hunt when I was twelve years old. We had good duck hunting. We still had the prairie chicken in that area, and the partridge in the woods. As a

young boy, I had all of the advantages of the outdoors along with the hard work and a good educational background. That school offered no electives in high school but it qualified graduates for the University of Minnesota.

When my dad died in 1934, I was sixteen. My task, along with staying in school, was to help get my brother through high school. He was one year behind me. And, of course, my two sisters were also going to school. My mother was trying to keep things going when we were at school. That meant that we had to do a lot of work when we got home, before school in the morning, and especially during the summer.

After I finished high school in 1936, I stayed out of doing anything for a year except running the farm and helping my brother finish school. I was eighteen when I graduated from high school. I wanted to be certain that he finished high school. The understanding was that he would come back and help out on the farm. He came out of high school and immediately enlisted in the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) and was sent out to the state of Washington as one of the Corps members. I looked around after he left and thought I was not going to be able to make it on the farm without additional training.

HELMS: The idea was that after he graduated from high school you would go to college?

BERG: I had hoped that one of us would get more technical training in the agricultural area as we did not have vocational agriculture (vo-ag) at our high school. We did have a vo-ag department at another high school at Pine City, six miles in the other direction. I went to some evening classes there after I came out of high school and when I was home that year. I found that they had books on agriculture and there were people that knew more than I ever dreamed you could learn about agriculture. They also had a shop there that helped in terms of learning how to weld and do woodworking and that sort of thing. The Smith-Hughes instructor, the vo-ag teacher at the adjoining school, suggested that I look into the Minnesota School of Agriculture down at St. Paul, Minnesota. Secretary Bob Bergland went through that sort of exercise, as you may know from his history.

In the fall of 1937, I went down to the University of Minnesota to enroll in the School of Agriculture. I laid my transcript on the registrar's desk. It was a woman who looked it over. She told me I qualified for the University, full-time. Why not enroll in that? I asked if I could afford it and she said it was twenty-six dollars per quarter. I did have that much with me and I was able to enroll at the University of Minnesota, at least for the first quarter.

What to do about the farm? My mother by that time had decided to sell the farm, move to town with her two daughters, and help them finish school. So I became a University of Minnesota student. The choice was somewhat limited in the agricultural field, but I began in the broad agricultural area that would qualify me to be a vo-ag teacher or an Extension agent. I was looking at courses broadly in terms of crops, soils, animals, and that sort of thing. I also was concerned about the possibility of the military even back in those days because we were heading in Europe into the beginning of World War II. So I enrolled in ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) at the University.

The University of Minnesota is split in terms of campuses. They have the main campus in Minneapolis where most of the basic courses are offered for the first two years and what they called the farm campus in St. Paul where they had the College of Agriculture, Home Economics and Forestry. That's where they had the experiment station. Much of our work in the later time in school was on the St. Paul campus, but all of the ROTC work was on the main campus. So I took enough mathematics courses to qualify to be an ROTC student because, I think, the primary emphasis at that time in that particular unit was engineering. I was debating then about whether I should pursue a career in engineering or stick with agriculture.

I had an opportunity, I think it was in 1938, to get into pilot's training in what was then the Army Air Force. I took a very rigorous physical exam and passed everything and they said there is one last thing that we need to have you do and that is to read a color chart. I went into that room and for the first time found out that I was partially color-blind. That dropped me out of the qualifications to be a candidate for the Air Force, which was probably fortunate. Many of those who I knew qualified and ended up going over to England. They were fighting Germany over London and other places. Many of them never came back. That convinced me that I had better begin to concentrate on what I needed to do. I had two years of ROTC and I then concentrated on agriculture. I went into Smith-Hughes training and ended up continuing in that way. In the early part of 1941, I would have graduated in June, but the head of the vo-ag schools at Minnesota said they needed me to go out to a school that was losing its Smith-Hughes person because he or she was being drafted. I said I wanted to finish and get a degree and they said no problem. They would guarantee me that. We had a quarter system and it was coming into the second quarter. They said they would guarantee me that I would get nothing but straight A's from there on until I graduated, from this quarter and my third quarter coming out in June, 1941.

I had met the girl that later became my wife, Ruth, in the spring of my sophomore year. She had transferred after the first year from North Dakota State University to the University of Minnesota as a home economist. We had made up our minds during our later days at the University of Minnesota that we would become married at some time. I said I would go out and start my Smith-Hughes work in the school in northern Minnesota up in St. Louis County at the request of the dean of the school. She finished her home ec. degree work in June and went to work for the Farm Security Administration on the western side of the state at Crookston as a home ec. advisor. She would go out and help women who did not have the necessary background in canning and sewing and that sort of thing. It's the kind of thing that is now fairly accepted and Extension does that sort of thing with some of their home ec. people. The Farm Security Administration had a very good staff in that regard back in the early 1940s.

HELMS: Was this mostly the people who had the rural rehabilitation loans?

BERG: Right. They were trying to take people who were perhaps getting into farming for the first time or having a tough go of it. They were offered technical advice all the way, help on the farm, and help in the home, that sort of thing. I ended up at a school in Meadowlands in St. Louis County. It's about fifty miles west of Duluth.

HELMS: Let me interrupt. During your study at the university, was there much in the way of what we think of as conservation activities?

BERG: There wasn't very much. We didn't hear about this sort of thing. I mentioned the fact that on the farm we never did see the kind of assistance that I know is now available from USDA. The first contact we had with a governmental agency was some time in the mid-1930s when somebody came out to measure the amount of ground we had in alfalfa and said that we would qualify for having a crop conserving farm. We qualified under the old AAA (Agricultural Adjustment Administration) for some subsidy for having a rotation that we had just had as a matter of course all the time. But that was our first and only contact with government.

At the University of Minnesota, the courses I did take were good in terms of soils and crop agronomy, genetics, and that sort of background. We had excellent courses in economics. The forestry school was there so we had some courses in forestry. It was not in terms of what people would be getting now in the way of resource management, environmental courses, and soil and water conservation. I did take a federal exam that was offered by the Soil Conservation Service when I was at the university.

The teaching was very demanding and vo-ag teachers were year-round instructors. I not only had the people

in that high school between the time I went out there in the early part of 1941 until they finished school that spring, but also I had classes through the summer, including a Future Farmers of America group. I got acquainted with the county agent. St. Louis is a big county up in northern Minnesota and he was very helpful. He used the Smith-Hughes or vo-ag teachers as his outreach throughout the county. That was a good combination because I then learned the kinds of things that Extension was doing and the kind of things that we could help on. This included the fact that he and I went into a venture of buying about fifty sheep, finding a place to keep them, and doing all the things it took to have an ongoing enterprise. Eventually, we sold them and it turned out to be a worthwhile endeavor. That area was also getting some help from the governor, at that time Governor Harold Stassen, because the iron mine area had been depressed and they were trying to build the agricultural area. Therefore, there were some funds available to help strengthen rural America.

I had been at Meadowlands for only a short time when a larger school close by, maybe twenty-five miles away, at Floodwood offered me the chance to be their instructor. They had two people on their staff for agriculture and they wanted me to take the top position. That was to teach the senior class and then work with the adults. They would have another person for the freshmen, sophomores, and

juniors. That was a more attractive assignment. My wife and I were planning on being married and she was still working over at Crookston so we decided that we would take the Floodwood job. That activity had an effort underway with the local cooperative creamery. I found when I was in that area that the co-ops were very strong. Many of those farms were the result of cut-over forest areas that I had experienced on my own farm. They had to turn to farming as a last resort. The area around Floodwood was primarily Finnish farmers. Many of them could not speak English, but they wanted help and the cooperative creamery was able to afford help. The co-op would help fund part of the job that I had with the school district if I would work primarily with the dairy farmers to improve their operations.

One of the things included setting up an artificial insemination ring. I had some background in that at the University of Minnesota. They were doing some early experimental work there. The previous person who had been at that location was an expert in that area. He was moving on to establishing a full-time insemination activity in southern Minnesota. So I had the help of that sort of expertise. We actually then had five bulls. There were three Jerseys and two Holstein bulls to service the cattle that were in the vicinity of that cooperative creamery. And that became a very interesting kind of a side line. I had another person hired to help do that,

but I was the expert, along with being a teacher for the senior class, arranging evening classes for farmers on a broad array of subjects, plus capturing some of the work that was coming out of the state agency to help build that rural area. I had a network of people who were working on other activities that would generate some additional income in northern Minnesota to supplement the income that had dropped off because of the mining problems. Mining wasn't totally done in. They hadn't invented the taconite process yet and it was pretty badly depressed.

In the fall of 1941 I started teaching at Floodwood, Minnesota. We were married on the twentieth of November 1941, which happened to be on Thanksgiving Day. President Roosevelt had moved Thanksgiving up one week because people at that time didn't start shopping for Christmas until Thanksgiving was over. To attempt to revive the economy, they added another week of shopping. Some states did not adopt that, but Minnesota did. She finished her work over at Crookston, Minnesota, in June of 1942 and came to live in Floodwood. About that time, I got an offer to come with the SCS. I hadn't heard anything since I sent in the exam and now here was an offer to come to a town in Idaho, Downey.

I knew something about the West because I had to work each summer to keep things going. The Great Northern Railroad ran the hotels in

Glacier Park. Their headquarters was in St. Paul, Minnesota. They recruited staff for all their work during the summer, out in Glacier Park, from the University students. During my time at the University of Minnesota, I had developed and was quite skilled in meat cutting and worked for the commissary that served the whole University in terms of the dormitories, hospital, student unions, and so forth. With that background, they said they needed a meat cutter for one of the hotels in Glacier Park. I went out there the last summer I was in school, 1940. I hadn't been there but two weeks and one of the persons they'd brought out as a porter--and that was the best paying job because they got the tips--just didn't fit. They sent him back home and offered me that job. That gave me good income that summer because I would carry bags and people would give silver dollars as tips at a beautiful place at the Sun Lodge in Glacier Park on St. Marys Lake. Tourists were traveling to see our country for the first time because the European community was tied up in the War. Many of these people who had traveled abroad during earlier times were amazed to see our own scenic areas.

Going back to the work I did during the summer, between my freshman and sophomore years, my uncle, Paul Berg, an Iowa State graduate as an engineer, was a chief engineer at a packing plant at Ottumwa, Iowa. They were building a new hog plant. He got me a job on construction that

first summer. Between my sophomore and junior years I went back up to the farm area that I had grown up in and helped a person wire farmsteads that were getting REA (Rural Electrification Administration) power for the first time. I wasn't an expert at that line of work, but I learned from this person who I worked with how to do the electrical work. The gratification of people, when they were able to turn that power on and get their yard lights and lights in the barn and house, and the fact that they could go out and buy electrical appliances, was just unbelievable.

Coming back now to the fact that I got an offer from the SCS, my wife had never been west of the eastern part of North Dakota. She said, "What are we going out to that part of the country for?" She didn't know much about it. Well, I had seen that beautiful mountain country in Montana and I thought if Idaho was anywhere like it maybe I could get a combination of what I had in Minnesota where I could have the lakes and streams and also the mountains. My thought was that maybe they would assign me to northern Idaho, up around Coeur d'Alene or someplace. As a matter of fact, they assigned me about as far south as you could get in Idaho at Downey.

HELMS: The motivation wasn't that it looked better, in the long run, financially?

BERG: It was a little bit better. I went to work full-time as a Smith-Hughes teacher in Meadowlands at eighteen hundred dollars per year. The Floodwood offer was a little better, but not much. The first offer from SCS was twenty-one hundred dollars, I think.

HELMS: What year was that?

BERG: Because I had to disengage myself from the school, it took until February of 1943 when we finally reported to SCS out there. I gave the school the deadline between Christmas and New Years that I was going to make the break. They kept us on for a short time afterwards because they just didn't have anybody there at Floodwood. We finally reported into Downey on the fifteenth of February in 1943. That was a six-day work week at that time that brought in the twenty-one hundred dollars. At that time, I was labeled a P-1, professional grade 1. They had what they called the sub-professional grades and the professional grades that went from one on up to eight.

My first assignment at Downey with the SCS was at a former Civilian Conservation Corps camp. It was not with Civilian Conservation Corps people. These camps that we had in the SCS were now being utilized for people who were conscientious objectors who were not going to be able to enter the armed forces. The camps went into public service. The SCS had responsibility during the full

work day, six days a week, to find work for these people out on the farms and the ranches. That's what I ended up getting involved with first.

HELMS: They called them Civilian Public Service Camps?

BERG: That's exactly right. The camps themselves during the off hours were run by churches. We had more than church or religious objectors. We had some objectors on political grounds and we had some objectors that came in from the Jehovah Witnesses. If they did not stay in the camp, they were treated as deserters. Then it became the follow-up responsibility of some governmental agency, probably the FBI, to find out where they were. The people at the Downey camp were the Amish and Mennonite people who had come from the eastern part of the country, Pennsylvania, Indiana, and so forth. These turned out to be very conscientious people and hard workers.

Our job was to go out and plan the conservation work needed on a farm, then get acceptance from the farmer that these workers could come in and do what had to be done. We brought in everything. We brought in the labor, we brought in the machinery, and we brought in the grass seed. If we needed to build a structure--we had all of the structural needs--we brought in the concrete, the cement, everything. I developed probably about fifty of those plans with the help

of the key person at that location. The conservationist there was Verne Heidenrich. He was an excellent teacher. He had come from a ranch background. The culture in southern Idaho was completely different than what I had known in Minnesota. In Idaho, they had irrigation of the valley lands, and dry land farming with the wheat fallow on the sloping lands that were just below the forested lands on the public domain. Then they had the range lands. Verne was an excellent teacher for me because he understood that culture and led me through all the things I needed to know about what they did in irrigated agriculture, dry land agriculture, and range country heavily mixed in with the public lands.

HELMS: Most of the work, I would gather, was in the irrigated area?

BERG: The work for the CCC camps was primarily on the irrigated land, but we did have some work on the dry lands building terraces and trying to stabilize the grassed waterways, and on the range lands developing water. So it was a combination.

HELMS: The farmers were accepting, of having the conscientious objectors work on the farm?

BERG: No problem. It was easy to get cooperation. Before I leave that, though, it was a good lesson for me. Most of those farmers felt that this was government work. They felt very little responsibility. I am sure you

have heard that before. They said, "That was the government's conservation measure and I don't worry about it." It needed maintenance but it didn't get any. It was the worst possible way to try to engage the local landowner. But it did provide work for these people and it did get some conservation work established in an area. That district was one of the oldest in the country. It was the Portneuf Soil Conservation District.

The CCC camp that was established first in that district was just outside of Pocatello. That was the headquarters for all of our operations in that part of Idaho. That CCC camp was brought into terrace and contour all of the land above the city. The city was in the valley. That land above Pocatello had been severely over-grazed for years. Every time they would get heavy snowmelt in the spring or a summer storm, the damage to the city from the overflow from the upper plateau was very serious. So the CCC went up there and dug terraces all over the hills on both sides of town. That was one reason they had this camp at Downey. They were doing some work down there.

Also, the Service had what they called the land utilization projects in an adjoining county. They had been buying land that had been formerly wheat land but was marginal and putting it back into grass. It was west of Malad about sixty or seventy miles. We actually had a "spike camp," as

we called it, out of our Downey camp during the summer months to work out on this land utilization area. I did some work out there. We had a conservation plan there on that big holding. I think it was over 150,000 acres of land. We dug wells, we fenced the area, and we reseeded the area. We were working on a plan based on public money coming to the SCS. At one time I analyzed the money coming in on that property. I did this after I came back from World War II, but I'm getting a little bit ahead of myself. It would have taken a hundred years to establish the plan on that land based on the money that was coming in from the federal government. I'll tell what we did about that later. We had those camps that had been CCC camps that lent themselves to this public service work during the War. I had decided I was going to go into World War II at some time.

