

NEW NEEDS, NEW EFFORTS, IN NEW ENGLAND

I am pleased to be here in Rhode Island, in Providence, at the Meeting of the Rhode Island State Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts. New England is beautiful anytime and especially so in the Fall.

Your many years of conservation work represent considerable experience in developing new plans and efforts to meet changing, land-use needs in one of the Nation's original states. New England was long an early leader in American conservation efforts, represented by the innovative work and experiments of Jared Eliot, Samual Deane, a minister in Maine, Solomon Drown of Rhode Island, a surgeon during the Revolution, and Isaac Hill, an editor in New Hampshire, among others.

Remarks of Norman A. Berg, Associate Administrator, Soil Conservation Service, at the Meeting of the Rhode Island State Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Providence, Rhode Island, November 17, 1971.

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Eliot was a minister and doctor of Killingsworth, Connecticut, and his "Essays Upon Field Husbandry in New England," published in 1748, was the first American book on agriculture.

Yet, while our population centers, our means of travel and communications, and expanding land-use needs have necessarily changed greatly, since the time of the early New England conservation pioneers, the determination of men dedicated to the sound development of our natural resources has not changed. Furthermore, men determined to combat soil erosion and resulting sediment have traditionally come from all walks of life -- and they do today, working together for the good of all.

Your State alone, covering some 675,000 acres, has grown from 860,000 people in 1960 to nearly 1 million in 1970. It ranks second in population density, with more than 80 per cent of its people living in urban centers. Nearly all of the State's towns and cities are experiencing steady increases in growth and accompanying demands to change the use of land to accommodate the additional people.

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This trend has created opportunities for the Soil Conservation Service.

Just what assistance can SCS provide, especially in many areas which rely less and less on agriculture? How can the Service help in accommodating the many different points of view in this dramatic shift in land use?

The variety and numbers of nonagricultural cooperators given technical assistance by the districts and SCS continue to increase. These include state and municipal land operators, school districts, land developers, suburban communities, and many people who have country homes where farming is not the principal livelihood. These individuals are interested in controlling erosion and reducing sediment damage, developing wildlife areas, improving vegetative cover, and safeguarding stands of timber for the future. Also, there is a growing interest in recreation on the part of agricultural landowners as well as more urban-oriented development groups.

It is from towns and cities, however, that SCS now receives increasing calls for assistance. Valuable resource data and interpretations of soil, water, and related resource are often furnished, for example, to nearly every town in the State in the planning and development of school nature areas and public recreation areas, and to communities and State bodies which are developing open space plans as they relate to environmental corridors. These include special soil reports, natural soil groups reports, conservation needs information, sediment and erosion inventories, and environmental corridor reports.

Assistance is also provided to units of government for preparation of Resource Conservation and Development and watershed applications. For greater effectiveness, the State Department of Planning is cooperating with SCS in designating high-priority growth areas needing soils information.

As for soils information in Rhode Island, detailed soil maps for over 48,000 acres have been completed to date, and more are on the way. To accelerate soil survey activities, a number of towns in the State have developed cost-sharing arrangements with SCS.

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Nationally, during the past year, we continued to accelerate the publication of soil surveys. More were published last year than ever before; even more will be published this year. This is welcome news, because the demand for soil surveys and the ways in which they are used continue to increase. A pilot study is underway to determine the uses that can be made of electronic mapping and drafting equipment in the preparation of soil handbooks and drafts of soil survey manuscripts. The outlook is hopeful.

We know that the usefulness of our soil surveys rests ultimately on accurate soils maps, on sound classification and correlation, on reliable interpretations, and on its availability to the public. For each survey, all of the inputs must meet the highest technical standards.

You can see that we will be drawn more and more into assisting land-use policy groups, locally and nationally.

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We have more basic information about the land resources of the United States than any other organization, public or private. We have obtained that information through the soil survey, snow surveys, the Conservation Needs Inventory, and the experience on the land of more than 2 million district cooperators in 3,000 conservation districts. And if we are to have any sort of meaningful land-use policy, we have to begin with an inventory, with the basic information on our resources, and go on from there.

An important development this year in the resource area is the introduction of National Land-Use Policy bills, which, if enacted by Congress, will institute more land-use planning policy than has ever been seen at both the national and state levels. There have been national policies affecting land use, including the Homestead Act and the laws creating our national parks and forest and grazing lands, but there has never been a coordinated land-use policy for the whole country.

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But whether or not legislation is enacted, we will be drawn into the thick of local, state, and national efforts to protect and improve the environment through guidance and direction in the use to which America puts its land.

One of today's headline subjects is the environment. For some time now, there has been much shouting, waving of arms, rolling of eyes, and gnashing of teeth. Perhaps some of this is necessary at a certain stage. But, when the shouters are at least temporarily exhausted and the public is aroused, there comes a time for lower voices and late hours of hard work, and solid facts with which to work. This is the time for a clear-eyed, experienced look at where we are, where we want to go, and how to get there.

