

OPPORTUNITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSIONERS

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It was a sincere pleasure to receive the invitation to meet with you today.

I was born in Iowa. Burlington was home for my first six years. Both my parents were native Iowans. Their parents or grandparents came here direct from Norway, Ireland, and Germany, respectively. I've always been proud of my Midwest ancestry. I'm glad to be back in Iowa even though briefly.

I always welcome an opportunity to be with conservation districts and their leaders and see them in action.

It gives me the opportunity to meet new people and renew acquaintances with some fine friends of long standing.

It also gives me the chance to discuss some of the important responsibilities and challenges in resource development that face us today, and what the Department of Agriculture, the Soil Conservation Service, and most importantly, soil conservation districts, are now doing to meet these challenges. And what we need to do in the future.

We live in a dynamic society where change is the rule rather than the exception. We continue to marvel at our scientific progress and technological advances both on the land and in space. It is actually difficult to keep up with what is new. In our attempt to do so, I feel we often slight the

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importance of land use advances for the more spectacular space explorations. However, we still look to our land and water to fill many of our needs. Our primary use of land and water is to provide us with food, fiber, and wood products--and this will continue to be the primary use.

Over the years, the Soil Conservation Service and Soil Conservation Districts have worked primarily with farmers and ranchers in developing resource conservation plans on private land--and this will continue to be our primary function. However, the world in which we live is getting more complex.

For one thing, our rural area is no longer strictly rural in nature. Our rural nonfarm population now exceeds farm people by 4 to 1. We are becoming an urban Nation with urban wants, needs, and desires. This hasn't always been so.

The Soil Conservation Service, as many of you well remember, started out--both in name and objective--as primarily an erosion control agency. In those days erosion was truly a national menace. Our most valuable resource base was in jeopardy. Wind erosion in the Great Plains and water erosion everywhere had made great inroads in the destruction of our land. All our energies were concentrated on one thing. That was to halt erosion.

The dust storms, which dramatized the widespread damage from erosion, helped launch a new national program to save soil and protect renewable natural resources. But today man no longer needs windstorms, floods, fires, or other catastrophes to destroy his resource base. He has developed an infinite capacity for destruction of his own. He defaces the countryside, denudes the land, silts the lakes and pollutes the rivers--generally with little thought of the consequences. We have become the world's most lavish users of water and the most extravagant users of land.

Advances in agricultural technology have, of course, enabled us to stretch our resource base--to make it possible for us to look to land and water for uses other than that of food and fiber. We are, therefore, concerned with the shifting of land to fill these new uses--that these shifts are made wisely not only to fulfill our present needs but also those of generations to come. Our concept of soil and water conservation has been broadened through the years to meet these new challenges in land use. Without a doubt, our concept will continue to be broadened in the future.

It was three decades ago that the magnitude and urgency of the conservation job began to impress itself on the Nation. The primary concern at that time, as I stated earlier, was with erosion on agricultural lands, a serious problem threatening many areas of the country.

With so much at stake, the temptation was to use the power of the Federal government and the State governments to compel the control of erosion and put a halt to excessive waste and misuse of land and water.

But in all parts of the country there were farmers and ranchers who said they were both willing and able to take on the job. Conservation leaders agreed they should. There was a certain amount of experience to indicate they would.

The time for decision drew near. Conservation leaders studied the wind erosion control districts of Texas and the grazing districts of Montana. They observed the Miami and Muskingum Conservancy Districts of Ohio. They analyzed the drainage districts here in Iowa. The valuable experience of the Soil Conservation Service with its early erosion control demonstration projects and the Civilian Conservation Corps areas was brought to bear on the problem.

Everywhere it was apparent that really effective conservation work was done better and lasted longer when the landowners themselves took a large and active part in the job.

Out of this experience the Soil and Water Conservation District idea was born. The men most concerned with conservation realized that as long as land was used by free people, the people themselves must organize to use it safely and wisely.

The steady growth of Soil and Water Conservation Districts during the past quarter-century has been an impressive record of America's belief in democratic action at the grass-roots. Their capabilities for service have outstripped the greatest expectations of those who originally conceived this venture in local community action. In every region of the Nation, demands for District services exceed their capacity to fulfill them.

Districts are successful because they meet a fundamental need. They are a highly useful mechanism for coordinating work on a vital, complex problem involving many people, many organizations, and many kinds of knowledge. And they produce important, tangible benefits.