HELMS: It sounds as though the assistance given under the Civilian Public Service Camps was more than typically given in the demonstration projects. They had labor and equipment.

BERG: They built very heavily on the experience that they had. The camp superintendent for the SCS work, Stubb Hattan, had been engaged in some of the early CCC work in some other parts of the West. Incidentally, the SCS at that time was divided into seven regions. Our regional headquarters was at Portland,

our state office was in Boise, and the area office that represented that southern Idaho area was in Pocatello.

Most of the districts in that southeastern part of Idaho had already been established. There was one in Bannock County, which was the Portneuf district, one in Bear Lake, and one in Oneida County. There were three very strong districts there already and they all had some CCC background. There were some counties that hadn't organized districts that were close by.

I went into the Marine Corps in September of 1943 and came back to Downey in May 1946. I ended up being in Washington, D.C., towards the end of my Marine Corps' time. I was stationed at the Naval Research Lab down on the Potomac. The training I had gotten in the Marine Corps was comparable to what I had gotten in the early days of my ROTC experience. They made me into an engineer with very intensive training in several locations throughout the country. I started boot camp in San Diego, California, got training eventually at Wright College in Chicago, Grove City in Pennsylvania, and then at the Naval Research Lab in Washington. I was eventually assigned there to develop instructional material for the students that were going through the courses that I had taken earlier. They looked at my background in terms of teaching and

that is where they ended up putting me. They wanted me to stay in after the war was finished but I decided I would go back to Agriculture.

I had the opportunity while I was in Washington to come down and get acquainted with the SCS office in Washington, at the same location as it is now. That was the first time I went into the chief's office.

HELMS: Which is where it is now?

BERG: Yes. The chief was in Africa as I remember it and J. C. Dykes was acting. For the first time I had that acquaintance. However, before I left Washington on May 1 of 1946, I had a chance to meet the chief. He had come back and I remember going into the office there. He was lounging on a couch that used to be in that office. It was still there when I took over. He handed me a booklet that had just been published by SCS and said, "This is what you need to go out and do more about." He knew I was going back to Idaho, although Dykes at one time had waved his hand to a big map in back of his desk and said, "You can go anyplace in the country." I ended up going back to Downey. The chief told me, "Young man, your job is to help get those districts organized in Idaho." They were having trouble getting districts organized.

My assignment was back to Downey at the same grade, P-1. I had been gone for three years. The first thing they did was send us up to the Palouse

school to be reoriented. That was my first exposure to that Palouse country. They had a school at Pullman, Washington, for returning vets.

HELMS: What was the purpose of that? To learn about new techniques?

BERG: New techniques. There hadn't been much change in policy as I remembered it, but they were, I guess, assuming that we really needed to be refreshed. It was a good opportunity to get acquainted and it was a great opportunity to see some of the problems of Palouse. They were much more severe than anything I had seen in the country. We also established contacts with some key people out of the Portland regional office and met returnees from other parts of the West. Our region had California, Nevada, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Hawaii, and Alaska. It was an interesting mix of western people. I got acquainted with some key people that I have followed all these years, and we're good friends even today.

Shortly after I got back to Downey, they wanted me to go to Pocatello and begin to get myself ready to work as a work unit conservationist. The person that had been the work unit conservationist was going to be moved over to the western part of the state. There were three of us that came back about the same time from World War II and we ended up right in the Pocatello area. They were going to send John Hull over to the western part of the

state. They were going to send Harold Harris over to the Aberdeen Plant Materials Center. They wanted me to become, when I was ready, the work unit conservationist which then would have moved me from a P-1 to a P-2. I think that must have been in the fall of 1946 or early 1947. My wife and I moved to Pocatello. We had one daughter at that time. She was two years old the day we left Washington on May 1, 1946.

We went back to Idaho without a dime. It was really rough going. I had some money sent in from my Marine paycheck to savings bonds and that allowed us to have enough money to buy a refrigerator, a stove, and that sort of thing, but we could not see our way clear to do anything but rent to begin with. We did find a friend there, though, who had a place to rent. He was a high school teacher. We met people through a Methodist church there who were very helpful. That allowed us to begin building a foundation for a family and for the future.

I was able to do a reasonably good job as a work unit conservationist and attracted attention on up the line. In 1950 they asked me to take over what they called a work group. Then it was called a district conservationist. That was the person who is now the equivalent of an area conservationist. The district conservationists had in their job description that they would meet with every conservation district board every time they had a meeting.

The local person, the work unit conservationist, did not represent the Service with the district. The district conservationist represented the Service with the district. I had board meetings in several of these districts every month, plus helping get the new districts established. I had been working on that. We were able to find the younger landowners coming back, like I had, from World War II who were willing to carry the petitions to get people out for hearings and get people out to vote. My area was the first to get all the districts organized. This was not easy to do.

HELMS: What were the reasons for that?

BERG: It was a mix. There were people, and there still are, who feel that any government activity is going to interfere with their private property or raise their taxes or do something. That was some of the propaganda that was brought in. Extension had very strong programs through the state and there were some people at the university level of Extension who didn't feel that we needed to duplicate what they were doing. We didn't find that necessarily at the county level. In fact, these Extension agents at the local level became our best allies. There was some objection to an additional bureaucracy from ASCS (Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service). I can remember going to hearings where people would hold up a map that came out of Portland showing how many districts

had been organized in the state. It showed the districts colored red and they'd hold that map up and say, "Look, if you're wondering what kind of an organization you're heading towards, this is it! (laughs)." Several of us suggested that they change the color to green. If we had a district in the county, it became green. We also had to defend the fact that there wouldn't be any additional taxes and that was a very sensitive matter. It's unfortunate, but that was built into the law.

The business of helping outside of a conservation district was changed somewhat when the Department decided that SCS would be responsible for the technical practices related to ACP (Agricultural Conservation Program) cost sharing. That changed our rules somewhat. But we still held a pretty tight line as to how much we would do outside of the district even on that type of work. Some delegations went into the "white counties," as we called those that didn't have a district, to certify that technical work was properly done on the more permanent type practices. That was a requirement that the Department placed on the SCS at that time.

HELMS: The predecessor to the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (the Production and Marketing Administration) sometimes had its own people for the agricultural conservation payments on the technical side, correct?

BERG: They did. The SCS did not want to have a duplicate technical agency so we did more and more of that work. Once the district was established, it wasn't a problem at all. Incidentally, we had been doing a lot of work with the old Production and Marketing Administration even before they made that assignment. But this made it more formal. It also provided eventually for that five percent transfer of funding that Congressman Jamie Whitten wrote into the act even before I came back to the District of Columbia.

The work in southern Idaho was very well accepted from the standpoint of the SCS. Many of those irrigated farms had been developed going back to the settlement of the Mormons. They were using primarily flood irrigation. There was a lot of erosion and there were a lot of problems from the standpoint of their return flows, the excess water coming off. Especially if they were irrigating elevated areas, if there was too much irrigation--and in a lot of cases there was too much application--it was showing up down below them and developing wetlands on lands that had been previously fairly well drained. They had been farmed well and then they began to get a higher water table because the land up above was putting out too much water.

We also had some severe gullying as it came off the upper benches into the lower valleys. There were rivers in all that area that really were of great concern. The Bear River and the Portneuf River had that kind of problem. But we helped make those irrigated farms with the techniques that we had such as the ability to map not only the soil but the engineering, the topography, of the area. We had engineers that would then design a system that would provide for the proper distribution of the water, where to lay out the ditches, what kind of rate it should have, and all that sort of thing. We, without question, made many of those farms much more profitable. We also introduced into the system a rotation that would allow the proper mix of grain, sugar beets, potatoes, and alfalfa for hay or pasture. The sloping areas with limited moisture--maybe only twelve to thirteen inches of moisture per year--had to be fallowed every other year to conserve the moisture. But there was a lot of runoff on that land that was fallowed. It was just bare or no cover at all. We began working on what is now known as crop residue management. We called it stubble mulch back in that era.

My first task with those dry land wheat farmers was to get them to keep the matches in their pocket so that they would not burn their stubble after they had finished harvesting their fields. The whole area used to just go up in smoke in the fall because they didn't know what to do with the

stubble. They also, I thought, at that time were not at all acquainted with the fact that highly erodible land needed contouring with a mix of fallow and wheat. To the extent that we could sell terracing, we were doing that. That was more difficult. Some of that land should have never been cropped. It should have been kept as grassland. Some of those farmers, if they had livestock, were willing to move the land back to grass, but it wasn't easy to do.

I learned another thing from the early days in SCS and then being gone for three years and returning. For many of those people that I had worked with on the farm to develop a good conservation plan, when I came back and picked those plans out of the file and went out to see those farmers or ranchers, they would look at me and ask where I had been. They had been waiting for me to come back. They had not done very much about what we had planned. They had accepted a complete conservation plan on paper, but it meant absolutely nothing in terms of what was needed in the way of follow-up. My early concern was that our national policy--and here I was just a little new field person out there--was wrong. The planning process had to be incremental and the establishment of the work had to be incremental. It was never finished. It was a dynamic process. So we put that into practice with people that we were working with, even though policy may not have supported that. We recognized that you could put on a

piece of paper a complete resource management plan. But you better be prepared for the fact that they are going to take it one step at a time. Many of the people asked for help based on a single problem, not looking at the whole resource. You tried to get them to broaden their thinking. When we brought a soil map out and brought a topo map out and went over that with the farmer, we knew more about his land than he did, even though he or she may have been farming it for over forty years. I also insisted that I would never meet only with the man of the family. I wanted to sit down around the kitchen table after we had walked the farm or ranch and be certain that they were both in on what we were talking about and would agree to the kind of things that had to be done. That made sense even back in those days. It was a cooperative effort.

HELMS: The idea then was even if a farmer just wanted help with a single problem you didn't just deal with that problem. You had to do the whole farm?

BERG: Our orders were, "Do the whole farm. Lay out the whole system from A to Z. Get them to sign as a cooperator with a conservation plan on that basis, a complete plan, a basic plan." When we got into the ACP requirements as to servicing their work, the Service came up with the three-tiered plan approach. It was some sort of an initial plan, maybe just to service the ACP request on a

single practice, and an advanced plan that brought them half-way to what ended up being a basic plan. In other words, it was a three-step approach. It was more in line with what I am talking about now.

We analyzed that even after I got back into Washington as to what still needed to be done. It was a matter of understanding from the very beginning that these people who owned and operated the land really were prepared to do something immediately and maybe half-way through the year, but beyond that you really had to stay with them. That's going to plague the SCS on the conservation compliance plans. Obviously, in the implementation of those plans, numbering something over one million three hundred thousand, people may not have understood what it was that they were expected to do without an awful lot of follow-up.

The work as a work unit conservationist was really very satisfying. It allowed a mix of being in the office to do the things that had to be done to keep track of what had been agreed to, to get the basic data together so you could talk to people intelligently about what their problems were, what some of the options were in terms of a plan, what option they'd select based on their enterprise or their finances or their timing, and working out a schedule and all that sort of thing.

Then there was the actual work of doing it. We had the so-called "sub-professionals" to help us do a lot of that work. But SCS had to gradually wean itself in those areas by getting out of doing everything and turning the cost and the doing of it over to the farmer. Even in the early days when I came back from World War II, we were buying the stakes to go out and mark the one hundred yard markers on every field. Then we'd go out and mark how much of a cut or how much of a fill on each stake. We'd actually get on the bulldozer and show the operator what we meant. I learned how to do that. We began an effort to try to say, "What could we have the farmer do?" We were just swamped with requests and we had to get out from some of that other work that we were doing.

HELMS: By that time it wasn't a problem of convincing the people to do a lot of this work, it was a matter of getting enough people to do it, correct?

BERG: Yes, and we found ourselves doing more of it than we probably should have. We could train them to do it. I am going to cite a case. On fairly sloping fields, where they flood irrigated after they put the crop in, they would put in what they called contour ditches temporarily for that year. They were ditches with enough grade to let the water run across that particular field. We'd come out and lay those out every year. One day I was out on a farm and I said, "You

know, I looked in a catalog, either a Montgomery or Sears, and you could buy a level fairly reasonable and you could do your own. I'd show you how to do it, where you read the target and how much to drop it next time you go across the field so you get a contour with a little grade." The guy looked at me and he said, "Come on over here and look at this." Then he took me into the shed and he showed me a two-by-four about thirty feet long with two legs on it, one about one half inch shorter than the other and he had a level strapped on the top of it. He said, "When I can't get a hold of you people, here's what I use." He walked that thing out across the field and obviously it gave him the grade. If I came out and did it, he loved it (laughs). He liked the conversation and he liked that professional approach. So I began to work on the basis that we could find other ways to do business including letting them buy the stakes and letting the contractor have his own level. Maybe the farmer would have a level, too.

HELMS: We hear a lot about salinity problems, but, with proper drainage and controls, that has been an irrigated area for a long time.

BERG: It has since the mid-1850s. But there were some severe problems. We had an expert come out. Incidentally, we used to get technical help out of the regional office. They were called zone people. There would be a team of two people. One would be an engineer and one would be an

agronomist or plant scientist or something and they would give us extra help. As a matter of fact, my first contact with Don Williams was when he was the engineer coming into my area to help on irrigation problems. And these were experts that really helped us. I had good technical advice from the best that the SCS had in every field that you could possibly imagine. I was really privileged to work with people who were experts. Harold Tower was our agronomist. Don Williams was our irrigation specialist.

I had a group of farmers in the new district that I'd helped get into place. It was west of American Falls, in a big flat area. It was about fifty thousand acres that was dry land wheat. This was out in the lava rock country, which was the Mennonite country. One of the board members who ended up being chairman came to me one time and he said, "Do you have a geologist?" and I told him, "Yes, I'll get a man out of Portland." We sat down and talked about the strategy for that area and this geologist went out and looked at it. We actually found a site on this person's farm where the geologist said, "If you poke a hole down here you'll find water." That took a private investment and a chance on this person doing it. He had to convince his dad into doing it. This was a younger man. And they found water. That area turned from a class four area in terms of land capability because of the limitation on precipitation, to a magnificent

irrigated area because everybody else went for wells too. They went to sugar beets and potatoes, and much more intensive cropping. Those were the kinds of things that we got called in on. We would kind of hold their hand while they decided, based on the best technical advice that we could give them, what kind of a risk to take. I had some Japanese-Americans that came back from World War II. They were taking over their family operations. They would go through what they should do in the way of an investment and the kinds of things that had to be done to make that farm area look like it does today, magnificent.

HELMS: Where were they located?

BERG: They were out in the irrigated area north of Pocatello. There are so many things that go back to those days when you start reminiscing about it. The combination of the field and the office work was why most of the SCS-ers came into SCS in the first place.

In 1950, I was asked to take over what I called a work group and become a district conservationist. That gave me the responsibility for the districts in southeastern Idaho. As I said earlier, that included meeting with the district boards and doing all the things you have to do to represent that level of operation in the Service. It turned out to be a very challenging job because you got very well acquainted with all of the people who work in the field and their families and children. You

also tried to represent the things that somebody else wanted, such as the regional office or the state office. We never heard about the Washington office. The Washington office staff did come through one time. They had a tour in the West. The regional conservators used to meet in different regions of the country and they met in the West one time when I was there in Pocatello. Chief Bennett and several of the top officials came out of Washington with all of our Portland staff. I had to set up a tour for them. Most of our direction came from the regional office. That's where the technical offices were. The state offices were fairly weak at that time. The district conservationists that had this work group function, and I think there were six of us in Idaho at that time, were primarily supervisory. They did not do the field work that I had done as a work unit conservationist. You could give advice to the people if they needed more training and that sort of thing, but you didn't have time to do much more than that. I also had the responsibility for this land utilization area, this big 100,000 acre-plus area out west of Malad. I already mentioned looking at the plan and how long it would take to get the practices installed with the federal money that was appropriated every year.

