

## LAND USE: The National Perspective

Thank you for the chance to visit San Diego, where United Airlines' in-flight magazine tells me "You Can Have It All." The article says we are in a city of 1½ million people that is "youthful but conservative, energetic without being frantic, growing up but--so far--manageable, hedonistic but mindful of its historic and natural riches, seeking sophistication but clinging to its small town friendliness and good manners."

Thus, in the midst of a glowing travelogue, the author is worried enough to hedge on how long San Diego's growth will be "manageable." That kind of concern about urban growth permeates the local scene, the state legislatures, the federal bureaucracy. It permeates the meeting programs of important organizations like yours--that perform the vital role of idea-sharing among civil servants, corporate types, landowners, and citizen volunteers. Land-use concerns are receiving priority attention in the most heavily populated states and in those where you have to hunt for neighbors in a square mile. Growth management and land use control headed the list of major concerns at the National Governor's Conference last June.

There are many different viewpoints on managing growth in the United States or in any one community. I cannot speak for all the Federal viewpoints, although I will discuss the major land use bills now being considered--and some laws already on the books--and try to outline some of the objections, motives, suggestions, and plans.

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Material for talk by Norman A. Berg, Associate Administrator, USDA Soil Conservation Service, at the annual meeting of the California Section, Society for Range Management, San Diego, California, November 7, 1975.

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Some concerns about growth are based on crowding...or stretching community services too far. Others are based on potential loss of one kind of natural resource or another. Some people are mostly worried about safeguards, while others are just as full of adrenalin about the protection of private property rights. There are perhaps distinct urban and rural viewpoints.

Obviously, we need fine cities like San Diego. We need recreation areas of many kinds. We need small towns...and transportation systems to connect them. We need an adequate base of good agricultural land--and those of us in the farm-and-ranch sector of American life often think we are the only ones worried about that last item.

To achieve all these aims or demands or needs for land use requires a close look at our decision-making processes...and reshaping here...and reassuring there..and reforming over there.

In the next two days you'll be discussing some matters that are perhaps more questions than answers, and vice versa. I hope you'll come away with a closer understanding and an idea of some worthwhile actions on land use.

Land use planners can take a cue from America's range managers. Members of your society and their counterparts in range management have had a long-time concern about the land's environmental condition, carrying capacity, and systematic use and protection. I think these factors need to be applied in decision-making on land that is in many other uses. And agriculture deserves more voice in what happens to agricultural land.

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The Department of Agriculture's concern was expressed very well last month by Assistant Secretary Robert Long in testimony before subcommittees of the House Committee on Science and Technology.

He indicated that we may have the capacity to meet the Nation's needs for adequate supplies of good quality food, feed, fiber and wood products-- at prices consumers can afford to pay and with reasonable returns to those engaged in producing, processing, and marketing agricultural products-- IF--but the list of "if's" is getting longer all the time. We can make it, said Secretary Long:

--If adequate acreages of the best lands are available for crop production;

--If agriculture remains competitive with other demands for access to available water supplies;

--If genetic resources are available for yielding nutrients required by man and animals and for responding to disease, insect and other environmental stresses;

--If there are effective chemical pesticides available to supplement biological and cultural methods of pest control;

--If there are adequate supplies of plant nutrients at reasonable costs;

--If there are adequate supplies of energy at reasonable costs;

--If there is an effective farm-to-market transportation system;

--If there is an effective credit system;

--If there are sufficient numbers of highly trained people skilled in management who find modern-day farming to be a rewarding and reasonably profitable life pursuit."

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The first "if"--adequate acreages of the best lands available for crop production--is a subject with many sides to it.

An article in the Washington Post (while it still had a printing press) had the headline, "Farmland Loss: No Critical Issue." It poked fun at the "1-million-acre myth" for the rate of annual conversion of agricultural land to other uses. But as Mel Cotner of the Economic Research Service and I said in a joint letter to the author, the loss of our best farmland is of critical concern, whatever the acreage figures may be.

Among other things:

--The national figures mask important shifts in land use occurring at local and regional levels;

--There is no way of telling what quality of lands are involved, without better inventorying and monitoring of top-yielding lands;

--The land use conflicts associated with leap-frog and strip development patterns result in lowered management intensities and premature conversion of far more acres than are actually built up; and

--Much of the remaining arable land in the nation, while physically suited for agricultural production, is scattered or in small tracts that may be uneconomical to develop into production for many years.

If present cropland is farmed more intensively, seeking higher and higher average yields, it will place greater strains on soil and water resources and will force farmers to make greater investments in conservation systems.