First, there is economic gain. Studies prove that landowners who practice conservation and sound management of land and water make a better living. This increases community income through improved purchasing power--and better sales of machinery, supplies, and consumer goods.

It has been demonstrated that District programs have:

Strengthened the economic capability of rural America and thereby contributed to the health of the total economy;

Created new wealth;

Created new private employment opportunities;

Created a strong market for the products of industry; and they have

Promoted the acceptance of local responsibility--and the cooperation of landowners and other citizens in resource development--without regulation or compulsion.

Second, there is reduction or prevention of cost. Resource management practices adopted by landowners of every description prevent damages and costly corrective action. Savings on construction costs in urban areas alone, through the use of soil surveys, are most impressive--and this program is still in its infancy.

District programs have:

Reduced waste and damage in the use of soil, water, and related natural resources acre by acre and farm by farm.

Reduced the flood hazard, and the silting of rivers, harbors, and reservoirs through community watersheds.

Third, there are wideapread benefits of community improvement. District programs provide improved water supplies and water quality, establish new recreational opportunities, and afford greater freedom from severe flood damages. They also help to assure continuous supplies of high-quality food--now and for the future. Districts have:

Provided an organized channel for the practical application of research and science to current resource problems;

Developed new water supplies for industry, agriculture, recreation, and municipalities;

Added to the fish, game, and wildlife population;

Promoted privately-owned recreational space and facilities;

Developed a wider usefulness for America's natural resources; and

Contributed substantially to the beauty of the countryside.

There is a wide range of District programs that can only be touched on in this brief account. There are many others. For example, Districts often make available to their cooperators specialized equipment--such as terracers, tree-planters, and other machines--that is not readily at hand. This is a valuable service. In the Plains States, they aid farmers and ranchers in special long-term programs aimed at developing a permanent agriculture in this area of climatic extremes and hazards. And they cooperate in the management of millions of acres of the Nation's public lands.

Across America, they sponsor teacher education programs in resource management, cooperate with industry, work with youth groups, and church leaders, and help install demonstration areas emphasizing good resource management.

These benefits are readily measurable. Yet we are coming to recognize the importance of other values created by conservation and resource development that are more difficult to assess. Some call them the esthetic and amenity values. How valuable is the natural beauty of a well-kept countryside? How much is a greenbelt around a town worth? Can price tags be put on fish, wildlife, and game?

Orderly growth is clearly superior to haphazard, wasteful sprawl. And a well-managed landscape that symbolizes a harmonious relationship between man and his environment has value above dollars and cents. But in considering these rewards of resource management, each citizen must judge for himself.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of Districts has been to establish once more the willingness and ability of local people to accept a fundamental American responsibility--the responsibility of purposeful, constructive self-government.

A lot of time and money are spent by Districts, cooperating organizations and landowners in carrying out these and all the other technical, educational, and coordinative services we have been discussing.

It would be easy and satisfying for me to stop at this point. To have simply spent my time applauding your great work, however, would be a disservice to responsible leaders of soil conservation districts. This I cannot in good conscience do. There are ahead--challenges that exceed anything we have faced to-date.

THE TASK AHEAD

As our population grows, the pressures and demands on natural resources become acute. District leaders do not foresee any immediate resource crisis on the horizon. But they do believe that one consequence is certain: the resource management and development tasks in the years directly ahead are going to be formidable. For example:

The population of the United States will require twice as much production from its agricultural lands by 1980.

America will need nearly 600 billion gallons of water a day in 1980. We now use about 350 billion gallons daily.

By the year 2000, production of wood from the forest resources of the country will need to be doubled.

By the end of the century, we will need approximately 130 million acres for recreation, triple the present acreage devoted to this purpose.

Each year more than a million acres are being taken out of agriculture, primarily for highways, housing, and other urban uses.

With these additional requirements to face, we continue to have problems of waste. Across the country, we are still losing some 500,000 acres a year

as a result of erosion and other land damage, rural and urban. Water shortages, once confined to semi-arid regions of the United States, now begin to occur in humid areas. As our stream valleys become more crowded with homes and industries, flood hazards mount progressively. Misuse of forest lands and wildlife habitat continues.

After a quarter-century of effort, more than two-thirds of the conservation job on the land remains to be done. Ninety percent of the development work for watershed protection and flood prevention on the watersheds of the country is yet to be started.