HELMS: That was reseeding?

BERG: Reseeding, fencing, finding water, and doing the kinds of things that would manage the area. I asked,

"Who was using the grass?" It was the local livestock people. I said, "Can I meet with them?"

HELMS: Was there a cooperative agreement with the district?

BERG: Yes, with the district.

HELMS: And then the district rented it to the contractor?

BERG: Yes, it was mostly SCS, though. Incidentally, a person who eventually became governor of Idaho, his boy came from that area, Evans. His dad was on the district board and the state commission. But it was an enlightened group down in that area. I went to the livestock users and I said, "If we could speed up the seeding on that area you, the users, would get this advantage much quicker than if you just wait for government." So they agreed to go out and seed thousands of acres of that land. They bought the seed, they brought in their own equipment, and we got crested wheatgrass all over that area in a hurry compared to what it would take for the government to do it.

I think it was during the reorganization that we went through or maybe it was when they did it in the regional offices. There was a reorganization order that the land utilization areas would be turned over to either the Forest Service, if they were close to a national forest, or to state governments.

HELMS: I think that happened a little before the reorganization.

BERG: It did, right. Because I remember the people that we used to have here. Ed Grest was the top LU (land utilization) man back here. He came out there to see how I was doing in Idaho. He moved over to the Forest Service in that reorganization. He may have still been here when I came back in 1960, but I'm not real sure.

When the transfer of that land went to the Forest Service, my office was in the Federal Building, the Post Office Building, in Pocatello. Right across the hall was the supervisor of the Caribou National Forest. He had the closest forest to that land utilization area so that was where they were going to transfer that LU holding. It was done on the first of January, whatever year that was, and out in that country they didn't have snowmobiles at that time. You couldn't get there. I had on my records, hundreds of miles of fence, it was a property. Therefore, I had to have a property record on every well, on every piece of machinery that was out there, and on hundreds of miles of fence. I can remember he and I looking at each other and I said, "Well, I know it's there, now you'll just have to take my word for it. If you want to go out and look, you go right ahead, but here's the file. Here are all the property records on that." The LU became Forest Service property.

HELMS: I wanted to back up a moment. What you're saying is that you got the ranchers who were using the land to buy the seed, correct? It was mostly crested wheatgrass?

BERG: Right, crested wheatgrass. There were some other grass strains that began to come in from our plant materials centers that were better. But a lot of it in the early days was crested wheatgrass. Now, there were people who were skeptical about that because they said, "That gives them a right to claim that they have a right to graze." And I said, "Who else is going to come in here?" They were the adjoining ranchers. You were not going to bring ranchers from someplace else in the state or the country to graze on that property. It's too far away. They were charged a fee and the Forest Service took it over and continued that arrangement as far as I know. It became their National Grasslands. The fact is, we did a pretty good job of managing that area in terms of what the idea was when they bought it in the first place.

The assignment then in terms of that work group changed when they changed from the P grade. Incidentally, those work group district conservationists were P-3's. That was an advance in terms of being able to take on an additional line of work.

It was in 1950 when I got that assignment and my wife and I were able to buy our first home. I think we put down five hundred dollars. I used

a VA (Veterans Administration) loan. It was no easy trick either. There was one time between 1946 and 1950 when the SCS had to go through a very drastic personnel reduction. Apparently each region was asked to pick three people who could be in jeopardy because they were fairly new in the organization that they did not want to lose and I was one of them. I was the one from Idaho, Tom Helseth from Oregon, and Arnold Bolle from the state of Washington. They protected us somehow. I had to drop back from a P-2 to a sub-professional because I had 120 on my score in terms of my veteran status. So they said, "Norm, we'll protect your salary and your job and we won't bring in somebody over top of you, but you'll have to drop back for six months." So I went back to a sub-professional grade for six to eight months. I took advantage of that because I said, "Well, now I can go out in the field!" Tom Helseth ended up being a state conservationist in California and Arnold Bolle went on to Harvard a little bit before I did to study for his Ph.D. He went back to become the dean of forestry at the University of Montana. He's still there, Dean Emeritus. In fact, I periodically see him written up on the national news.

There was an interesting exercise when I was there in southern Idaho. William R. Van Dersal was our chief of operations. Don Williams was there in the regional office. J. H. Christ was our regional conservator. It was a combination of brainstorming

and I think Van was probably the one that was instrumental in putting the ideas together. First, they had gone to a sociologist to learn how important it was to understand what motivated people. I'll go back to some things that Pete Nowak has done. You know, the business of what motivates people to do something. That early work was dedicated to finding what they called the "Elmers." You know the story on that. They selected one of my districts, the Power District, as one of those experimental districts. It was west of Pocatello out at American Falls, a fairly new district that I had helped organize. It had a good county agent. We would simply claim that everybody in the district was a cooperator, not this business of one-on-one-on-one. We'd just say that every land user in the district was a cooperator. Then we'd look at the overall strategy of the area in terms of its resources and that sort of thing as to what kind of plan each one of those people needed. Then we would construct that plan in the office, take it out to them, and try to talk them into it. In other words, the dry land was practically all the same. On the irrigated land, many of the practices were practically the same, and the range land was very comparable. We'd develop one plan for the area that represented that particular type of land use. Then we'd carve it up into sections based on the ownership and go out there and say, "Here's a plan for your property. Wouldn't you like to be a cooperator and become engaged in this activity?"

I had that activity in Idaho, Bolle had it in Washington, and Tom had it in Oregon. It was kind of an experiment in terms of what could be done to expand our limited SCS force dramatically. But we'd do this through the leaders that were identified, the Elmers. We'd go to the people that were obviously the thought leaders of the area. That was the beginning of an activity that still makes sense today.

HELMS: Did they decide to try this everywhere? What was the result of the experiment?

BERG: It broke down because the regional offices were disbanded. It came just before we had that reorganization during the Eisenhower/Benson Administration. There were some uneasy feelings within the SCS. Some of the old-timers felt that we were giving away the store. In other words, we were just becoming Extension agents with information that we printed and passed out. There were many people who felt that all SCS did was go out there and hold the hand of the person who was doing the work. You just had to do it. It just came out of that kind of background. And that was the way it was. There were others who felt that this was so far-fetched that it would never work. It was just too simple. Hugh Bennett had come out earlier and said that with additional funding, we could do all the work that needs to be done within fifteen years. We'd button up the soil conservation job. And this

was part of that effort, to try to accomplish that mission. There were many of us in the younger age in the ranks that said, "Hey, I plan on making this a lifetime career! You were gonna button this work up in fifteen years?" We didn't think it would ever be that kind of deal.

HELMS: I wonder why he went on saying that?

BERG: Well, it was a good thing to do to try to get the funding. It was a funding strategy. And I could see that after I understood what it was really all about.

When they changed the grade level from P to GS, they also changed the way in which an area conservationist would function, as opposed to a district conservationist with a work group.

HELMS: Norm, could you tell me about what year that was?

BERG: I think it was 1954. What had been the P-3, the equivalent of a GS-9, as a work group district conservationist (DC), became an area conservationist at a GS-11. The field level had not yet been changed. That was still called a work unit conservationist. They were allowed to be either GS-7's or GS-9's eventually. We set up some sort of criteria that said some were more difficult districts and that sort of thing. But the number of area conservationists came down. I think we ended up with only four in

Idaho instead of six. So we had more districts to be concerned about. And we did not have to meet with the district boards directly. The work unit conservationist became the SCS representative with the district. We would meet with them as often as we could. I had one district, fairly new, that used to meet every Saturday night. And it was seventy miles from home!

The area conservationists had new assignments in terms of a lot of other activities that were beginning to show up in the mid-1950s. The ground work was being laid for the watershed program, what became P.L. 566. The Great Plains Conservation Program began at about the same time. There were several things that the national leaders could see coming that they were preparing the field for.

HELMS: Before the reorganization of 1953, there was some activity with legislation that was introduced in 1948 that was sort of important. I was wondering if, out in the field, you heard very much about that. You did for the 1953 reorganization.

BERG: Oh, no question about that. We were heavily engaged in that. Incidentally, Idaho didn't have a state SCD (soil conservation district) association, and I was in the Service before they had a national association. I had helped in the background to organize that in Idaho. The president of the state association was from the area that I represented and he was a

good friend who I had helped in many ways. He had served in the state legislature and so forth. We got very heavily involved in the business of reorganizing. All of the district governing boards in southern Idaho were Mormon, as were all of my field conservationists. The Secretary of Agriculture, Ezra Taft Benson, was a Mormon. I had the role of going to those people that I knew out there in Idaho and asking them to contact Mr. Benson directly and tell him he was doing the wrong thing. And we played a key role. It wasn't Benson that was doing this, it was J. Earl Coke from California, who had an Extension Service background.

We were part of Waters Davis' effort to publish the "Tuesday Letter," which alerted conservation district leaders. We helped with that. We could help generate the kind of grassroots support that had to be done in our area, as it was done all over the country.

HELMS: So how did you get the message out?

BERG: The Tuesday Letter.

HELMS: It wasn't a matter of somebody from the regional office in Portland telling you?

BERG: The guy that wrote the Letter, from this level, was Ray Heinen. Ray was still here when I came back. When I came back here, I looked around and Ray and I were in our early forties and everybody else

was in their sixties, running the outfit. And I said, "Ray, we're the people that are going to have to take this organization over." Well, Ray turned out to be the person who was doing many of the things that had to be done in terms of strategy. He had contacts with people like J. C. Dykes and others who were instrumental in this strategy. That's why the Eisenhower/Benson group had told Dykes not to go to Capitol Hill for those eight years, and he didn't.

HELMS: Concerning the Small Watershed Act, I've been interested to know what the strategy was in the SCS to get people to form watershed associations. It wasn't just something that happened on its own. Was there a strategy involved that encouraged this?

BERG: No question about it. It developed comparably to what we had developed in other areas. Of course, we had that river basin strategy for P.L. 534 in some of the big river basins that people drew on. We didn't have any in my area, but we knew what this was. That got us into a lot of the project work that was and continues to be very comparable to P.L. 566. Except that was even better in terms of what they could do in those areas. The reorganization was very real at the field level because we knew that the regional offices were threatened and, in my background up to that point, that was our only source of help. Not only were they going to "do in" the regional offices, they were

going to "do in" the whole SCS. But we began to see the strategy develop through what came out, weekly, in that newsletter (the Tuesday Letter) as to the hearings that were being held here and throughout the country and what could be done in lieu of total disbandment. Other New Deal organizations were also threatened-- REA, Farmer's Home. Anything that had come through the New Deal was also reviewed for the first time in the new Republican administration in the 1950s.

What we ended up with was the strategy of giving up the regional offices and putting much more responsibility in the state offices. We kept a semblance of regional offices because we had this watershed work. Those ended up being the technical centers that were left at seven places to begin with, along with our cartographic operations. By the time I got back from Harvard, the state offices had become the focal points and the regional offices were gone. They'd helped me get into Harvard. Being back here and coming into Washington every time I had a break, I was privy to what was going on.

HELMS: You mentioned your time at Harvard.

BERG: I had noticed that they had an announcement out for people who were qualified to go to Harvard for a year. Arnold Bolle was one of the people who had gone earlier, as had Ralph Sasser from Tennessee. He's

the dad of the present Senator. I met him and the Senator when he was a boy. There were a few others around the Service that I had contact with and they were encouraging me to look that way, too. I think I applied one year and didn't hear anything. In 1955, I was accepted to go to Harvard. Now, unbeknownst to me, my wife had been tucking a little money away, because we had to do this on our own, there was no government help for that kind of thing. She said, "If you qualify, we'll find a way to make it." At that time we had four children, the youngest being about a year old. And I was accepted at the Littauer Center, as they called it up at Harvard, which is now the Kennedy School. It was the public administration graduate school. We were notified of that in the early part of 1955. We had until September to report there. So I began the process of phasing out what I was doing in Idaho and buttoning up the home that we had bought in 1950 and renting it, because we planned on coming back to Idaho. We spent that year at Harvard; it was a very fascinating experience.

I won't spend too much time on that, but that was really a great year. The people that came in from the several organizations became kind of a group, working in the natural resource area. They represented a mix of people from federal and state government. A friend of mine, who had been a graduate from our class in Minnesota, showed up. I hadn't seen him for fifteen years--Leonard Harkness. He

was the head of the 4-H activities at that time in Minnesota. Ruth and I had known him, and he had married and had a family. He had been a very outstanding World War II Navy flier. While we were there at Harvard, he was approached by the Minnesota Republican delegation to run for governor. He came to several of us and asked our advice. We suggested that he stay right where he was (laughs)! There was one other SCS-er, Al Mangum, who eventually became the state conservationist in Louisiana. There were people from the Bureau of Reclamation, the USGS (United States Geological Survey), and a couple of other agencies, including some state governments. But that network stayed together in school.

We had the unique opportunity there of getting acquainted with people who were emeritus, like John D. Black, who had been one of the top economists that formed the strategies for the farm programs in the 1930s. We had Ayers Brinzer as our daily contact. He had been very instrumental in some of the work that Harvard had been doing in the natural resource area. We had Arthur Maass, who was one of the world's water leaders. We had Charley Harr, who used to come over from the law school. He ended up being back here in HUD (Housing and Urban Development) during the Kennedy-Johnson days. We had Merle Feinsod, and John Gaus, and we had some of the top professors at that

time. At the time we were there, they were devising the soil bank as agricultural legislation. Earl Heady came back for a semester out of Iowa State to teach some of our classes. John Kenneth Galbraith was there; then he went someplace to write his book on the affluent society. We had an unbelievable amount of talent there that impressed me not only from the standpoint of their own individual disciplines, but the fact that Harvard had that much knowledge about agriculture. Periodically, our seminar would invite a key person to come out of Washington. J. C. Dykes came up, Charles Kellogg came up, and Marion Clawson came up. Clawson was the head of the BLM (Bureau of Land Management) at the time. So we had a chance to mix with those people.

Whenever I had a break, SCS, to help financially, would put me on the payroll and bring me back into Washington. Carl Brown was here running the watershed program. He wanted help from the standpoint of what I knew was going on up there, because he knew Arthur Maass. Art had written that book, *Muddy Waters*, criticizing the Corps. Verna Mohagen was a great champion; she was the head of personnel. By that time, the reorganization had occurred and Don Williams was back here as the administrator and Van Dersal was back here as the deputy administrator for administration. Dykes was still here. Because of my year up at school, when I came to Washington in

1960, I had had a chance to get acquainted with Hollis Williams and so many others.

Aside from the fact that that was a challenging year in terms of the exposure to those academics, it was a very real world from the standpoint of having to live on our own. I had accumulated many days of leave time and I used that and it took me to Christmas time. And from then on until June we were without any funds. Now we did have a Littauer Grant, administered by Resources for the Future (RFF). Joe Fisher from Virginia, who died here recently, was the president of RFF at that time. It was through his group that we were able to get enough money to pay the tuition. I think it was eighteen hundred dollars. Now it's twenty-one thousand dollars! It was touch and go; I could not even stay for the graduation. I had to get back on the payroll. I could have stayed another year and gotten my Ph. D. They offered me that opportunity, but we just couldn't afford it. We had the four young kids from two to eleven. We just had to get back on the payroll.

They said, "Well, there are people who want you to come into Washington." Carl Brown wanted me to come and join the watershed people just getting started here. Verna Mohagen wanted me to come to personnel. Don Williams was the administrator. Don said, "I want you to go to South Dakota." I said, "I had planned on going back to Idaho." He

said, "I would have preferred to stay in Portland! But somebody has to work in other parts of the country." What he had in mind was, South Dakota was having some very tough problems. I didn't know that at the time. I didn't know anything about South Dakota. I'd lived next to it in Minnesota. It was the Dakotas that produced the dust during the Dust Bowl days that drifted over farms in eastern Minnesota. Yet the four years there turned out to be great.

HELMS: You went there as the.....