This is the time to plan together -- for the conservationist, the environmentalist, the developer, the farmer, the local leader, the businessman, the doctor, the minister, the zoning official, and, yes, the homeowner, to strive to accommodate as many land-use interests as possible.

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This is the time to launch "new efforts" to meet "new needs" -- the time to innovate within the accepted procedures of our society in determining natural resource use. In an age of specialization, we also have the means of assigning some specific and vital responsibilities to certain expert groups and individuals, such as yourselves, who are skilled in the proper ways of giving advice on technical information, funding, ordinances, and public acceptance and understanding of effective conservation efforts.

Effective information programs by conservation districts are essential in this endeavor.

Much as in a family, where rights and duties are assigned and accepted and respected, communities and the individuals within them need to learn the essential lesson of working with one another in reasonable harmony for their mutual good. This is vital in a matter so important as our environment -- belonging to all of us -- when we all should play by the rules of the game, the rules of a democratic society.

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Only in this way, can we expect reasonable and moderate change.

To demonstrate the danger of environmental hysteria, we may note recent findings in the sudden flap over "mercury poisoning" in tuna and swordfish. A team of pathologists from Saratoga General Hospital, in Minneapolis, last month reported that the amount of mercury in the environment has decreased during the past 60 years and that mercury pollution now presents no health hazard. They based their conclusions on studies of 59 samples of preserved human tissue going back to 1913. They further reported, however, that coal gives off mercury when it is burned, and that the decline and disappearance of the use of coal for heating individual homes was probably the reason for the sudden decline in mercury levels around the turn of the century. A really dangerous situation existed at that time, as the report concludes, since the absorption of mercury vapor through respiration is extremely rapid and is a much greater threat to the brain than mercury absorbed organically.

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Fortunately, an increasing number of states are developing and enacting regulatory guides and actions with respect to land use and conservation treatment:

- Maine has Revised Environmental Improvement Commission Statutes to conduct the location of developments in a manner having minimal adverse impact on natural environment of their surroundings;
- Vermont has legislation creating an environmental board;
- Massachusetts has a Coastal Wetlands authorizing the Department of Natural Resources to take initiative in wetland protection.
- Maryland has a statewide sediment control program; and
- Iowa has legislation requiring landowners to observe adequate measures for the conservation of soil and water resources and control of water pollution.

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And there are many more, arrived at, not by emotion and panic, but by cool and orderly planning and due process of law, accommodating all legitimate interests in the land-use arena.

To guide our own future efforts, SCS has been carefully developing a long-range plan. It focuses on the tasks that need to be done to improve and maintain all the resource management systems that make up our landscape so that they meet quality standards for current and long-term use. It points up the effects and benefits that can result from these improvements. And it discusses the kinds of technical action -- in watershed development, in the Great Plains, in Resource Conservation and Development projects -- that SCS will need to concentrate on in the years ahead to help insure a high quality environment.

The plan calls for:

- Broadening our activities in monitoring and inventorying soil and water resources;

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- Adjusting our technology to changing conditions and to important concerns such as pollution abatement;
- Improving our planning assistance to contribute more fully to the planning efforts of one cooperator, or the Nation; and
- Working closely with conservation districts to make soil and water conservation principles and techniques a part of planning and ordinance criteria used by state and local governments and private groups and organizations.

Shifting to immediate concerns --- in the last 90 days, we have had to deal with several problems at the national level that have been occasioned by the austerity aspects of the Nation's efforts to contain inflation.

We have, like all others in government, been subject to the 90-day freeze. In addition, we are faced with bringing a slight downward adjustment in our average grade level of the Service.

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Beyond that, we have had personnel hiring and promotion constraints.

But at the same time, an agency with a \$342 million appropriation is not one that is withering on the vine. We have over 14,000 people strategically deployed throughout the United States. We know what the developing conservation and land-use problems are. We are working in a favorable environment with cooperating local people toward solutions that are sound and helpful.

As you know, we have had channel improvement held up to the strong light of critical examination. And I believe in the long run we will come out of this fuss stronger than ever despite some unfounded and sometimes hysterical charges.

I regard SCS and the conservation districts as strong viable entities that are making a vital contribution to the Nation's environmental improvement efforts. I think more and more people have the same regard for the districts.

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We've got a big backlog of work, and additional jobs confronting us. District leaders represent "important wheels" in the environmental machinery, and their long-time respect for the ecological approach today serves them in good stead.

Finally, I would like to say that the Resource Conservation and Development Program received a big boost this year, with 20 multi-county areas, involving 21 states, authorized for new planning starts. These approvals bring to 98 the number of authorized RC&D projects in the United States, and this action reflects the high regard for this development program by the Administration and by Congress.

As you know, the Little Rhody Resource Conservation and Development Project, covering the whole State of Rhode Island is one of the new projects now eligible for planning assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This represents a big step -- a truly "new effort" -- in improving the natural resource base, the environment, and the living standards for State citizens.

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I feel confident our "new efforts" will accommodate "new needs" for environmental protection. Conservation district work is bearing more and more fruit in New England and across the Nation.

Let's dig in and develop a still better environment for the future.

Thank you.

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