Wasted hills and valleys, urban sprawl, uncontrolled rivers, polluted waters, and despoiled forests are not the proud symbols of a free, responsible people.

The task ahead is large. It requires that each citizen understand that land and water are the foundation of America's strength. It requires that each citizen recognize that not only our material standard of living--the highest on earth--but also our free and democratic society depend largely on the abundance and continuing fruitfulness of these resources.

As resource requirements grow, wise management becomes even more critical. Some observers have predicted that the importance of resource development is increasing so fast that resource decisions will be the major topic of public concern and debate by the end of this century.

Complexity and competition are the new dimensions of the resource management task. Balancing the requirements of economic growth and the necessities for wisdom in resource use is not easy. Land, water, and space will have to do double duty--or even triple duty. Alternatives will have to be weighed and priorities established.

Many decisions have to be made. For example, in water-short areas of the United States, there may not be enough water to meet all demands for municipal use, industry, recreation, and irrigation. Something will have to give.

As a Nation we will have to decide whether we can afford to remove millions of acres of fertile agricultural land from production and devote it to highway systems, airports, and housing projects. This process cannot continue unabated without finally paying a penalty in higher food costs and lower food quality.

Population growth, productivity increases, and technological changes are compounding complexity and competition in resource use. Organization, purpose, and wisdom are needed to face up to the increased complexity and competition in resource use--organization to provide the structure for getting the job accomplished, purpose to assure that the needs and desires of the people are met, and wisdom to make sure that choices are made on a sound basis.

Therefore, by necessity and choice, conservation is commanding increasing attention in the United States. More people are spending more time thinking--and working--on the subject. The same is true of the development of natural resources. The distinction is between conservation to prevent damages, and deliberate efforts to improve the usefulness and productivity of resources.

All this is happening not a year too soon. . . because all signs are that America is in a race against time to bring about 1) needed adjustments in land and water use, 2) elimination of waste (and damage) in resource use, and 3) the development of resources to provide new water supplies, recreational areas, and forests; more intensive agriculture; and improved water quality and wildlife management.

The race is to accomplish the adjustments, the protection, and the development at a rate commensurate with the increasing demands being added by a growing population, economic expansion, social advances, urbanization, and the need for higher per-acre production from agriculture.

Boiled down, however, two key problems face conservationists:

1. Whether the work of resource management and development, and the public support for this work, can be sufficiently elevated as a national purpose in time to get the job done, and
2. Whether landowners and operators living closest to the resources and local communities can function effectively in this assignment as responsible citizens in our kind of society, or whether, in the end, the task will become so large as far as local people are concerned that big State and Federal government must move in to regulate.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts must deal with these problems or ask themselves who will.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts have operated since their origin in an atmosphere of careful scrutiny and diligent self-examination. Because they represent an experiment in social and political organization that seeks to utilize the flexibility and strength of a partnership between local, State, and Federal governments in solving complex and difficult problems, they have had to prove their value to critical observers.

In the earliest period, questions raised about Districts concerned the possible challenge they were interpreted as representing to existing agencies in the agricultural and conservation field. It was feared that the District approach--dealing directly with the landowner and providing him with technical and other services--might erode the influence and duplicate the activities of

agencies working through other techniques to improve agricultural land utilization. As time passed these fears were proven groundless, and Districts were recognized as filling a real need as the focus around which soil and water conservation efforts could be concentrated.

As the movement grew and the shape of District programs became clear, the grounds of criticism shifted from their justification to the effectiveness of these citizen-managed organizations, operating within the limits of restrictive State laws drafted with an eye toward minimizing public fears of a new governmental structure. During this period, Districts turned their attention to organizational improvements designed to facilitate their then-current objectives. These included strengthening District operating procedures, consolidating the effectiveness of the State Soil and Water Conservation Committees, Boards, and Commissions, and organization of their State and national associations.

Today, when Districts have approached maturity, the focus of criticism has changed. The most recent criticism--both inside and outside the movement--questions the total adequacy of Districts in meeting modern resource conservation and development needs. The vast changes in the locus and nature of conservation problems--reflecting the growth and character of the American economy that took place largely in the post-World War II years--are the stimuli for these recent critical assessments. At the very moment the District seemed perfected as a tool of effective social action, its objectives, traditions, and operating procedures have been called into question.