BERG: Assistant state conservationist, in charge of the watershed and Great Plains Conservation programs. I was kind of a chief of operations. I don't want this to be misunderstood, but the people that had been scattered around the country from the regional offices really had a morale problem. The people in that area, the Plains, came out of Nebraska. There were several good people that had come out of Nebraska. The state engineer, the other assistant state conservationist, and the state administrative officer, had all been down at the Lincoln, Nebraska, regional office. And that had happened all over the country. It was a matter of fitting those people into a situation that was pretty provincial. These states, with the state conservationists that had been there from the days that they were state coordinators, were pretty much in control of what happened in the state. The fact that they had gotten more authority was still being tested, as to

how much that really represented. Some of them took it as a very strong mandate to do almost anything they wanted and there was concern that we'd end up with a national Service or end up with fifty programs instead of seven. It was obvious, because South Dakota was Don Williams' home state. He was born in a little town called Doland and had gone through South Dakota State University at Brookings. Don and I had about ten years of history. All that left me no choice but to take that assignment. I said, "Well, we have got to go back and sell the home in Idaho and move the family in time for school in Huron." So we did that. That turned out to be a totally new experience, because the Great Plains are different from the Midwest and different from the West. Huron was the northern part of the Dust Bowl during the 1930s. But again, a great group of professionals were there with the Soil Conservation Service, and a great group of district leaders and farmers.

HELMS: You mentioned the coordinators. They didn't really have direct supervisory authority over the field offices, did they?

BERG: In the beginning they did not. They eventually became state conservationists but still with limited staff. About all the staff they had at the state offices when they had the original offices, were the administrative overhead people and maybe a state soil scientist. Later on, they built a very substantial staff in terms of

engineering, agronomy, biology and everything you needed. But the states approached this job in a variety of ways depending on the leadership that they had. During that time in South Dakota, the decision was made back here in Washington to assign the Great Plains Conservation Program to SCS.

Those who did not want SCS to have the new program formed an organization called FARM (Farmers Association for Resources Management). This is all written up in Neil Sampson's book, *For Love of the Land*, if you want to go back and read about it. Don came to me and said, "We've got people in Washington that will help you do whatever has to be done out there to beat this. We've got to fight it." What they were going to do was to petition the districts to go out of business. The state law was very simple. It only took twenty-five names on a petition to get a district hearing and then a referendum if the hearing was favorable. It only took the same number, at least in the model act, to start the process the other way. Somebody found that out, and the state committee in South Dakota was given something like fifteen or twenty petitions to dissolve districts through this organization called FARM. It was organized with private help through people who were here, the ASCS network, to do in the districts. Why? They felt that the cost sharing functions of Great Plains should have been assigned to ASCS.

It developed into a nation-wide battle just like the reorganization. It called for hearings and people got into the act, including the Secretary. The help I got included a mix of people from the conservation districts, both at the state and national levels, but especially Ray Heinen, Harper Simms, Glen Loyd, and Phil Glick. Phil had left the Department many years earlier. We brought him back in to begin to analyze what that model act represented in the way of what districts should be and what the theory was behind the districts, and why they were so different from anything else that we'd ever had out here. And Phil turned out to be as good as he was in the beginning, delighted to get back into this area, and did many of the things that we needed to do in terms of analyzing the legal implications. We went through three referendums in South Dakota. The first one we lost, because it was called much too early, before we were ready to deal with it.

HELMS: This was about 1957?

BERG: In that area. The first one was out in the western part of the country in a fairly newly-organized district that wasn't all that well equipped to deal with this kind of thing. And the district governing board members, after we lost that thing, came to me and said, "Nobody ever told us what our jobs were. We are really very unhappy about what happened here. We'll get a district back someday, but somebody should have helped us understand what our

responsibilities were as local district governing board members." Tony Krebs was on the national board; he was from Wall and a big rancher. Howard Gears was the state agency representative, and I represented SCS as kind of a background person. We would travel day and night to the districts that were threatened with these petitions and explain to them what they were, what their responsibilities were, and what could happen if they lost their district.

The second district that petitioned and came up for a vote was out at Mitchell, the hometown of the state association president. He was a dairy farmer and a good one, a younger farmer. We held that to a tie. And then there was one other one, and we won that one. We only lost one district. And then, based on legal advice, probably including the help that Phil Glick gave, the state attorney general said, "To go through this process is a waste of public money." And they threw the rest of the petitions out. And that was the end of it. By that time, the national level had gotten its act together, the assignment for Great Plains had been solidified in SCS, and the Secretary had gotten into the act to write what had to be done in cooperative arrangements between ASCS and SCS.

HELMS: This happened after the assignment of the program to SCS, right?

BERG: Right after. It hit us like a brick wall, because we didn't understand all the ramifications of why that had happened back here, like I do now. It was an assistant secretary out of Oregon, Ervin L. Peterson, who had insisted that the SCS have this assignment. Of course, Don Williams was not in favor in ASCS. He had been at ACP (Agricultural Conservation Program) for a while, when it was an independent agency. He had actually gone to the Hill and testified that they didn't need as much money as they were getting. They were spending money on lime and things like that. That upset the bureaucracy. When he became the administrator of SCS and got the Great Plains assignment on top of that, that was more than the old bureaucracy could stand over there in the ASCS.

HELMS: The National Limestone Institute was involved in that effort?

BERG: Expert at lobbying.

HELMS: I've seen their newsletter.

BERG: There's a file some place that just has to be very fascinating on this whole area. I had gone through the process of helping to get districts established in Idaho and had acted in the background. I understood how important it was to have that process followed--a petition, hearing, and referendum that succeeded. I also understood that some of those districts had to vote three or four times to get

established and how important it was to defeat attempts to get districts dissolved. I went to people who had written the original act and I said, "Look, it's a mistake to have the state conservationist as a voting member of the state commission." Many of the state laws were changed to make them advisory. Up to that time, they had been voting members.

HELMS: Why was that? It looks bad?

BERG: It was. They became part of the process as a governmental agency representing the state government and yet they were federal agency representatives. They should only be advisory.

HELMS: From my interview with Glick, I think that their view was that it was another expert voice.

BERG: Yes, it was at the time. The state conservationists at that time were key to getting district laws in place all over the country--the model act. There's no question about it. But in too many cases, they tended to dominate the process. They dominated the commission or the committee or whatever they called it in that state. They were hand-picking the members to be on that committee or commission. In South Dakota, it came back against us because they were running against the state conservationist as much as they were running against the districts. One of the reasons that I had been sent to

South Dakota in the first place was because we had a morale problem.

HELMS: So you'd have the people outside of the government bureaus more involved and have more support when problems hit?

BERG: Then you had the confusion that existed as to whether the ASCS people were to get beyond the federal level or were federal employees. They got all the benefits and everything else, they structured that very carefully, but you get out to the local county and they put their money in the bank and write their checks on the bank (laughs). It was a political arm of the Department. It was very effective when it was brought into play and was powerful.



Part Two: January 28, 1993

This interview was conducted at the offices of the American Farmland Trust in Washington, D.C.

HELMS: At our first interview, we ended just as you were about to take a job in Washington. Please explain to us your duties, as well as any important topics and events.

BERG: The administrator at that time, Don Williams, reassigned me from South Dakota to the Washington, D.C. headquarters of the Soil Conservation Service and I reported in December of 1960. The job that he had in mind for me to do was to replace two people. One had been his confidential assistant, Glenn Rule, who had worked with Don and previous administrators and chiefs of the SCS from the beginning of the Service. The other was Henry Abbot, who was assigned the task of working with Congress and had been in that position since the beginning of the Soil Conservation Service. The combination of these two jobs presented an opportunity to do many things that were associated with the activities that represented the top level of the Soil Conservation Service not only internally, but also with USDA and Congress. It also was an opportunity as a young person coming into the Soil Conservation Service at the national level to get acquainted with the activities in other regions of the country. That was very high

priority on my part because although I knew the Midwest, the Great Plains and the West very well, I had limited experience in the other regions of the country including the Southwest, the South and the Northeast.

HELMS: What did the job of confidential assistant involve? I don't know that we use that term anymore.

BERG: Glenn Rule, when he occupied that position, was obviously an advisor in many ways and was also a good writer. So he did a lot of the writing for the chief's talks and that sort of thing. Now it would be more related to perhaps a political assignment. At that time, it was not. Neither Rule nor Abbot were political appointees from the standpoint of the administration, but they were very close to many of the things that were being done in relation to those activities.

HELMS: Since you were replacing Abbot, let's discuss your work with Congress.

BERG: The opportunity to work with Congress was very interesting. With the help of others, I got acquainted with key representatives and senators. One of the things that I learned when coming back to Washington, D.C. that impressed me about the Soil Conservation Service was the work that we were doing already in districts and regions of the country that were rapidly becoming suburbia. We had the movement of people from the

inner city out into the suburbs. Also the metropolitan areas became much larger with the growth of our U.S. population. But the soil and water conservation problems remained on the land regardless of the ownership. So the Soil Conservation Service in many of the conservation districts that were experiencing heavy population growth had some very challenging assignments that went beyond what I had had in the way of background working primarily with the farmers and ranchers in Idaho and in South Dakota. That led us to re-analyze the types of technical assistance that we had, not only at the national level, but also in the state offices, that would fit the local conditions in these rapidly urbanizing districts where there was still an important workload in the agricultural area, but also an increasing workload because of the transfer of land to nonagricultural uses. It was very demanding to try to stop the soil from being eroded during construction. We began to see the outlines of what eventually led to concern about water quality.

HELMS: During that time we changed the law so that we could do soil surveys in urban areas.

BERG: We did several things, Doug. One of the interesting things that happened early in my experience was due to the leadership of Gordon Zimmerman and the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD). Zimmerman was their executive vice president. The NACD

established a district outlook committee of members of their own association and state agencies, and asked the administrator to assign SCS people as advisors. I was the leader of a five-person team in that effort.

HELMS: This is about when?

BERG: That was in the early 1960s. That led to an analysis of what had been the experience of conservation districts for the first twenty-five years of their work and what still needed to be done. This led to additional authority for the conservation districts to deal with some of these problems that went beyond just the farm and ranch and agricultural sector. We also recognized that there were new opportunities, especially the work related to the small watersheds, the watershed protection and flood prevention work. That authority had come in the mid-1950s to the Soil Conservation Service and the districts were playing a key role in sponsorship of those activities, as well as what came in the early 1960s from the decision of the administration under Secretary of Agriculture Freeman to do more about rural development. That led to the Soil Conservation Service getting authority to carry out what we now call the Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) projects.

HELMS: The Orville Freeman administration also had an emphasis on helping urbanizing areas. This emphasis had started somewhat before the beginning of that administration, correct?

BERG: The Freeman leadership was willing to look at some of these problems that went beyond the traditional agricultural area. He had come from being the governor of Minnesota and he was a classmate of my wife and myself at the University of Minnesota. He asked me to co-chair a conference with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a first, really. We labeled it "Soil, Water, and Suburbia" because we felt that this area between the downtown city and the very rural areas was a no-person's land out there that wasn't getting the proper attention. We brought together people from all sectors including the traditional people in the conservation world and the people who were the planners in HUD. My co-chairman was Norman Beckman, who was a top-level person for then Secretary Weaver in HUD. We had an excellent conference and talked about the problems that developed when land was moved from agriculture to other uses such as highways, airports, shopping centers and homes. That gave us the first chance to do more as an agency regarding that area of concern. A person I brought in when I had the opportunity was Minot Silliman, who came from the Illinois and Wisconsin area around Chicago

and Milwaukee, where we had been engaged in a variety of activities that went beyond soil conservation on farmland.

HELMS: I guess to avoid the implication that everything is made in Washington, there were some city officials who were instrumental in this.

BERG: The regional planner for southeastern Wisconsin headquartered in Milwaukee and there were many others. We had a very top-level conference, as I look back on it, setting the stage for the kind of work that represented something more than just working with farms, ranches and forests. That led eventually to another conference where we dealt with the problems of sediment produced by development, and that was an early forerunner, as I mentioned earlier, of getting into concerns about what happened off-site from farmland erosion, including the impairment of water quality.

HELMS: I think since the two are related we could go ahead, even if it doesn't track chronologically, and mention your involvement and the agency's involvement in the erosion control laws for states. Particularly since Maryland, where you live, has been one of the leaders in that.

BERG: One of the things that we recognized was the importance of dealing with the problem of where development occurs. It's now labeled

growth management. In those days, in Maryland for example, some of the suburban counties, like Montgomery County and Prince Georges County around Washington, D.C., Baltimore County around Baltimore, Maryland, and Fairfax County in Virginia began developing local ordinances or authorities to deal with this problem. In Maryland that eventually led to an authority to deal with the whole area around the Patuxent River and it became a state law. The way that we kept this fairly high level of interest was that each year we would organize a kind of a soil, water, and suburbia tour to show people what was happening as land was moved from agriculture to other uses.

This also led to something that was the beginning of how the Department and the federal government, as well as state and local governments, addressed the problem of land use. What is the best use of land? We were concerned that some of our prime and unique agricultural land, the important farmland, was being covered up with nonagricultural uses. If in the development of the different structures and other things that are needed for civilization we had alternatives as to where it should be done, we recommended that we should pay more attention to class one soils being wiped out, in terms of agricultural use, forever. Some very critical areas that were producing fruits and vegetables in the citrus regions of California, Arizona and Florida were all brought into the

picture. We developed for the first time, and I think it was a breakthrough, a policy for the Department on how land use could be analyzed, and a policy for land use. I can remember Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz asking me to chair a committee that led to a land use policy statement.

HELMS: What generally were the reactions of the conservation districts and the traditional agricultural interests in the Department to getting involved in some of these areas where we had not been involved before?

BERG: At that time it was very favorable. I don't think there was any question about agriculture in terms of the concern about what was happening as land moved from agricultural to other uses. They wanted to be involved in what was being done. That's why they took an interest in the land use and growth management activities and the need to control soil loss if it was going to housing or a shopping center or whatever.

There was another debate going on at the same time. In 1965 I was moved from being an assistant to the administrator to be the deputy administrator for field services. That position had long been occupied by J. C. Dykes, and when he retired, the administrator and the Secretary, at that time Freeman, asked me to assume that position. A year prior to that, I had taken over the leadership of the Great Plains Conservation Program at

the national level when Cy Lucker, who had helped start that program, retired. In effect I had taken on three positions and combined them into one. When I went on to become the deputy administrator it was required that I have an assistant for the Great Plains Conservation Program area, which we did have, and then we had a special area that dealt with congressional relations. But my background in that area, based on the five years of experience I had, was very valuable.

The thing that led from the concern about land use policy to what the Soil Conservation Service and USDA did was really a debate about what had been happening throughout the country when we had development that impacted an area that went beyond one local jurisdiction. There were several examples: new airports that had been sited that would affect a large region in regard to transportation, housing needs, and the shopping centers that would be needed to serve the people who served those new activities. A good example was the development of the Disney operation in Florida just south of Orlando. Orlando was a very quiet retirees' town, and when they developed that large recreational activity there south of Orlando, it changed the complexion of the whole region with regard to how land was going to be used, how water was going to be used, and what the soil and water conservation problems would be. That led to the attempt during the Nixon administration to get

a national land use policy through Congress. It did not happen, but agriculture had a very keen interest in what that would have been. The Soil and Water Conservation Society at that time was very forward in leading the debate on what should be done and they had two major conferences, one in Des Moines, Iowa, and one in Omaha, Nebraska. We brought together people from all sectors of our national life to talk about the implications of land use and how it should be decided.

HELMS: The administration's and the Department's position was to support a national land use policy, correct?

BERG: At that time, the Secretary of the Interior was the leader in the effort for the administration, but Senator Henry Jackson from Washington and Congressman Morris Udall from Arizona were the key sponsors of that legislation in the Congress.