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If the cropland base were expanded by 100 million acres in the next 15 years or so, millions of those added acres would be Class II, III, and even IV land. These acres would require varying investments in conservation--some substantial--to make them usable for crops on a sustained basis.

The whole agricultural community must discourage bringing acres into cropland use that cannot presently be protected against erosion at reasonable cost. We must also see to it that land brought into crop production receives adequate conservation treatment. We may be meeting the challenges so far, but the challenges are multiplying.

If 100 million acres of Classes I-III land were converted to cropland in the next 10 to 15 years, additional soil loss could be as much as 670 million tons per year based on experience in 1973-75. Such accelerated pollution and destruction of America's resource base could not be tolerated.

Our goal must be: Every new acre under conservation plan from the start. Any lesser goal would court disaster and invite government intervention and mandatory erosion controls.

Conservationists must also continue to advocate the preservation of prime agricultural land for agriculture. USDA recently took leadership in a Seminar on Retention of Prime Lands. The papers presented and the discussions that followed went a long way toward identifying what prime lands are, the steps that should be taken to assure careful decisions about their use, and the likely consequences of those actions.

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Participants recommended that prime lands be considered specifically in preparing environmental impact statements. They also agreed that a national organization similar to the Water Resources Council should be established for land. They called for:

- \* Intensified agricultural research aimed at improving productivity.
- \* Formulation of a national policy for meeting food and fiber needs to the year 2000.

- \* Development of a policy on the "retention of prime and related land for agricultural use," especially where urban and rural areas meet (at the edge).

- \* Development by USDA of a land classification system, based on soil surveys, to assist in making land-use decisions.

- \* Continuation of the present policy of making final land-use decisions at the State and local levels.

SCS has already started an inventory showing extent and location of prime and unique farmland. Combined with land use and land ownership data, it will outline the dimensions of the nation's reserve of highly productive land. The inventory also will provide benchmarks for monitoring shifts of prime farmland.

SCS also is working closely with other USDA agencies such as the Forest Service to carry out the land-use policies set forth in Secretary's Memorandum 1827.

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We try to keep up to date with the national legislative and program situation as it unfolds, make inputs where appropriate, and communicate the feelings of our rural constituents.

As far as the development of national legislation is concerned, this is a rocky road. One thing we have learned from experience is that it is next to impossible to regulate Americans into doing anything they don't want to do. Laws can be ignored, regulations conveniently overlooked or forgotten. But some coordination of local and regional activities is certainly needed.

THERE ARE SOME BASIC QUESTIONS THAT NEED DISCUSSION:

1. How much can the voluntary approach be accelerated? Can rural America through the voluntary approach meet the 1983 and 1985 national water pollution goals?--P.L. 92-500, Sec. 101(a) - (1) and (2).
2. Is rural America ready to accept compulsory conservation programs-- programs that would conserve land resources and prevent unnecessary pollution of water resources?
3. Should USDA and conservation districts be more aggressive in bringing about conservation programs on all land which would result in meeting the national water pollution goals of 1983 and 1985?
4. Should conservation districts' leadership be encouraged to assume greater regulatory responsibilities?

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5. What should the role of USDA be in providing assistance to conservation districts in regulatory activities related to land use and conservation treatment of land?
6. Can districts be effective in regulatory activities without staff?
7. Should districts seek additional sources of federal or state funding to carry out regulatory activities?

The League of Women Voters recently took an official stance that the Federal Government should exert leadership to:

- \* encourage formation of land resource goals;
- \* develop policies and standards for conserving land resources;
- \* foster coordinated planning and management by all levels of government;
- \* encourage cooperation between agencies and governments to insure consideration of all public and private rights and interests affected by land-use decisions;
- \* minimize conflicts of interest among those who make decisions about land resources; and
- \* insure more effective citizen participation.

Yet many rural interests are still suspicious of national land-use plans that seem to foreshadow Federal control and Federal "plans" for private land. Indeed, "control" is a word often used to inspire shock or fear.

When applied to Federal actions, it invariably describes something leading to no good.



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One of the dictionary definitions of "control" is less restrictive. It describes control as "effective and reliable skill in the use of a tool, instrument, technique, or artistic medium." In this spirit, current legislative proposals encourage new land management programs specifically designed to include landowners, users, and the general public in the decisionmaking process.

This is a step in the right direction, for USDA feels any federal land program should not harass individuals, local governments, or states, but reduce some of the conflicting and irresponsible things that now result from the patterns of federal investments, programs, and actions.