In 1952, W. Robert Parks the next President of this great University concluded his study of "Soil Conservation Districts in Action" by stating that they had "demonstrated promising potentialities in developing a new working integration between national and local government, as well as between the lay citizen and his government." "But there still remain these large questions: What will the soil conservation districts of the future be like? Will they become mere local outlets for the conservation program of a national agency, or will they continue to grow in local independence and strength?"

What are Soil Conservation District potentials and limitations?

At the present time, two searching analyses of districts and conservation programs are being published by Resources for the Future, Inc. An earlier draft manuscript charged that districts have proven themselves incapable of meeting modern conservation challenges, have confined themselves to agricultural problems, and have constituted themselves as a closed, self-perpetuating system providing little access to, or participation by, the public in their decisions.

These books will probably put forth evidence that districts--although their achievements have been many--exhibit fundamental structural and operational weaknesses.

There is no doubt that any group--be it church, civic club, farm organization, or you name it--can be criticized. The important thing is to recognize what aspects need to be strengthened for the future benefit of the organization.

And in this critical self-analysis that we need to do, the Soil Conservation Service must not hide its collective head in the sand "ostrich-like." We are still proud to be your partner for life--and for better and/or for worse.

I suggest we begin discussion here and elsewhere on at least the following ten items:

1. The Need for Broader Orientation

The Standard Soil Conservation Districts Act--upon which most State enabling laws are based--authorized districts to conduct conservation programs of considerable scope. Districts were empowered to conserve water resources in connection with soil resources, forest lands, and entire watersheds as well as farm and grazing lands.

The original objectives underlying the creation of districts were correspondingly broad. The purposes were a) to curb destruction of land by erosion and floods, b) to induce land use adjustments from marginal to better land and to raise rural standards of living, c) to protect funds and public investments from waste through uncoordinated governmental action, and d) to develop organization and techniques for long-range comprehensive planning and execution of multi-purpose programs.

Despite these broad authorities and objectives, districts in actual operation in almost every case have conceived of themselves and have come to be identified as rural organizations. In their programs they are heavily oriented toward rural landowners, land occupiers, and agricultural producers--and have preoccupied themselves with the investigation and solution of soil and water conservation problems on farm and grazing lands.

Several factors have contributed to this narrow orientation. In the first place, the name itself, "soil conservation district," indicated a close association between districts and the principal owners of the soil--farmers. Second, the agricultural orientation was confirmed by the legislatures of many States which specifically restricted the operation of districts to agricultural regions of the State.

Third, there seems to be little question that, although districts were conceived in broad terms, the dominant problem of the 1930's which had attracted public attention was soil erosion. It is not surprising that districts concentrated on agricultural lands.

In today's world, the interests of resource users rather than resource owners are becoming more important. And, as the towns, cities, and metropolitan areas of the Nation have enlarged, serious problems of land use, erosion, sedimentation, pollution, recreation, and efficient resource use have sprung up on the fringes of urban areas.

It is not that farm and ranch conservation work has become less important. It is simply that a whole new series of major conservation problems affecting large numbers of people have been set in motion by our Nation's social and economic growth processes.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts whose technical and organizational experience qualifies them for aiding greatly in the solution of problems of this nature--and even broader problems of planning and land utilization, are hampered by their narrow orientation. The problem is compounded where districts initiate watershed programs which include many non-rural objectives.

Finally, the agricultural orientation of Districts affects their ability to secure full support and participation. In the 1960's the United States public--right or wrong--looks upon "soil" as an agricultural concern which, because of its presumed capacity to produce endlessly bountiful crops that cost billions of dollars to store, is less of a national asset than it actually is. Districts therefore do not receive the fullest kind of public support that they require in their efforts to meet broader resource conservation problems.

2. The Need for Adequate Representation on Governing Boards

This problem is closely related to the one discussed above. In most cases--because of provisions of State laws and tradition--the supervisors of districts are farmers, ranchers, or other persons closely related to agriculture. Therefore, the composition of district governing boards does not reflect the broad spectrum of interest in the field of resource conservation and development.

This has created a serious blind spot. The effects of erosion and runoff on urban water supplies and industrial water needs, as well as the importance of forest conservation, wildlife conservation, wilderness reservation, recreation needs and scenic resources, have seemed to the farmers and ranchers running the district program as somewhat removed from the area of their immediate interests.