HELMS: What in particular did you do in terms of the Great Plains Conservation Program? I think you were over there when it was reauthorized. Are there any particular things that come to mind regarding changes in policies that you or SCS wanted to see in that program?

BERG: I was asked to provide leadership as to how the program, which had been set up with a sunset clause, should be reauthorized after the first ten years. To get ready for

that we established a committee of state conservationists led by the state conservationist in Texas, Red Smith, to look at what should be done for the future of the Great Plains Conservation Program. There had always been a discussion about how large that area should be. The law required that it be confined to the ten Great Plains states, but we had drawn a boundary line on the east side that was in quite a ways from the eastern boundaries of each of the Great Plains states. On the western side, the same thing, it stopped the Great Plains activities as we began to move into the mountainous country. We were really dedicated to having it concentrated in the Great Plains area. There had always been pressure to add counties for cost sharing and the technical assistance under that program. One of the things that we got from the state conservationist committee was that we should pretty well hold the boundary to the program.

I remember testifying in support of extending the program and providing additional authorization for funding. We always had a backlog of at least two to three years of people who wanted in the program that we didn't have funding for. It was demonstrating out in the countryside that the best way to approach conservation was on a planned basis by offering incentives through cost sharing and technical assistance. But some of these contracts could run anywhere from three to ten years and required even more time beyond the ten years

to do some of the work on the bigger ranches. One of the committees in Congress that handled this was the committee on agriculture on the House side. Congressman Bob Poage chaired the committee at that time and he took an interest in the program because he was from Texas. Another congressman who was a very influential person, George Mahon from Texas, endorsed the program. Therefore, there was no doubt that the program should be continued. It was just a matter of being careful about how much it was extended beyond the boundary lines that had been set and how it would be handled in terms of the resources available.

HELMS: Carl Brown was very influential, wasn't he, in the things dealing with water and the Small Watershed Program?

BERG: Carl Brown was my mentor from the beginning on the Small Watershed Program. I had gotten acquainted with him when I was at Harvard in the mid-1950s. He had asked me to come to Washington when I had a break at school. That was just as the program was beginning. One of my thesis papers at Harvard dealt with the Small Watershed Program. As I remember, the title was "Public Law 566: From Act to Action." In other words, what did it take to move a law of Congress into implementation? I got a lot of help at that time from Carl Brown. As a matter of fact, when I came out of Harvard, as I mentioned earlier in the

interview, he wanted me to come to work on his staff in Washington, but Don Williams sent me to South Dakota. I stayed in touch with Carl then. When I came back to Washington, we developed an even closer working relationship. He had the long-term background of how that program had come from the early days on the authorized river basin watershed activity, and our work with the Corps of Engineers, the Department of the Interior and other departments at the national level. He was able to educate me and keep me very well informed about the work of the Small Watershed Program. He unfortunately died at an early age, and I still feel keenly the loss of a person like that.

HELMS: Of course, we know Charles Kellogg was a prolific writer. What was his influence within the Soil Conservation Service and his contribution there?

BERG: Dr. Kellogg had an eminent capability to understand not only the work we were doing in this country on soils, but also world-wide. He had traveled widely and understood the work in other nations. I had the good fortune again to have Charles Kellogg take me under his wing and give me his views on many topics that went beyond soil conservation. His insight on our work concerning what soils could and couldn't do in terms of productive capability and that sort of thing was most valuable. He was a great scientist. He also had a very

close working relationship with the Forest Service and through him I had a chance to get acquainted with the chief of the Forest Service, at that time Richard McArdle, and after that with the other chiefs.

HELMS: The RC&Ds have had a fair amount of political support. Over the past thirty years there has been a sort of up and down level of support by various administrations for them.

BERG: The RC&Ds came from an interesting background. I went to Capitol Hill to testify along with Secretary Freeman on something he was concerned about. He came to Washington and looked out the window from the South Building at that large expanse of area south and east that had been totally cleared of very low level housing. As he looked out that window, he made the remark, "Why don't we have something like that for rural areas? If we have an urban renewal program, why shouldn't we have a rural renewal program?"

The authority that came from Congress was pretty vague. The House Committee on Agriculture and also the Senate side asked me to help write report language that would define what the Department should do with this authority. It did help lead to what we now call the Resource Conservation and Development projects. Once that authority came into law we were encouraged by a very minimal appropriation to designate ten pilot areas, which we did. To test the concept of how to strengthen the rural

economy you need to understand that this was occurring about the same time as additional attention was being given to regions of the country that President Kennedy had said needed more help: the Appalachian area; the Four Corners area in Arizona, Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico; the Great Lakes northern cut-over areas that had been quite badly depressed. We were part of that larger combination of things that were happening--giving attention to regions of the country that were in need of more economic activity. Our basis for engaging in this was that we started with soil and water resources as the natural resource base that needed to be not only conserved and protected, but also enhanced in a way that could help develop the economies of the area. This led, I think, to many activities around the country that were really forerunners of what anyone talks about in the way of realistic rural development today.

HELMS: What were some of the internal discussions within NACD? I interviewed Gordon Zimmerman on putting more emphasis on these things. Was that accepted or was it seen as taking away from traditional activities?

BERG: In the early days to get these RC&Ds off to a good start we took some high caliber work unit conservationists and made them project coordinators with practically a blank check to do what needed to be done out there. This was met with

some resistance by the people in traditional soil and water conservation work who were concerned that we were taking away from their work to do things that they weren't saying shouldn't be done, but that shouldn't have the priority that we were giving them.

We developed these projects on the basis that followed an outline comparable to the small watershed activity. There would be an application for a project. It would require approval by state agencies and support by sponsors. The projects were eventually authorized by the Secretary of Agriculture, but we were limited in how many we could authorize each year, not only by the funding level but by what OMB came to label as a "new start" just like we had with the small watershed projects. However, during my time at the Soil Conservation Service the number of authorized projects had increased from those early ten pilot areas to something close to two hundred projects, and I think it's still continuing.

There were people in the traditional conservation areas who were concerned about the dilution of their help when we moved into these new initiatives. They were concerned about the fact that we were giving more attention to these suburban soil and water conservation problems. They were also concerned about the fact that the level of Soil Conservation Service help had been set in terms of

making it very difficult to get any additional assistance based on these new responsibilities.

We had people who had reached the conclusion that, since the dust bowls and gullies that had developed around the country during the first two hundred years of our development couldn't be seen because they were covered up with trees, therefore the problems of soil conservation had been solved. That led us to a couple of things that we felt were desirable. Our data had to be improved. That came from an early authority to do more soil surveys and what we ended up calling the National Resources Inventory work. That allowed us to get a better definition of the conditions of the soils and the trends in regard to soil loss and water quality and that sort of thing. That eventually caused Congress to enact the so-called Resource Conservation Act (Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act of 1977) that gave the Department, through SCS, a very clear cut authority to do two things: first, perform a very comprehensive appraisal and second, develop a national conservation plan.

From the early work leading to soil and water conservation, we broadened the areas in which we had influence in terms of the urban work, the suburban work and RC&Ds. In the mid-1970s we had an all-out push for production that brought a lot of marginal land into cultivation that should not have been sodbusted.

HELMS: While we're on that track let's go ahead and deal with that. What constituency pushed some of these ideas?

BERG: It was more an urban-based constituency that had that view. We were rapidly becoming an urban nation. That representation was beginning to show up in Congress, in key committees in Congress and in state legislatures in these highly urbanized states. They were getting pressure for other higher priority activities because the environmental movement was getting underway in the early 1970s. After the first Earth Day, many of what we call now the quality of life issues were more important.

HELMS: In the discussions within SCS the impetus for getting the Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) going was brought on by wanting to demonstrate that there was still a need?

BERG: No question about it. The first NRI of any value was completed by 1977, and it turned out to be most significant in terms of the Resource Conservation Act identification of what needed to be done. It showed several things. It showed that there was a concentration of the problem. It wasn't occurring everywhere. The losses were very heavy where it was occurring. Our traditional programs had not solved that problem. These chronic soil and water conservation

problems were plaguing the nation in very critical areas that needed to be addressed.

HELMS: Can you recount for me the events and the actors involved in getting the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act passed and the discussions and decisions in trying to pursue that?

BERG: The people who were instrumental in helping do that included Jim Giltmier, who then served with the Senate Agriculture Committee. He called me and told me that we would get a request to help draft legislation. They had been influenced by the Resources Planning Act that dealt with the Forest Service activities. It was Jim's suggestion that we needed something comparable for the soil and water conservation area. That led to the RCA activity. The first time through this legislation was vetoed by President Ford on the recommendation of people in his administration that this was land use authority. We felt it was not. Therefore when President Carter came into office the law was signed. That allowed the Department to begin the work that led to a very extensive analysis of the conditions of the soils throughout the country, the trends, and the successes of the programs that had been in place. As I remembered, in USDA alone that included research, Extension, technical assistance, cost sharing, and credit. We also worked with the Department of the Interior on their concerns for wetlands and EPA

on their concerns about water quality. We were also concerned about the role of the public lands, Forest Service lands obviously, and those of the Bureau of Land Management and Fish and Wildlife refuges.

HELMS: I guess in the beginning of the RCA work you were instrumental in supervising that. What are your thoughts on how it was done, how it should have been done, and what was done correctly, or missteps in the process?

BERG: There are still people in SCS in key positions that were very instrumental in doing much of the staff work that had to be done. But the Department had set up an RCA coordinating committee chaired by an assistant secretary. On a day-by-day basis they asked me--I was then the associate administrator in SCS--to be the chief of operations for the activity that involved eight agencies. We asked OMB to have a representative. It required a lot of detailed work along with staff help not only from SCS, but from several agencies. This was because the acquisition of the data, the analysis, and the ability to identify the results of several alternatives offered for the future had to be run through in terms of production of food and fiber, soil loss, and what resources would be required to cause that to happen. This all led to heavy public involvement. We had major ideas that went out for public review. That included, incidentally, continuation of the traditional program of the voluntary

approach instead of regulation. We also had an alternative that eventually led to the conservation compliance work that came from the 1985 farm bill, although at that time it did not get much support.

HELMS: You were chief when the administrations changed and before the first national program was announced. As I recall, there was a lot of debate and decisions to be made before we finally got a national program out. What are your recollections on that and what were the points at issue?

BERG: It was kind of interesting. When you look back at the first run that came out of the late 1970s on RCA, the world needed more food and fiber and there was an all-out push for production. But by the time the new administration arrived and Block became Secretary of Agriculture, the problem was already being turned around. Although we had forecast export needs at a level that built on a pretty healthy background and some other things that related to population growth, we found shortly after the new administration began in the 1980s that surpluses from the standpoint of crop production began to build up again. That required not only trying to hold the line on exports, which were dropping off, but also determining what kind of land use should dominate in the future. In other words, the land use allocation process came back heavily and we discerned that we did not need these

highly erodible lands in the production system. The early run on RCA was concerned primarily with the on-site productivity of soil. In other words, what would be the impact of soil loss on the individual farm's productive capability? We were concerned about holding that production capability at a high level. But by the time we got around to releasing the first national conservation plan, the emphasis was already shifting to off-site problems dealing with water quality, what was happening to wildlife habitat as wetlands were being moved into agricultural uses, and what was happening to other activities that the public was more concerned with than just soil loss affecting production on a farm.

HELMS: The RCA involves long-range planning. I was wondering, during Ken Grant's administration, how did SCS develop this framework plan, Soil and Water Conservation for a Better America? Did that have much impact? How did that come about and what are your thoughts on it?

BERG: I meant to mention that. As a matter of fact that was a very forward, pioneering effort that we undertook in the beginning of 1969 when Ken Grant moved in to be the administrator and I became his associate. That framework plan, if you look back on it, covered many of the items that are still on the agenda for the Soil Conservation Service. We went through a very deliberate process to expand the

activities. It related in part to the activities I mentioned earlier of the district outlook committee examining the first twenty-five years of conservation districts. As they enlarged their responsibilities and even changed some of their state laws to broaden their authorities, that challenged the Soil Conservation Service to look at what they should be doing in cooperation with the conservation districts and other organizations to move beyond traditional soil erosion reduction, which had been the emphasis from the early 1930s.

HELMS: Now, the RCA data is more widely available and there are experts interested and people who use this to influence legislation and policy.

BERG: "Soil Conservation in America: What Do We Have to Lose," a document that we produced here in the American Farmland Trust, is an indication of how best to use the kind of data that was produced, target our efforts, and recognize that there is need for change. There was a window of opportunity because conditions in the early 1980s led to the 1985 Food Security Act, including the conservation provisions. I think you'll see in that document the results of a combination of things that came from the agency, but were demonstrated as most valuable by the work that we did for the outside. We also had the ability, away from federal activities, to work with larger coalitions and also work with the people who enact the

laws in a way that is not limited by somebody having to sanction what you can say or not say.

HELMS: Let me drop back to the 1960s. Of course you were there when the Civil Rights Act was passed and I have written one article on how SCS tried to deal with that. For this interview could you recount for us the agency's reaction and how it tried to deal with meeting the spirit of the law in terms of equal employment and service to minorities?

BERG: I think you've done an excellent job in your article, Doug, of relating some of the history that goes back to the beginning of the Soil Conservation Service. We have always been disturbed by the fact that we needed to give more help to low income people who may not have been as well educated and so forth. The Service had an earlier philosophy that we would serve people on a first-come-first-serve basis when they were ready, willing, and able. That had to be turned around because we found people out there who had never heard of the Soil Conservation Service. We had to go out and seek them. They may not have been in that condition of being ready, willing, and able to work on a conservation plan and to begin implementation. That included the minorities in many cases who had not been given the attention at the field level that was needed.

Now within the agency, the development of technical staff that included more minorities was a real challenge. One of the early leaders on this was Ralph Sasser, who was the state conservationist in Tennessee. We worked to strengthen the curriculum in the 1890 Land Grant Universities that would produce qualified people whom the Soil Conservation Service would be able to put on full-time. We also found a lack of women in the Soil Conservation Service. I personally brought several into key positions. The universities began producing very highly qualified women who were able to be soil scientists, soil conservationists, biologists, or economists that the Service found to be very capable.

I have one last thought on that. I think the Service and other USDA agencies have been really pressed to do more dealing with minorities and women. They've been reacting fairly well but more needs to be done. And in many cases, we were told that we should turn off our assistance to the soil and water conservation districts if they did not have minority representation on their governing boards. This was a delicate matter because these boards are locally appointed or elected and that's under state law. The federal government was being encouraged to either provide or withdraw our technical assistance to encourage more minority participation in the governing of the conservation districts, which is still a challenge.

HELMS: Who would propose this, the Civil Rights Commission or the OMB?

BERG: Primarily, the people who had responsibility for equal employment opportunity, the civil service and the rights of the minorities.

HELMS: You did try to get the state conservationists to encourage minority candidates to run, but with very limited success. I know a few were elected but not very many.

BERG: In terms of governing board members?

HELMS: Yes.

BERG: It's been an uphill struggle to get more minorities represented on conservation district governing boards. In some cases these people did not have that as a high priority as to what they wanted to serve on.

HELMS: Let's try to go over some of the SCS's increasing involvement in water quality. Start with the Great Lakes assignment you had and with the Rural Clean Water Program. Also, please address to what extent the Soil Conservation Service and USDA influenced amendments to the Clean Water Act or was merely reacting to what was happening.

BERG: I remember clearly Ken Grant taking to the Secretary the concern that USDA was being left out

of the initiatives that needed to be developed, related primarily to the broader concerns of the environmental community, but especially water quality. I had been assigned in 1972 to lead a team from the United States and each of the eight states that bordered the Great Lakes along with a Canadian team under the sponsorship of the International Joint Commission, to look at Great Lakes water quality.