The current proposals for a national land use policy act and their status:

1. HR 3510 -- Not reported out of House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee (23-19 vote). Reasons: Adverse pressure on members, particularly in some states. People distrust motives and what may ultimately result if a federal bill were to pass.

2. HR 8932 -- Same bill reprinted with changes introduced in Committee action. Committee currently plans no action; neither does Mr. Udall.

3. S. 984 -- Senator Jackson's bill. Very similar to HR 8932, except that it contains an energy title. Hearings and markup expected soon. Much work may center on energy title.

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The general philosophy of the Udall/Jackson bills as proposed:

1. Need to restructure land use decisionmaking beyond local government to handle issues having more than local impact or in areas of more than local concern.
2. Need to keep federal government out of land use decisions, but put federal dollars into helping state and local governments develop new programs.
3. Need to control land use more directly at both local and state level (more than just plan).
4. Federal actions (major) need to be consistent with approved state programs.

USDA's position regarding current national proposals is that they are generally improvements over proposals made in previous years, but that the timing is not good. Implementing them would require expending too many new Federal dollars in the midst of an economic climate that dictates more care than ever in planning expenditures.

Over the long term, however, some kind of Federal role seems inevitable. A large chunk of land-use planning involves public works investments, such as airports, highways, parks, and power plants. And as the Nation's largest single land holder, the Federal Government's actions on public lands can have a pronounced effect on private land use.

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A big objective in any Federal land-use program ought to be to reduce some of the conflicts that now result from patterns of Federal investments, programs, and actions.

This might be done by providing a Federal coordinating mechanism for reviewing and settling conflicts in Federal investment decisions. It might be done, too, by providing some Federal funds to improve the data services upon which local land-use decisions are based. A Federal coordinating mechanism could also help in developing a model state "package" of land-use laws. Federal grants might also be made available to those States that have enabling legislation modern enough to meet the model requirements.

Whether or not a land-use bill does emerge from this Congress, the Federal Government will be heavily involved in the land-use process because of laws already on the books. Eight major Federal Land Use planning programs in the Departments of Commerce, Interior, Transportation, and the Environmental Protection Agency already have a \$250-million-a-year involvement:

- Coastal zone management
- Water quality
- Highway construction
- Outdoor recreation
- Economic development
- Mass Transit
- Water-resource project construction

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The 1974 Housing Act encourages shared responsibility in the development of sound growth and land use planning. Recipients of Section 701 Comprehensive Planning Grants need a completed land use plan after August 1977. The President has asked HUD to take the lead in rationalizing various planning grants. And the list goes on, of existing Federal programs that directly or indirectly influence patterns of growth and planning processes.

Whether or not a land-use bill does emerge from this Congress, the Department of Agriculture is committed to continue its programs of assisting rural land users and local governments with their responsibilities in land-use decisionmaking.

We deal directly through conservation districts on a day-to-day, face-to-face basis with private land users and local and state officials. These people make the private and public decisions that determine this country's land-use patterns. The factual data that these decisionmakers utilize--soil surveys, flood hazard analyses, vegetation maps, and other environmental assessments--come largely from USDA specialists.

As new demands face local decisionmakers, it is a local USDA office or conservation district office that is often called upon to evaluate the environmental capabilities of the land involved. USDA also is responsible for the management of 187 million acres of Federal lands in the National Forest System. As new state and local programs are developed, they need more and better data upon which to base land-use decisions.

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For much of this, they turn to USDA and conservation districts. Although this has often stretched our resources, we give high priority to assisting state and local governments in their land-use management responsibilities.

We are also basically concerned with the long-term productive capability and prosperity of American agriculture and forestry.

USDA takes rural opinions on the subject of land use very seriously. There is a constant sampling of rural opinion flowing into the Department. The feedback we are getting is that land use is a problem--that current methods of making decisions that impact land are not adequate--that drawing more plans isn't the total answer--and that any new program for guiding land use must include all interests. Rural people do want local control of local issues, but some see the need for a limited State role on the larger questions that extend beyond local boundaries. They do not want the Federal Government telling them what they should or shouldn't do.

Those may be parochial, rural views, but we think they are realistic. Farmers, ranchers, and foresters survive on their ability to make daily decisions and commitments that reflect an understanding of land and how it must be used to provide current and future income and benefit. Rural people have a definite contribution to make in the land use planning process, and we strongly urge that they participate in it.

Land-use planning is everyone's business. It is a constructive step toward helping America meet the demands being made and the opportunities being presented.

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We must now, more carefully than ever, allocate resources to provide the food and fiber, energy, transportation, housing, and other needs of all people. And under all is the land--the one common need of all.