Urban and industrial interests are beginning to feel uneasy about a resource conservation program that concentrates primarily on soil and water conservation on farm and grazing lands and is controlled by agriculturalists. And, correspondingly, many districts have found that as the number of farmers and ranchers in their jurisdiction decreased, the ability of the districts to meet emerging community needs decreases in proportion.

The lack of democratic representation of social and economic interests in a major governmental program of resource development is reflected in the records of poor voter turnout in elections for district supervisors. The electorate--whose composition is primarily urban--is seldom interested in the selection of farmers to fill what they conceive of as an agricultural post. The problem of limited participation by voters in district affairs is a broader question.

3. Authorities Needed

Although the narrow construction of district responsibilities has been in part the product of tradition, public attitudes, and the other influences mentioned above, the lack of explicit authority in State laws clearly outlining their role in water, forest, wildlife and other resource conservation efforts has tended to limit district initiative and effectiveness in developing truly comprehensive programs.

4. Funds Needed Sufficient for the Task Ahead

The original concept of the district was that it would receive its technical and other program services from the Soil Conservation Service and other Federal and State agencies assigned to work with the districts. It was also believed that districts would meet administrative expenses such as office rent, equipment, and supplies, secretarial services, postage, telephone and transportation from monies to be appropriated by State and local governments.

These expectations have been partially fulfilled. The Soil Conservation Service and other Federal and State agencies appropriate annually large sums of money for services to districts and for programs closely related to districts and carried out in cooperation with them. Concurrently, the amount

of State and county appropriations to districts has risen steadily and reached the total of \$19.2 million during the 1965 fiscal year. Iowa does well with over \$600,000 annually at the present time.

5. Greater Administrative Effectiveness

Allied to the problems of limited authority and funds described above are problems of administrative effectiveness. The enabling laws of the various States assume that a group of three or five men who are (usually) not reimbursed for their services are capable of planning, administering, coordinating and executing a program of major significance in their jurisdictions. The extent to which their optimism has proven correct is truly remarkable. The success of this voluntary effort is perhaps due to the exceptional devotion and dedication of district supervisors, the strong and continuous support they have received from Federal agencies providing them with necessary services, and the persistent efforts of the State Soil and Water Conservation Committees.

In spite of these accomplishments, it is now clear that the district administrative structure is inadequate to perform the tasks already in progress, much less the increasing demands of the future. Some district supervisors are capable of finding the time and exercising the skills needed to plan work; talk with potential cooperators, groups, and individuals; assist in securing funds; participate in regional, State-wide and national organizations; and otherwise carry out the responsibilities of a commissioner or supervisor. Others, however, are weak, unsure of themselves, and inexperienced in administration. Few districts have staff personnel to aid the

6. Acceptance of Decision-making Role in Policy Matters

It is, therefore, not surprising that it is difficult for district boards to perform the great number of routine tasks that lie before them, much less do the kind of thoughtful and careful planning of the use of the technical, financial, and educational services which must be organized in pursuit of their objectives.

However, lacking an independent staff, governing boards tend to rely heavily on the judgment and recommendations of the professional conservationists who work closely with them. In technical matters, this is proper and necessary. But technical matters always involve policy, and over-reliance on agency personnel in policy determination now not uncommon is certainly not a responsible practice.

District supervisors are not meeting their responsibilities unless they make useful and significant plans for the future, remain fully informed about the progress of their long-range program, keep monthly and annual work plans current, and relate the program to all the other kinds of resource work and resource-related activities underway in the jurisdiction. But the organizational arrangements--based on district sponsorship--for facilitating effective work of this kind are not well developed.

7. Broadened Influence in Resource Affairs

We have discussed the manner in which the agricultural orientation of districts, their lack of funds and authority, and their administrative weaknesses have resulted in a lessened capacity to serve as effective instruments of local policy-making.

In the early days of the program, the political requirement of minimizing coercive aspects of the soil conservation effort, and the genuine desire to create a new, voluntary, and democratic movement, resulted in districts which conceived their powers and tasks narrowly and found themselves relying on others to make many major decisions.

The realization that districts are losing their opportunity to influence the course of conservation events, and that they are not utilized or consulted adequately in the prosecution of natural resource development work is not uncommon among commissioners or supervisors. New Federal and State government efforts designed to meet emerging conservation needs--the programs created by the last Congress for example, are typical and have resulted in a host of single-purpose "project-type" programs whose administration has been assigned to specific governmental bureaus or agencies. Only in rare instances have these programs--such as the Great Plains Conservation Program; Resource Conservation and Development Projects; Rural Renewal, the Cropland Conversion, and Rural Areas Development efforts, and some public land management and development programs--been funneled through districts. Neither by law nor governmental policy--except for cases where the Soil Conservation Service has elected to work through districts--have districts been given an effective and substantial role. The reasons most often given for this neglect of districts are 1) that the Federal government has no authority to say that a program shall be carried out through districts because (they) are subdivisions of State government, and 2) that districts lack essential capabilities of administration.