The questions we were asked to address included what impact does land use have on water quality in the Great Lakes? And if land use does contribute in some way to water quality impairment, what are the sources, what kinds of land uses are key, what are the contaminants, and what's the impact on the water quality of the lake? What should be done about it? We worked on that as a kind of ad hoc assignment along with everything else we had to do with the very excellent team and staff people from both countries. We produced a document for the International Joint Commission. We had reported to them periodically but we finally reported our findings with about a hundred back-up documents in July of 1978. We made about two dozen recommendations to the two nations as to what should be done relating land use to water quality.

It was evident that land use was contributing to deterioration of water quality. We found that not only was soil impacting water quality as sediment, but that those sediments

carried fertilizers and chemicals that hadn't been utilized by the plants. These were causing some severe problems in terms of water quality, especially in Lake Erie. Our recommendations led to more attention being given to the nonpoint sources of pollution because up to that time, point sources had gotten most of the funding from the federal level. It also was the beginning of much more work in the conservation tillage and crop residue management area. They were possible techniques to solve some of the problems.

HELMS: That was identified as a possible solution?

BERG: Yes, it was very compatible with our recommendations that we extend that work. There was more emphasis on crop residue management and what we ended up calling conservation tillage. We also recommended that each land owner or land user have a plan, not only a conservation plan, but a plan that dealt with water quality. That included how to handle the waste that came from animals and other things that happened beyond just the management of the soil. The handling of the containers that carried chemicals and the livestock waste was very significant.

HELMS: That was about the time the Service as a whole began doing a lot more work in that area.

BERG: Yes, we were doing this work far beyond the Great Lakes area. Much of the work we did in the Great Lakes area was driven by what we were seeing happen in other parts of the country too.

HELMS: Your assignment on this and Grant going to the Secretary-- were those two tied together?

BERG: Yes, I think there is a connection. It led to a much more thorough examination of the role of USDA, not only from the standpoint of the Soil Conservation Service, but our research activities, our Extension activities, and our funding of work. As sort of a peripheral thing I was assigned this role representing the Secretary. I was the only federal representative on this study. This was during Secretary Clifford Harden's time. He was a very astute person in terms of his knowledge of agriculture and his background. We were also concerned, as the clean water authorization was being enacted, that attention should be given to the non-point sources along with the point sources. Some of that occurred later but Neil Sampson had a very key role in conjunction with Senator John Culver of Iowa. He introduced legislation that would, in the Clean Water Act, have given the Department more funding to deal with nonpoint source pollution. That led to the Rural Clean Water Program, a pilot activity with two dozen projects that were authorized.

HELMS: That was the program SCS would like to have run but the funding never came and internal debate over the leadership occurred, correct?

BERG: There's a document that assigned the total program in terms of jurisdiction to the Soil Conservation Service, but eventually that developed into a discussion as to the role of the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, their key role in handling the funding and that sort of thing. The compromise, as it moved through the Congress, limited the amount of funding and set up only the pilot activities in about two dozen projects.

HELMS: During the last ten years or so there's been a period of adjustment in terms of accepting water quality as a major issue. Is part of this the problem of finger pointing at our clientele, farmers? Can you discuss this?

BERG: Yes, that was a key point because in our early work we ran into that as we took our ideas from the International Joint Commission study to the farmers and land users in both countries. Some of the organizations representing the farmers and the farmers themselves did not want to talk about the fact that their activities might contribute in some detrimental way to water quality. You had to relate cause and effect, which was in some cases very difficult because they were quite distant from a body of water. How did their activities hurt

water quality? So the finger pointing was one of the concerns they had. Admission eventually came that they probably were part of the problem and that they would like to be part of the plan to correct it. We especially ran into that around the Chesapeake Bay where we've had very good leadership. The whole nonpoint water quality relationship is developing and will be a major portion of the Clean Water Act reauthorization whether it occurs this year (1993) or next year. It will be more demanding in not only what can be done with the voluntary incentive role, but there also will be some concern about where mandatory activity kicks in.

HELMS: Dropping back to the 1960s again, would you discuss for us a little bit the growing criticism of the Small Watershed Program, controversies over the channelization, and the reaction of the agency to this?

BERG: On this area I'm reminded of the first day the 103rd Congress came into session and the new members were sworn in. I walked into Tom Barlow's office, the new congressman from western Kentucky. Tom had been the lead person in the early days of concerns with what SCS was doing about channels. He and I developed a friendship over the years because he's been a very strong enthusiast for the Soil and Water Conservation Society. As a matter of fact, he chaired the chapter in Kentucky. He had the background when he came to Washington.

The channel work of the Soil Conservation Service needed review. That began shortly after the Carter Administration came in because President Carter, as governor of Georgia, had been exposed to some of the problems regarding the Small Watershed Program. We had several cases that had ended up in court. Tom Barlow and others were concerned over traditional flood prevention activities that led to some of the channels being strictly an engineer's design, without involving the biologist and others who were concerned about other values.

The criticism of the Small Watershed Program may have overlooked the advantages that program has offered. First of all, it was called the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act. Because of that, SCS emphasized the watershed protection portion. I had the experience in South Dakota of initiating the small watershed activities in that state. We looked at the problems on the land and the need for additional conservation plans and practices that should be installed in advance of any structural work, including reservoirs and channels. Perhaps enough emphasis had not been given to that. That led to SCS cost sharing on some of the practices that were needed on the land. It led to an examination of whether or not the channels, laid out strictly on the basis of engineering criteria, couldn't benefit by having other disciplines involved. We found in many cases that the channels did

not have to be very severe--cutting down through the floodplain in a straight line. We could leave some of the meandering, we could leave some of the growth, we could have filter strips, and we could encourage the multiple use of those areas beyond just removing water from the reservoirs.

HELMS: Wouldn't you say you involved more biologists? How was that done? Of course you have NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) and that makes you do it to a certain extent.

BERG: The National Environmental Policy Act and the environmental assessment caused some of that. It started in the planning process and then the implementation in the design itself, once the project was approved for installation.

HELMS: Wasn't there a big conflict about whether or not we would go back and do environmental impact statements on previously approved projects?

BERG: We did. We went back and reviewed every project that had not been completed in the early 1970s. First of all, should they be continued even though they were underway? Should they be taken off the books if they did not meet the criteria that were then set up? Could they be modified? Many of them were. This was helpful because the appropriations committees provided SCS with additional funding

to do some replanning on the projects that needed modification.

HELMS: I don't know if this happened during your tenure or a little later, but what are your recollections of an emphasis on what we call land treatment watersheds, those that focus on watershed protection? The emphasis isn't the same as it used to be, but what were the reasons for that emphasis?

BERG: I think it's partially; what we're talking about. Could we reduce having these projects heavily involved with structures and solve more of the problems with land treatment? Here again the advantages of residue management and conservation tillage were getting emphasis that they had not gotten earlier. But we still needed some structural work if we were going to stop some of the flooding. There were additional authorities given over the years in amending the act to allow recreational opportunities, and fish and wildlife benefits to be brought into the project formation, especially in the reservoirs. Of course the municipal and industrial water and some of the other values of having water in reservoirs came up as a higher priority.

HELMS: The Environmental Protection Agency has discovered watersheds, as have a lot of groups, as a suitable way of trying to deal with resource problems. Based on your experience, what's the best way of going about these things? We have a

heritage of dealing with things like the Small Watershed Program which recognizes these watershed boundaries. We have the other side of the program where we deal more on political boundaries or deal with a wide variety of services to clientele.

BERG: No question about it. In fact, we're now coming into harmony with other agencies that recognize the watershed approach. We have long recognized the Small Watershed Program as an example. Most of the problems cannot be solved on a fence line basis or the ownership of an individual farm, ranch, or forest holding. In many cases these are community-wide and involve a fairly significant geographic area. In examining the drainage of an area, you have to look at the impact of all the land use and other conditions that are there. And so, when we're talking about solving nonpoint source problems, we're back to the basic premise of what we had in mind from the beginning of how to approach soil and water conservation. Having first laid the foundation with good work on each individual property, we then recognized that many of these problems went beyond the fence line and were really community-wide or watershed-wide.

HELMS: You came in under Don Williams. I've done an interview with Don. Is there anything you can say regarding his leadership of the Service?

BERG: My opinion of Don Williams is so high. I think he was the one administrator in the Soil Conservation Service who stands out in my memory and my work as being the best administrator that the Soil Conservation Service has ever had. Bennett was the crusader who started the program, there's no question about that. But Williams came in at a very difficult time when the SCS was even being questioned at the federal level and by the administration as to whether it should even be continued. He was able to work that through to the point that the agency became even stronger. He was an excellent professional. He was an engineer but had a broad background. I remember the work that he was helping us on in the fields in Idaho in regard to our conservation problems--hands-on type work. He had a very keen mind regarding a variety of institutions in the political setting in which we had to function. He was an excellent administrator in terms of management skills. He assembled a topnotch team that was badly needed in his tenure to move the Soil Conservation Service from the early beginnings in the 1930s through the 1950s and the 1960s and to what we inherited as younger people when Ken Grant and I moved into the top positions at the end of 1969 and the beginning of 1970. I cannot say enough about Don Williams in terms of his skills and his long successful tenure as the administrator of the Soil Conservation Service. I think anybody who worked with him would endorse that.

HELMS: A pretty ringing endorsement. So we mentioned in 1965 you became the deputy for field services, right?

BERG: Yes.

HELMS: I suppose when Don Williams retired you would have been one of those under consideration? Was not getting the chief's job a big disappointment to you?

BERG: No, not really. I'm reminded that Secretary Freeman asked, and he may have asked more people than I know about, to write what they viewed the chief's position, at that time called administrator, to represent, and what would be the challenges that should be faced. This was when the job of associate administrator was open. I wrote a several page paper regarding my views of the opportunities and challenges that would be faced in that position. I know that Ken Grant was asked to do the same thing and perhaps some others. But the result was that Ken Grant was selected to be the associate administrator and then became the administrator. I was fortunate enough to become his associate.

HELMS: What was his emphasis? Do you recall his views on the challenges and the emphasis of his administration?

BERG: Our views were highly compatible. He had come from the state conservationist position in New

Hampshire, had had the year at Harvard, had been the state conservationist in Indiana, and had been brought in as the associate to Don Williams. He and I found that we were very compatible in terms of what should be done. That led to that earlier reference that you talked about, that Framework Plan for Soil and Water Conservation Work. As I mentioned earlier, he was the one that went to the Secretary about the need to have USDA more heavily involved in water quality activity. He recognized that and was heavily impacted by the debate about how the watershed program should be carried out, especially the channel work. We had to make adjustments in that area that were very healthy. We began a program at the University of Georgia under the leadership of people like Gene Odum and others, training our top level people to be environmentally sensitive if they hadn't had that kind of background.

HELMS: Since you mentioned that topic, the beginning of the "environmental period" was a shock to some people, was that right?

BERG: It was a shock because many people in the traditional agricultural area read Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* as being far out and not acceptable. They failed to read the significance of that very important book and her findings as to what was happening to our total environment and ecosystems. She understood that perhaps better than any other person.

I need to amplify a little bit on that. There were people that really resented the fact that agriculture was being labeled as part of the problem when we thought we had done a magnificent job of producing increased yields of food and fiber every year and had adopted the technology that had come out of the research in the scientific community and moved on to new technologies. We were quite surprised by the reaction; namely that some of these activities were viewed with dismay by the environmentalists that were getting a handle on much broader issues than what we were prepared to deal with.

HELMS: There was one incident that happened in the 1970s which I want to ask your recollection of. When the Soil Conservation Service started in the Department of the Interior, it had had some big projects on Indian reservations, particularly the Navajo reservation. Then the president's reorganization plan in the early 1940s said that the Department of the Interior would do the conservation work. But in the late 1970s we re-introduced SCS by establishing a policy that reservations could establish conservation districts. Could you give your recollection on how that came about?

BERG: We were very forceful in wanting that to happen. Because, again, it was partly related to the civil rights activities and concerns. Areas that needed help weren't getting it and we had more capability than the

Department of the Interior people to work on those kinds of problems. So we went after that very vigorously and had support.

HELMS: Maybe this was Freeman's influence. Did not the Soil Conservation Service get more involved in foreign assignments? Was that the 1960s? Someone I think told me that part of the problem previously was there was no mechanism for assuring people they would retain their civil service rights when they returned or even have a job. Could you straighten this out for me?

BERG: Freeman was very concerned about international activities. He had traveled widely. Les Brown was one of his early staff people in this area, obviously a very talented person who has gone on to have a worldwide reputation in his own right in the World Watch activities. We did have a strengthening of our international work and this, plus the concern of our administrator Williams, caused it to happen.

HELMS: Could you sort of review during your tenure, some views of the various assistant secretaries you've reported to and what their emphasis for Soil Conservation Service was?

BERG: The first assistant secretary that I worked with was John Baker who was Freeman's person in the conservation and rural development area. He was a very strong leader and many of the things that are now being

done came from his leadership. Secretary Bob Long was an excellent leader, no question about that. He understood the issues that dealt with not only the traditional work, but also the concern about prime farmlands. He helped get the land use policy through the Department that we talked about earlier, which led to some conferences on land use, and laid the groundwork for what eventually became the National Agricultural Land Study, as well as the organization whose offices we are sitting in here, the American Farmland Trust. There have been other assistant secretaries since I left the Soil Conservation Service, including the most recent one, whom I have a lot of respect for. That's Jim Moseley. He just served a couple of years but his leadership led to some of the continuing work the Soil Conservation Service still faces. These people come back in my memory as very outstanding leaders.

HELMS: How did you come to be chief? Why were you selected? When did this happen?

BERG: When Ken Grant retired there were two of us in contention, Mel Davis and myself. Mel was selected by Secretary Butz. He was a younger person and had great promise. I continued as his associate. But then later in the Carter administration, Secretary Bergland asked if I would serve as chief and that gave me the opportunity from 1979 to 1982 to be the chief.

HELMS: What did you want to accomplish? What were your priorities?

BERG: We were right in the midst of the very demanding exercise that I mentioned earlier, the Resource Conservation Act appraisal, a national activity to strengthen our partnership with the states. I had about a ten-point agenda in mind. First of all, in terms of management, strengthen our field activities to build our field forces whenever we had an opportunity. That included not only the federal appropriations but strengthening the nonfederal help coming from state and local governments. That had been increasing over the years but was fairly fragmented and needed to be strengthened. We had to recognize the interdisciplinary activities that involved the Soil Conservation Service, giving high priority to bringing in every possible expert to deal with the problems that cut across many different disciplines, and to not have the area dominated by any one discipline, whether it be a soil scientist, an engineer, an economist, or whatever. In other words we needed the broad cross-cutting activities that had been laid down from the very beginning in Bennett's ideas as to how conservation and the planning and implementation process should be carried out.

I was also concerned that the Soil Conservation Service should be recognized as a highly professional organization, a lead organization in cooperation with the conservation districts at the state and local level. We really should be the conscience of the federal government in regard to how best to use the private land and water resources owned for the most part by farmers, ranchers, and foresters who had to be in business and stay in business. We recognized that they had to be encouraged to be good stewards in the process. We had to engage the other members of the broad "environmental community" who were concerned about wildlife values, water quality, how land was used for development purposes, important farmlands and unique farmlands of the country.

My first action as chief of the Soil Conservation Service was to look at the organization itself. We moved the title of the position back to chief from administrator, and strengthened the role of the assistant chiefs and the deputy chiefs. We also recognized that we had to consolidate some of our functions that had been left over from the old regional office days. We asked the employees throughout the agency to make recommendations for how we could improve our way of doing work. We got many excellent recommendations. One included the fact that at the national level we really didn't have a national support office. In other words, we had state offices that were equipped with personnel,

finance, and other operations. But, we didn't have that at the national level. I established that under the leadership of Pearlie Reed, who is now [in early 1993] the state conservationist in California. That was really a management need. We needed to get our own headquarters operation, where we had several hundred people, in order.

HELMS: Looking back, what things are you pleased with and what things are you disappointed with?