We must not let a "crisis mentality" stampede us into developing this vital resource in ways that solve today's problems while creating tomorrow's. The time for debate appears to be running out--the need for action growing ever more urgent. The USDA and rural America are committed to being constructive partners in that action.

Here in California, you are fortunate that so many state and local leaders--and the members of this Society--have recognized the magnitude of the job and the urgency of the need. Your foresight--and your instinct for taking preventive action where it is needed--can help California avoid irreversible land-use mistakes.

In a recent book entitled, the Florida Experience: Land and Water Policy in a Growth State,\*\* Luther Carter focused on a few recent environmental issues in Florida. He reflected on the ability of current political processes to cope with conflicts between environmental protection and economic growth. He tells the story in very readable fashion, set in context by an introduction outlining the state's unique political history and delicate environment.

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\*\*The Florida Experience: Land and Water Policy in a Growth State. By Luther J. Carter. 355 pp., illus., 1975. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland 21218.

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To bring development under control, Carter asserts that Florida needs to enact sweeping changes that include a policy of planned growth, a restructuring of both state and local governments, new planning mechanisms, increased use of the courts, and greatly increased citizen participation and political action.

These are sweeping changes--not the sort that occur overnight--and his proposed solution perhaps is unattainable in the whole sense. But it undoubtedly contains elements that are needed in Florida as well as in other states.

It should not be inferred that nothing can be done to guide growth until all reforms are fully in place. Most states, California included, must cope with land use issues now, using current abilities. From these often frustrating events come the motivation and learning needed to develop and improve the institutions of state and local governments. There is no "end point" where all the mechanisms will be in place and all the land-use issues solved. Land use planning and control is a constantly developing mixture of social, environmental, and political science in a changing real world. Definitive books on the subject should, in the main, be published loose-leaf.

Range management professionals have been in a "loose-leaf" mode for a long time, innovating and adapting and working toward an interdisciplinary approach to the planning and implementation of resource conservation programs.

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Range management systems that you help put into practice on private and public range areas can help produce the goods and services needed by rural and urban families and communities, and at the same time achieve quality standards for the basic resources of soil, water, and air.

As new Federal, state, and local efforts are made to revamp programs related to land use and growth policy, you and other people who are concerned about a strong agriculture and other rural interests can aid by making your views known and by lending ideas to fashion the new program efforts. Don't be bashful.

Land use in California is still largely California's problem. You can't wait for Washington to act--and obviously you aren't.

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Comparison of "Land Use and Resource Conservation Act of 1975" Bills

Congressman Udall of Arizona Authorized Both Bills

Item	H. R. 3510	H. R. 8932
Title I	Findings that Land Use Planning is in the national interest; declarations of policy and definitions.	Very similar, except that 101(a) provides a stronger community planning thrust and that a subsection (8) is added which addresses the issue of housing costs and tax revenues when "poor and unwise restrictions" are enacted.
Title II	Federal grants for state and Indian land use programs. Establishes an advisory council at the state level; eligibility and appeals; state land use program implementation, and interstate cooperation.	Similar, but vests authority with the "appropriate state agency" rather than specifying a "state land use planning agency" as in H.R. 3510.  Broadened the section on the advisory council.  Removed Federal agency consideration as a prerequisite for grant eligibility.
Title III	State land use programs. Outlines policies and objectives; areas of critical state concern; prime lands; large scale projects; key facilities; regional impacts; energy; coordination and consistency; administrative processes;	Very similar, but more process oriented. Administrative processes have been broadened, and made more explicit.
Title IV	Federal actions and Federal lands. Federal action where state is ineligible; consistency; inventory and identification; public land use plans and citizen involvement.	Deleted the requirement for Federal action where a state may be eligible.  Modified the provisions dealing with the consistency of Federal actions so that it is a more participatory process.  Deleted the requirement for a public land use plan, but does require a public land use planning process with meaningful public involvement including input from state public lands advisory council.

Item	H. R. 3510	H. R. 8932
Title V	<p>Administration establishes an office of land use administration in USDI; outlines interagency coordination procedures; various guidelines, rules or regulations; national policy recommendations; biennial report provisions; authorizations; allotments; financial records; and effect on existing authority.</p>	<p>Section 502, "Inter-agency Coordination" emphasized resolution of conflicts between Federal programs as well as between Federal and state programs. Includes Congressional approval of guidelines, rules, or regulations. Provides a more complete determination of the effect of the Act on existing authority.</p>

November 3, 1975  
Frank S. Dickson