Facing this erosion of their influence, district supervisors have said in effect to the professional conservationists who urge them to gear up to meet the resource development needs of the future: "You have done an excellent job in telling us the many things we need to do to improve our communities, but you have not told us that we have a real authoritative voice to actually carry out program or make decisions--except possibly to have a good program of promotion."

The end result is a commissioner or supervisor who feels that his role is to facilitate and promote a government program established at the State or national capital. He is not, under these conditions, an able representative of the local public and a maker of decisions reflecting local judgment--but a salesman.

8. Outdated State and Federal Laws and Policies

Districts are not alone in their problems of orientation, authorities, and funds. Many of these same problems affect the Federal and State agencies which assist them. Districts suffer from an inability to plan and coordinate programs effectively; the State and Federal agencies may not be able to carry out the technical and other work needed.

Without exploring this point in detail, it is noteworthy that appropriations to the Soil Conservation Service for conservation operations have steadily diminished in relation to the conservation work to be performed. Even watershed program funds--which have grown rapidly in the last decade--are seriously inadequate to meet even present needs. Similar problems exist in the Department of the Interior and other cooperating agencies.

Specific authorities for Federal and State cooperating agencies especially the State Soil and Water Conservation Committees, Boards, and Commissions have, as in the case of districts, not kept pace with changing conservation needs.

Only this past year, for example, the Philbin-Williams bill--which would have confirmed U. S. Department of Agriculture authorities to perform needed work in expanding suburban areas--failed passage in the Congress.

9. Proliferation of Resource Agencies

There is further and convincing evidence of the limitations of districts outlined above. In the last two decades there has been a steady proliferation of new units of local government charged with responsibilities for natural resource development. In 1962, there were 8,500 natural resource districts in the United States. This total includes drainage, soil and water conservation, irrigation and water conservation, flood control, park and recreation water supply, and other natural resource districts.

These districts represent 46 percent of all special-purpose districts organized for any purpose in the Nation. And there has been a 125 percent increase in their number since 1942.

The trend can be seen most clearly in the watershed program. In the 10 years since 1954 when Public Law 566 was passed, 701 new special purpose districts have been created to operate, maintain, and carry out programs under this legislation. These include 161 subdistricts of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, 320 independent special-purpose organizations such as flood control, conservancy, water management, drainage, and water control and improvement districts. There are 3,715 persons serving as supervisors of these special districts of which only 184 are district supervisors or commissioners.

The basic purpose for the organization of these new governmental units has been their possession of useful powers not available to districts--such as taxation, selling of bonds, and eminent domain--which have proven essential in watershed programs. In some cases, these districts were created under new legislation actually sponsored by Soil and Water Conservation Districts although other cases, existing authorities and/or legislation was adapted as a matter of convenience. Except perhaps in the case of subdistricts of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the result has been an increase in the number of governmental agencies and the subsequent problems of coordination.

There are other straws in the wind. Legislation recently enacted in Arkansas enables the creation of new resource agencies called Rural Development Authorities. These new units of local government are given broad powers to carry on conservation and resource development projects. Most of their functions and responsibilities duplicate those of Soil and Water Conservation Districts. The Appalachian Regional Development Act--when it passes--proposes authorization for the formation of similar development corporations.

In Massachusetts and Connecticut, many town (township) conservation commissions have been created in the last few years. These commissions are principally responsible for open space acquisition and recreational development.

Similar groups--called county conservation commissions--have been organized in Iowa.

Although districts have found effective ways to cooperate with these new resource agencies of every description, it is clear that new desires

and needs in the resource field have led to the creation of many new units of government, partly because districts were not capable of meeting the needs or did not want to accept that role.

10. Inadequate Communication and Responsiveness

In a broad sense, the factors affecting district effectiveness are rooted in the problem of resource management in a democratic society. One major element of this problem is that of communication and responsiveness.