BERG: What I'm most pleased about as I look back after over a decade of being out of the Soil Conservation Service is the fact that, based on much of the data and analysis and planning that we did that related to the Resources Conservation Act, we were able to take that material and utilize it in developing activities that led to coalition building, and the enactment of the conservation provisions in the 1985 farm bill: the Conservation Reserve Program, the swampbuster and sodbuster provisions, and of course the conservation compliance work that's still underway.

The other activity came from the National Agricultural Land study that revealed the need for more concern about the important farmlands and the prime and unique lands of the nation. That has been very compatible with why the American Farmland Trust is in business. In all of this, when I look back on how this related to the disciplines that represent the member-

ship of the Soil and Water Conservation Society, I see that these organizations are highly compatible with the missions of federal agencies. They can do a lot to help. When I look back at the successes it comes from a background in an agency that allows a continuation of that work in the non-profit setting.

that would do a more comprehensive job of taking on these added responsibilities. It would reduce some of the stress our people feel about all of these added responsibilities.



I also moved to become, at the request of my local county citizens, a member of my local conservation district board. I've been a member for over ten years and that allows me to see all of these activities that we represented within the agency at the federal level from the other side. In other words, providing the guidance that a governing board needs to have and being a very strong supporter of the state association and the National Association of Conservation Districts.

I guess the thing I would look back on in terms of disappointments stems from the fact that the SCS is the most elite corps of professional conservationists that the world has ever seen. The SCS is rewarded for that prestige by the actions in Congress and other places of being given more responsibilities, but we have not been able to generate the kind of funding support that's needed to develop the resources

Part Three: May 4, 1993

HELMS: As we start out, Norm, could you reiterate your reorganization plans for SCS? It was a fairly extensive reorganization of the national office. What were the reasons for it, the new disciplines that were hired, and some of those things?

BERG: First we asked for ideas throughout the Service on what could be done to improve our operations. We got many excellent ideas, as I mentioned earlier in the interview. I set up a committee of key people, including some people from the field, to meet and begin discussing what we had now, how it was working, and what needed to be changed. After several months of meetings, we decided on an organization that included adding some deputies. Primarily, we were concerned about separating the planning process from the resources needed. It related partially to the RCA work in terms of getting a budget for the next year or the next several years. We wanted to separate that function from the day-by-day operations of a budget office. To do that we set up a separate deputy who looked over that activity, including a separate division. That's still in the organization and is most useful as a way of dealing with budget problems each year.

We also, as I mentioned earlier, set up a national support office that coordinated all of the activities related to

procurement, funding of travel, and office space problems and the day-by-day business-type operations headquarters has to worry about. We had several hundred people in our national headquarters and we needed an office or division that gave that full-time attention.

We also wanted to strengthen the inventory and monitoring process that came from the appraisal authority in the RCA, which allows the gathering of data on the status, condition and trends of the natural resources of the country. This was based on the best field data that we could have. That required periodic field activities and then the very complicated job of digesting all that data and turning out usable reports focusing on what the priority problems were and what had to be done over a longer period of time.

There were some other functions that related to the assignment of the assistant chiefs and what their role would be. As you may remember, I suggested that we change the name of the organization leader from administrator back to chief. That was reflected all the way through the top level of positions because then the associate became a chief, the deputies became chiefs and the assistants became chiefs. We spelled out their role, especially the assistant chiefs, in relation to their regional technical service centers and their responsibility of representing the chief to the state conservationists in their region. In

effect, we gave them line authority at that time. It was stated so that everybody in the field knew that. There were some other activities that came from our study and realignment which required approval by the Secretary of Agriculture. The reorganization of agencies has to go through a fairly detailed process. It also was related to the proper use of the executive service idea that had come during the Carter Administration. The way in which people could be properly utilized, based on their talents, and moved from one position to another or even from one agency to another recognized that flexibility is important in the proper implementation of the executive service.

Going back to the reorganization of SCS, you mentioned the disciplines that we brought in. You're one of those, as a historian. SCS didn't have that sort of person or pay attention to that area. We brought in people who were more understanding of some of the sociological problems that had to be dealt with. We strengthened the environmental initiatives by adding emphasis to the need for a biologist or people with broader environmental backgrounds. We recognized that the conditions we were facing in regard to getting data required being much more open to the remote sensing and to the computer that was coming on very strong. We tried to get the necessary equipment and mechanical ability to deal with some of the problems in the Service.

HELMS: Could you explain how SCS's work group and Congressman Whitten worked on conservation and watershed programs? What about the early period when there were disagreements with him?

BERG: One of the earlier experiences when I joined the headquarters staff in the early 1960s was to accompany the administrator and his deputies to the appropriation hearings. The subcommittee on the House side was chaired by Congressman Jamie Whitten who had already been in Congress for a long time when I first met him. I got well acquainted with his staff person, Ross Pope, at that time and we worked very closely on many of the issues that dealt with SCS appropriations. I can remember an early remark when we came to an appropriation hearing. J.C. Dykes, the deputy at that time, had been barred from Hill contact during the previous administration and he came with us to this first appropriation hearing. Whitten welcomed him back to the Hill and the appropriation process. Jamie Whitten was very concerned about protecting what he identified as the traditional programs related to conservation districts, the cost sharing administered by ASCS, and good cooperation with the Extension Service. He more than once admonished the Service that he wanted SCS, ASCS, and Extension to work very closely together and if there was any doubt about that he would monitor the situation and take corrective action.

HELMS: Norm, I thought Clifford Hope and William Poage were more important in the start of P.L. 566.

BERG: Whitten was the grandfather of the Small Watershed Program, starting it with pilot activities in an appropriation bill that eventually led to the action by Congress that passed the Public Law 566. He protected that area because he had one of the early river basin authorizations that dealt with flood prevention. He wanted to expand that activity nationwide through the Small Watershed Program. There were points that he needed help on. He recognized each year when the appropriation bill came to the floor that wetlands were increasingly a problem. Therefore we helped him. I worked with Ross Pope on the language that would be inserted in the ACP (Agricultural Conservation Program) cost sharing activity that prohibited drainage on certain types of wetlands if cost sharing money was going to be utilized. It was based on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Circular 39. That's now been updated. It had identified twenty types of wetlands and we specifically spelled out the types of areas in the pothole regions of the Northern Plains that should not be drained with federal cost share money. That set the pattern for later work which led to the Water Bank and additional acquisition activities in the Department of the Interior. Even today it is kind of a precursor of what we have in the 1985 farm bill--the swampbuster.

HELMS: This is about what time?

BERG: That goes back more than twenty-five years as I remember. We also found in working with Mr. Whitten that any new activity that was going to be proposed that required funding, such as the early efforts to get involved in nonpoint source pollution that eventually became the Rural Clean Water Program, started on a very limited pilot basis. He was always concerned that we not introduce something new at the expense of traditional programs. That was evident when we first began to implement the Conservation Reserve Program coming from the 1985 farm bill in which there was specific language that it would not be at the expense of any other programs related to conservation. He was a great person in terms of understanding how programs in USDA related to the work that he knew first-hand in his rural area. Forestry was important, watershed protection was important, and direct help to the land users in terms of technical assistance, Extension, research, and financial help were all important. He was a very strong voice on how agriculture should continue to be recognized as a key economic activity in our country. When we took up the eleventh commandment that Walter Lowdermilk had introduced when he was in the Soil Conservation Service, Whitten then began to use that in practically all of the reports that accompanied the appropriation bills.

HELMS: He was not in favor of a lot of the requirements and restrictions in the environmental laws, correct?

BERG: After the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was created during the Nixon era, his committee had the jurisdiction over its appropriations. He found that it really didn't fit with his views of what should be funded and how they should operate. It eventually went to another committee. For anything new that dealt with moving away from the productive capability of agriculture or that might be viewed as a restriction from the environmental standpoint--the use of chemicals and that sort of thing--he was very cautious as to whether we should endorse it.

HELMS: What significant things happened in the first round of the RCA? A lot of it, I think, was targeting. What was your view?

BERG: We were very much in favor of it. We were able to shift some resources, both technical and financial in terms of cost sharing, to some of the key areas that were facing very serious erosion problems such as Iowa, western Tennessee, and other areas that had been neglected. This was very beneficial in stepping up the work that would result in some increased conservation; however, Congress again began to be concerned about shifting some of the programs from the areas that they felt should be getting more, not less. Therefore, they limited how much we could do.

HELMS: Can you recount the background to the delay in releasing the RCA? The Reagan administration had to become familiar with it and it took a little while to finally get out. For them, I guess, the point was the influence they wanted to have on the final national program.

BERG: The RCA had gone through a very lengthy process of getting public comment back on several alternatives. Some of these alternatives were fairly far reaching and they finally showed up in the 1985 farm bill, but they weren't about to be endorsed without further study by the incoming administration. We were also beginning, as I've mentioned earlier in the interviews, to turn around from the conditions in the 1970s when all-out agricultural production was needed. Now we were overproducing, surplus crops were building, exports had dropped off, and there was not that much concern about the productivity of the agricultural area as we began to see the off-site conditions that had to be dealt with. How did we recognize that what happened beyond the fence line, soil erosion as an example, impacted water quality? As we continued to drain wetlands or bring marginal lands into production, we needed a reevaluation and there had to be some priorities set. Although the RCA was envisioned as a way to get additional resources, OMB had gone through that experience with the Forest Service and the RPA (Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act) and they were not about

to give the Department the latitude to mandate additional resources. Anything that was going to be done was going to be at the expense of something else. Early in the appropriation effort, we were able to get an effort to rededicate about five percent of the cost share funding with additional technical assistance to some targeted areas. That was very beneficial and was the beginning of the process that led to some of the initiatives that we ended up with in the 1985 farm bill.

HELMS: You, of course, were our last career chief in SCS. Why were you asked to retire from that position and what were your feelings and reactions at the time?

BERG: I don't know just exactly how much of this story will ever be told, but I was at the National Association of Conservation District's Annual Meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, in February of 1982. At that conference, Secretary Block was there for another purpose, but we asked him to come in and talk to the people in attendance from SCS, primarily the state conservationists and the Washington office staff. There was no indication that he had it in mind to change the leadership of SCS. Shortly after that meeting in February, Assistant Secretary John Crowell told me that the Secretary wanted to put another person in the position of chief. That was the first I heard about that. John Crowell had been a lawyer for the Georgia-Pacific Company in Portland,

Oregon. He was primarily in the business of trying to get more timber harvested from the national forests. Incidentally, his confirmation process in the Senate was very long and drawn out. There was really a battle about that. There were three people that kind of fit the pattern at that time: the administrator of EPA, the Secretary of the Interior, James Watt, and John Crowell were all viewed by the environmentalists as being very much against the kind of things that they felt should be done. But John Crowell was a good friend and he had advised the Secretary not to make a change but asked that I keep this quiet. He was going off on a trip and suggested that we not do anything about this until he came back. In another couple of weeks, the news people began to pick up that something was developing. Jim Risser, who had long been the Washington-based representative for the *Des Moines Register*, the paper out of Iowa, had written some excellent articles on soil and water conservation for *The Smithsonian Magazine*. He came to me and asked whether there was a possibility that there might be a change. I suggested that he talk to the key people that might be contemplating such change and that I had heard something about this but was in no position to give any details. And he did break the story. It was picked up then by Congress through several conservation and environmental organizations and some farm organizations since SCS had become quite a well-liked activity. There were some oversight activities

from Congress, but in the end, the Secretary prevailed and brought in Peter Myers. I decided after nearly forty years of service that I would leave on the second of April 1982.

I did not agree with that decision. I was asked to step down when Secretary Block decided to bring his friend, Peter Myers, in to be the head of the agency on the basis that the agency ought to be run by a farmer. I was offered a chance to be his assistant and stay in the Department but I felt that was really just a fifth wheel operation. After Peter was assigned that position, I made certain that the agency did a very careful job of helping in the transition with all the information that he needed.

Not only did Myers serve as chief of the Soil Conservation Service, he then moved on to be the assistant secretary that had responsibility for the Soil Conservation Service. In that position he was able to lend considerable support to enact the Food Security Act activity and was very tolerant of having the outside organizations come in, get briefings on what the Department was doing, listen to our points of view and resolve any differences to the point that as we testified we did not have the differences showing up in public. As he moved on to be the deputy in the Department, we stayed very close to what we needed to do to brief the Department on outside activities. It was a very healthy relationship.

It's kind of interesting when I look back on whether or not the Soil Conservation Service should be headed by a career person or a politically appointed person. If the political appointment would have resulted in more resources coming to the Soil Conservation Service because they would have had more influence on the administration that appointed them, that would have been a great plus, but that hasn't happened. As a matter of fact shortly after Myers became chief, there was a suggestion from OMB that the Soil Conservation Service be totally abandoned and the budget be taken down to practically zero. It was only because of the outside influence that we brought to bear that we kept that from happening. What I'm saying is, if a political setting of that position is helpful, it ought to be that way. That has not happened. There are at least a thousand fewer staff equivalents in the agency now than when I left and it still seems to be heading in the wrong direction. You may want to ask other people who have had that position. Anybody who has served in that position will recognize how career and professionally oriented the organization is and how it should have that kind of leadership.

HELMS: How did it happen that you ended up here at the American Farmland Trust?

BERG: I was one of the people at the beginning of the American Farmland Trust, which was building primarily on the National Agricultural Lands Study that we have been a part of. I was one of their early counselors, working with Pat Noonan and Doug Wheeler. Of course, Bob Gray was one of the first people to join the American Farmland Trust and he had headed our National Agricultural Lands Study. When I had announced that I was leaving, Doug Wheeler and Bob Gray asked that I give consideration to becoming a part-time senior advisor for the American Farmland Trust at a time of my choosing. I took a couple of weeks off to think about it and decided that it was good way of rounding out my career. It's been eleven years now and it's been a very healthy and fruitful relationship.

HELMS: Should we talk about the events leading up to the passage of the 1985 farm bill, the agricultural climate that allowed it to be passed, the working groups that you were involved in, and some of those issues?

BERG: This comes back to my joining the American Farmland Trust. One of the reasons that they asked me was that president Doug Wheeler and his chief associate Bob Gray had just begun, with the approval of the Board of Directors of the American Farmland Trust, to expand their activities beyond farmland retention into soil conservation. They had a small grant to begin that work and that fit my capabilities very well. With field

work, we were able to get some added evidence as to how the farmers viewed what should be done. We set up an advisory committee of key people representing a mix of farmers, government officials, commodity groups, bankers and so forth. From that came a study that ended up having a series of recommendations as to what should be done. Ken Cook was involved in the writing of the report. We contracted with about twenty people who developed technical papers. That included key people on many of the issues that related to farm bill activity.

I had also been asked in the beginning of 1983 to be the Washington representative for the Soil and Water Conservation Society. We were able to bring that organization into the circle of discussions along with the American Farmland Trust and about a dozen of the conservation and environmental organizations. These included the older organizations such as the National Association of Conservation Districts, the Society of Range Management, the Society of American Foresters, the American Forestry Association, the National Wildlife Federation, the Wildlife Institute, the Audubon and Sierra organizations, and the Izaak Walton League. There were several of these organizations that found a particular reason for being concerned about the use of land and water, whether it be reducing soil loss, improving water quality, protecting wetland, increasing the number of trees that were planted,

or improving the grass cover. The broad array of interests that we had represented here found common ground related to their particular interest. In combination it ended up a fairly broad-based and effective coalition.

HELMS: In working with the conservation coalition, were you not sort of unique in being a long-term federal employee as well as closely aligned with the agricultural community?

BERG: Yes. I think that was an advantage because much of what we did in the coalition required that we have compatibility with what key staff people in USDA, the Department of the Interior, and to some extent EPA were doing. Even though they were not members of the coalition, we invited these people to come and join us and keep us updated as to what they were doing. For instance, the RCA process was still underway over in USDA. There were several activities, especially in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, that we needed to monitor, and concern about non-point source pollution was developing. We needed to have not only the federal agencies involved but also the state agencies that dealt with soil and water conservation. We also found interest from the standpoint of the governors through the National Governors Association.