Whether we like it or not, the general public does not, as a general rule, regard resources as an important issue. This failure of most people to become concerned and involved in resource management affairs is not a calculated judgment on their part that resources management is unimportant, undramatic, or something that can safely be deferred.

The subject has simply not been put to them in a meaningful way, a way that requires public airing of the facts, selection from alternatives, and the ratification of financial and other commitments.

The subject has not been elevated to a status requiring a periodic vote by the people generally. District commissioners or supervisor elections in the main are sparsely attended and usually reflect only agricultural opinion.

Resource management affairs as they are handled today by special-purpose rural Soil and Water Conservation Districts are not sufficiently exposed to public attention and consideration. District long-range programs and annual work plans are not considered important enough to submit to the public for ratification and, therefore, do not command the attention and concern, as for example, school plans handled by the school board.

Districts in a very real sense are therefore not responsive to the desires and needs of the public at large. For this reason, and for all the others described above, they stand in real jeopardy.

If our analysis of resource requirements and the present status of districts in meeting them is correct, there does exist in America today a need for organized, legal bodies to--

1. Represent all the people in ascertaining conservation needs and responding to their desires.
2. Develop resource conservation and development programs for all the people.
3. Involve all the people by requiring their approval, modification, or disapproval of programs and projects.
4. Accept responsibilities, including the expenditure of local, State, and Federal financial allocations on behalf of all the people in connection with programs and projects.

A special NACD Committee has not yet concluded their study. I'm optimistic that they will say that Soil and Water Conservation Districts should become these bodies. Such a policy, we believe, holds the most promise for organizing an effective and enlightened natural resource conservation and development program in America, a program in which local self-government is realized to the highest possible degree. Any other course would throw out the baby with the bath water. A quarter-century of experience and the local leadership and know-how of thousands of district leaders should not and cannot be ignored.

As districts decide that this is the direction in which they wish to move, some changes will need to be made. These will not be easy to make nor will they come about overnight. This will require that district officials assess their strengths and weaknesses carefully and objectively. This will require due regard for the programs and policies of other groups as well as districts.

We recognize that no single pattern of organization and operations will serve the needs of every State or region of the country. There are basic diversities in interest, capacities, problems, and convictions that must be accommodated.

To make it possible for districts to become the responsible local operating natural resource agency throughout America, many policies and procedures can be changed without legislative enactment. But it is evident that some of the problems of today's districts will require legislation to solve.

TOMORROW'S DISTRICTS

As districts move toward their full maturity, they find themselves faced with an enormous challenge:

1. As requests build for assistance from landowners and communities, they must step up efforts to provide the needed technical, financial, and other services necessary to move ahead with the job.
2. They must face the fact that resource programs of the future need to be developed in terms that our vast urban population--largely unacquainted with the fundamentals of land and water management--can understand and support.

3. They must equip themselves to meet the demands for orderly resource development in an age of steeply increasing requirements for land, water, and space, which may include inventing new operating machinery that will not only meet the basic requirements of farmers and other landowners, but also satisfy public community development needs and provide a framework for greater participation in resource matters.

Imaginative approaches are being made in these directions by many districts. The emerging shape of the future can be seen in many of the new long-range programs developed in recent years by district supervisors. These programs place more emphasis on the multiple use of resources. They envision the allocation of more time and money to comprehensive district-wide programs, comprehensive watershed programs, the development of recreational facilities, the encouragement of orderly growth of communities in accordance with resource capabilities, and the solution of water and land management problems in the small towns and suburban areas of America.

The evidence of recent years indicates that tomorrow's districts will include among their governing bodies a wider variety of citizens--representing a larger share of the population--than in the past. More doctors and lawyers, sportsmen and industrialists, and businessmen and educators will join farmers and ranchers among the ranks of district commissioners and supervisors. The added interests and abilities they bring to the task will broaden the support and improve the capability of the Nation's Soil and Water Conservation Districts to meet the resource needs of the future.

For more than 25 years, districts have grown in experience, capabilities, and vision. They have demonstrated their effectiveness in serving the conservation needs of farmers and ranchers. Now the signs indicate that local district leadership is beginning a new giant stride forward--expanding the breadth of district service to more people, more resources. This is an evolutionary development, and not surprising in view of districts' past success with more

limited objectives. The years ahead offer Soil and Water Conservation Districts the greatest opportunity they have had in modern times to strengthen the ideal of local self-government and at the same time help achieve vital goals in the care and development of America's natural resources.