HELMS: How were the exact provisions of the 1985 farm bill put together?

BERG: The first thing that we did was get an agreement on principles so that we could have a broad cross section of interests prevail, regardless of the special initiative of any one organization, whether it be wildlife or soil loss reduction or whatever. From that came the need to draft legislation. Key people on both the Senate and House agriculture committees and the staffs of those congressmen and senators were instrumental. There were also key people in the agencies who had the ability to draft legislation, or they could ask their general counsel's office to help. When looking at the 1985 farm bill, the first thing that people had to understand was what a farm bill really was and where its history had come from, the mid-1930s. The early interest was on sodbuster because we had a fairly conservative group of people, such as Senator Armstrong of Colorado and others, who were not at all happy about some of the excellent grassland being converted to cropland. Highly erodible land was threatened, primarily from wind erosion. It was land going into the production of wheat that we did not need as we had a surplus. The sodbuster initiative then broadened as we looked at the need to have a conservation reserve for the land that had already been broken out that should be put back into permanent vegetation. It led to the swampbuster that was allied in

terms of protecting valuable wetlands and it led to the conservation compliance activity. That was really a surprising initiative on the part of many people. It was a very strong initiative that even today is probably the most demanding provision that came from the 1985 farm bill.

HELMS: How was the lobbying done to get the congressional support?

BERG: We developed several background papers on each of these issues. As an example, the Sierra Club put together an excellent set of documents that could be utilized in their lobbying capability. It was really just excellent. Each of these groups had key people to follow each of these activities, and special assignments were given to the organizations that had contact with certain congressmen, senators or key staff. The key to much of the work was very close cooperation with people in important positions in agencies. We needed the help because the details, in terms of data and how the programs could be implemented, had to be practical and done in a way that they were able to write the policies and procedures. We did some very excellent work on a cooperative basis.

The action on the 1985 conservation title of the farm bill really got a boost when Senator Richard Lugar of Indiana convened a hearing in the Senate committee room in April of 1985, with twenty organizations testifying. The lead witness was

Governor Evans of Idaho. After that excellent hearing, it's my understanding that Senator Lugar directed his staff to begin working on a legislative package that would eventually become the conservation provisions of the Senate bill. Comparable work was going on in the House side under the leadership of Congressman Jones, who was the Chairman of the Subcommittee for Conservation Credit and Rural Development. Their efforts, combined with the actions by the Senate committee, eventually resulted in a bill that was widely circulated. We got excellent support not only from the organizations that represented the coalition, but also from the key people in federal and state governments. We had a really solid base because the 1981 farm bill was viewed as out-of-date. It was very timely that this activity was put in place.

HELMS: Let's just mention at least briefly some of the major issues on implementation. The first was how restricted the requirements would be for the CRP (Conservation Reserve Program). Could you summarize that debate, your attitude, and other attitudes on it?

BERG: What we had in mind for the CRP was to get highly erodible land that still qualified for all of the farm policy programs moved over to a less intensive use--primarily grass, but some tree planting and wildlife. This was an effort to target those highly

erodible cropland areas. The argument about what to accept in the way of a T-value. We had in mind locking up the most erodible land first. There were several modifications of policy. As we review the 36.5 million acres that are in the CRP and look to the future, what happens to that land after the ten-year contract time? There is obviously land in the conservation reserve that we do not need to protect with public money. We need to sort out those most sensitive areas that should really have a long-term less intensive use.

HELMS: What are your recommendations for that, just go to the most stringent requirement for renewals?

BERG: Well, we need to have more stringent requirements for renewal. The debate concerns areas that are not allowed to be used, for instance, for haying and grazing, except in a disaster declaration. There has to be recognition that land, if it's going to stay in a less intensive use, will have to offer income to the land user. This would require a change in the law. The possibility of converting some of these lands to a long-term easement is another option that's being examined as the Department begins to implement the Wetland Reserve Program. The surveys that we've done so far on the future use of CRP land indicate that the decisions will be driven primarily by the economics of the time, but we hope to offset that with incentives to allow the land users to keep it in a less intensive use.

HELMS: The other thing that happened during this period was the discussion of alternative conservation systems. Could you lay that discussion out for us, as well as your view and the conservation coalition's view on it?

BERG: There were some excellent oversight hearings on what should be done about compliance. The SCS did a remarkable job of developing well over a million compliance plans on over 135 million acres. There was in the Congress a discussion about how tight these plans should be in terms of reducing soil loss. There were special groups in the country that said they would have problems if the SCS insisted on a very rigid reduction of soil loss. It would put them out of business. Under a prior chief of the SCS, a decision was made to offer an alternative plan that would reduce soil loss by some rather vague measure. It was obviously something less than a good solid soil erosion reduction plan. The extent that the field people of SCS continue to have a very rigorous plan to reduce soil loss is still one of the things that we just don't know. My concern was that when we offered an alternative system and judged compliance, we wouldn't have a good solid yardstick to measure pre-plan soil loss and post-compliance plan soil loss. What was in the plan? What was expected of the land user? Is it actually being done? Many of the plans have residue management, conservation tillage, as a key component, and there have been

questions about the residue level that is expected and whether it can be met in a practical way. The 1993 and 1994 crop years are going to be the test of the application of the plans, regardless of whether they were based on the most rigid interpretation of soil loss reduction or a lesser system as required in an alternative plan.

HELMS: From the national point of view, how much were state conservation commissions, extension services, and various state commodity or agricultural groups involved in devising conservation systems? Was there pretty much just reliance on Soil Conservation Service expertise in its field offices?

BERG: Whatever is done in the way of standards and specifications should be in the field office technical guide. How up-to-date those guides are has always been questionable. But I think that the input from the research community, the best experience of farmers and ranchers up to that time, the work of Extension and others should have been part of technical guidance at the state and local level. How much of that actually occurred I frankly don't know, but the effort was sound. I know they're moving to improve the technical guides and how we interpret them to the land users, especially on the basis of what it takes to not only be a good steward of the land, but also to produce food and fiber at an economical level, in other words to stay in business in a sustainable way.

HELMS: The Soil and Water Conservation Society got involved in monitoring and appraising programs; that was somewhat unique. Did you have something to do with that?

BERG: I was on the steering committee and went out on some of the field evaluations. We did two studies and both of them were landmark activities. It's my understanding, and I have been part of a task force that SCS has assembled, that SCS is beginning to develop a much more detailed evaluation process within the agency. I think this is very timely. We were criticized by some of our members for finding and reporting some of the facts on compliance that were not all that satisfactory. The records increasingly are showing that what we found on this sampling basis is beginning to hold up as being pretty valid. There are a lot of problems that are going to have to be addressed. I think the agency and other people who are engaged in this process are getting the word from Congress that compliance needs to be taken seriously. Assistant Secretary Moseley and chief Bill Richards, I think, strengthened the emphasis that compliance was here to stay and should be implemented.

HELMS: On that thought, the 1990 farm bill added a few new things but mainly showed that there was no going back on any of the things in the

1985 farm bill. Was there ever a concern that there would be a reversal on some of the provisions in the 1985 bill?

BERG: Yes, Doug, there was concern. It ended up that the 1990 farm bill strengthened all provisions of the 1985 Act and added some additional features, especially as they would relate to off-site impacts that might damage water quality, as well as the expanded conservation reserve. They made some very clear-cut policy determinations that what was done in 1985 should be not only continued, but should also be taken very seriously. It was evident during the debate on the 1990 farm bill that many others, including the commodity groups and farm organizations, had very carefully evaluated what had happened in 1985 and were now part of the process of helping move on through the 1990 farm bill. They had to contend with a very strong element of pressure from the environmental community that provisions from the 1985 farm bill remain solid, be taken seriously and be monitored.

HELMS: As we sit here in May, there are some proposals for a Farm Services Agency which would merge the Soil Conservation Service, ASCS, and the Extension Service.

BERG: Not Extension, the proposal in the budget would merge ASCS, SCS, and Farmer's Home Administration.

HELMS: But going back to that point, I wanted to ask you a two-part question. One, as a young person in the field, can you recall what was done in 1953 during plans for merger? Two, could you recount for us in 1985 the proposals to zero out the funding? What have the conservation groups, NACD, the Soil and Water Conservation Society, and others done in previous incidents?

BERG: In the effort to examine all of the so-called New Deal programs when the Eisenhower/Benson administration took office, there was a determined effort to examine agencies such as ASCS, Farmer's Home, REA (Rural Electrification Administration), and Federal Crop Insurance to decide whether they should be continued. A determination was made at some level in the Secretary's office that SCS was no longer needed. The districts had excellent leadership from a rancher in Texas, Waters Davis. He was alerted to this plan to eliminate the SCS or at least reduce its capability considerably. As I mentioned in our previous interview, that led to what became the Tuesday Letter that went to each of the conservation districts in the country. There were hearings in the field, and in Congress there was a great deal of concern about eliminating SCS. The result was that SCS had to give up its seven regional offices. It strengthened the state offices.

I talked earlier in this interview about the key role that administrator Don Williams played. He had the difficult task of making the Soil Conservation Service work, in spite of the fact that the organization was supposed to have been eliminated. What it did was strengthen the state offices considerably. It was evident that when people at the field level knew, they in turn contacted their congressmen and senators and other people who make policy at the national level.

Later, after I left the Soil Conservation Service, an attempt was made under an OMB head during the Reagan administration to completely phase out the SCS by reducing its funding. That did not happen, again because the conservation districts and others alerted the field as to what that would mean. It was obvious that there was strong support for the conservation work and that it should be strengthened, not weakened.

HELMS: I guess the national organizations alert the field, and the field contacts their representatives and political leaders.

BERG: Well, it's a rather widespread process in terms of letting the people at the field level know what the facts are. That takes a little while and it takes some sort of focused effort from the national groups that are concerned. That includes the Soil and Water Conservation Society, the National Association of Conservation Districts, and the state agencies. State organi-

zations include not only districts but associations of state employees who work in the conservation area, and of course several of the commodity and farm organizations. Increasingly in the eighties, the environmental community was heard from. The latest effort regarding the Farm Services Agency is still in a discussion stage with the budget released in early April, but the administration does have in the USDA portion a proposed Farm Services Agency taking all of the money that ASCS, SCS, and Farmer's Home have and merging all of the people into a single account. We're just beginning to analyze what that would mean. The conservation districts have sent an alert through their national association to look at this very seriously as to what this may mean for the relationship with the conservation districts at the local level and what role SCS would play at the national level. The society has developed a set of principles that indicate how our members and our board would view this issue. I personally feel that the merging of SCS, ASCS, and Farmer's Home may need considerable discussion. If they're seeking to save money and people, there are ways that this can be done without destroying the effectiveness of an agency that was created by law.

HELMS: Tell us again how many years you have been in this business and perhaps tell us your thoughts, or how you sum up your career in the conservation field.

BERG: Doug, I've been privileged to have this long association with the soil and water conservation movement for something over fifty years now. It's gratifying to have had the privilege of working in the Soil Conservation Service. It's really the best federal department in government. I think the SCS is the best federal agency because of the highly decentralized activity and the work directly with the people who are responsible for the future of the land and water in the private sector of our country.

Since leaving the agency, I have had the great experience of working with two organizations that represent a long-term view of agricultural resources, including the retention of the prime and unique lands and the strengthening of soil and water conservation activities. Both the American Farmland Trust and the Soil and Water Conservation Society have provided an opportunity for me to reinvent myself, in terms of a career. I also have been a member of a local conservation district governing board for over ten years in Maryland. That's a very practical application at a county level of the policies that are enacted at the federal or state level. I've also been able to serve in an elected position as a board member and treasurer of the Natural Resources Council of America. That's a national organization with something over eighty organizations as dues-paying members. It's an umbrella organization in the broad sense. It covers the areas that represent practically

anything that could be described as being in the field of conservation or the environment. My association with the people who represent these organizations and serve in these key positions has been very gratifying.

I'm reminded of an article in the *Washington Post* this past Sunday. It said that the Clinton Administration has proposed a major change in the 1994 fiscal year budget for the REA and even as we speak there are probably over 3,000 members of those local REA associations in town.

Former Secretary of Agriculture, Bob Bergland, is now the chief executive officer for their association and he pointed out that it is a time for change. Coming back to the Farm Services Agency, we're not against change. We know that it is the way in which the world continues to function and it is part of the new administration's initiative. I came from an era of the Depression and the Dust Bowl, and we don't have that many people around who remember those days anymore. That's what Bob Bergland pointed out and that's why I think we're going to have to accept the fact that with the concerns of our heavily urban population, the concerns about efficiency of government service, and the concerns about the capability of the federal government to fund all of the priority needs of the nation, change is inevitable. We need to make the point again in the conservation field that natural resource conditions are important, that they need to be strong, and they need to be in a

sustainable use. We need to recognize that the off-site impact of what happens on land and water controlled by the private sector is as important as what happens on the land itself.

I'm not going to give a lecture on what I think the future should be, but we're very encouraged by the fact that younger people are continually coming into the agencies that represent a broad array of work in the resource field. That includes people who come into the Soil Conservation Service, into the research and Extension community, into the wildlife and forestry areas, into the developing water quality field as it relates to nonpoint source pollution, and into state and local governments that will complement and eventually exceed the federal effort in much of this work.

I'm gratified that a group has set up an activity called the Berg Fellowship for my wife and me. This will be the second year that we have had candidates. We have excellent nominees coming into that process to examine the way in which policy is developed to promote soil and water conservation work. Working with a network of people over the years has been not only gratifying, but also very useful in that many of the things we are concerned about take quite a long time to get in place and an even longer time to be implemented. Soil and water conservation work is never done; it's a continual activity. The next generation and the next

generation after need to carry on. Because, as we look at our ten grandchildren, my wife and I feel that we must do whatever we can to be certain that they have the same options or even more options as to what kind of lifestyle and the quality of life that they will face in the future. I certainly believe that the resource base is vital.



Appendix One:

Frequently Used Acronyms

AAA	Agricultural Adjustment Administration
ACP	Agricultural Conservation Program
AID	Agency for International Development
ARS	Agricultural Research Service
ASCS	Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
CCC	Civilian Conservation Corps
CRP	Conservation Reserve Program
DC	District Conservationist
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FmHA	Farmers Home Administration
FSA	Food Security Act
GAO	Government Accounting Office
HUD	Department of Housing and Urban Development
NACD	National Association of Conservation Districts
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NRI	National Resources Inventory
NTC	National Technical Center
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
RAMP	Rural Abandoned Mine Program
RCA	Resource Conservation Act
RC&D	Resource Conservation and Development
REA	Rural Electrification Administration
RFF	Resources for the Future
ROTC	Reserve Officers Training Corps
RPA	Resources Planning Act
SCD	Soil Conservation District
SCS	Soil Conservation Service
SES	Soil Erosion Service
TSC	Technical Services Center

USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
VA	Veterans Administration
WPA	Works Progress Administration



Appendix Two:

Chiefs and Adminstrators of the Soil Conservation Service

Chief

Hugh Hammond Bennett September 19, 1933 to November 13, 1951

Robert M. Salter November 13, 1951 to November 2, 1953

Administrator

Donald A. Williams November 27, 1953 to January 11, 1969

Kenneth E. Grant January 12, 1969 to May 31, 1975

R. M. (Mel) Davis June 1, 1975 to September 11, 1979

Chief

Norman A. Berg September 12, 1979 to April 2, 1982

Peter C. Myers April 4, 1982 to March 20, 1985

Wilson Scaling May 21, 1985 to July 11, 1990

William J. Richards December 16, 1990 to January 22, 1993

Paul W. Johnson January 10, 1994 to present

