PEOPLE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

On January 1, 1970 the President of the United States said, "The 1970's must be the years when America pays its debt to the past by reclaiming the purity of its air, its waters and our living environment."

That task though challenging will be a great deal easier to accomplish in Montana than some other places I know. You move into the future from a higher level of quality in your environment. Your air is cleaner, your waters less polluted, your landscape less cluttered--even magnificent. Montana's population--estimated as of April 1, 1970 to be 682,133 (up about 1 percent since 1960) suggests that this land of the "Big Sky" has opportunity for many more livable communities.

Material used by Norman A. Berg, Associate Administrator, Soil Conservation Service, Washington, D.C. at 25th annual meeting of the Montana Chapter of the Soil Conservation Society of America, July 18, 1970, Missoula, Montana

A recent publication, "Community Action for Environmental Quality" should attract readers. It's a guide for citizens who want to participate in practical action to make their communities better places to live in. Released by the Citizens Advisory Committee on Environmental Quality, it poses some basic questions for citizens who may feel overwhelmed by the complexity of our problems. Can we really do anything, some wonder, until we have a complete master plan for all the community's needs? The guidebook stresses comprehensive planning. But it also stresses the importance of getting action started.

It is significant that many of the pioneering conservation programs across our land began quite modestly. In any event, basic questions are being posed:

--How do elected officials stand on the issues?

--Is there a planning commission?

--Is there a group for zoning?

--What regional organizations exist?

--Is there an agency for pollution control?

--How vigorous is the community program for waste disposal?

--Is there a conservation district?

--Is there a small watershed or RC&D project in your area?

--Is there an overall recreation program?

--Who handles parks and open space?

--What civic organization and private organizations will join you?

Conservationists tend to assume that all good people share their viewpoint. Often they do not, and if they do, their support can be quite latent. Those same people may also feel that they are on the horns of a dilemma: Conservation vs. growth; that we should not stop progress--bird watching is all very fine, but new industries and more jobs are important, too!

Question: Is conservation progress? It depends in part on how conservation is defined. We professionals, district leaders, cooperators, are now discovering a larger purpose as we work for improvement of the whole community rather than resource improvement for its own sake.

More groups are discovering that, in their quest for better communities, conservation facts and know-how are invaluable.

In hundreds of counties of the United States--and in cities, towns, and villages--a movement of singular importance is gaining momentum. Local officials and heads of civic groups are launching determined efforts, not only for rapid business and industrial expansion as in former years, but for a wholesome, orderly development of the whole area in which residents may live a good life, and in which new business and industry may find a compatible climate.

These local units of government are bodies with the muscle and the tools, authorities and action corridors, to create the environment our Nation is seeking. State and Federal governments can help with the job, but the local leaders--with the ability to communicate with the community--carry the load.

In Maryland, my present home State, the Governor on Earth Day signed the Nation's first state-wide sediment-control program. Effective July 1, 1970, it is an expansion of the Patuxent River Watershed Protection Law that has been in effect since July 1, 1969. All land clearing and earth-moving for construction of any kind must hinge on a sediment-control plan and program approved by the soil conservation district.

As Under Secretary of Agriculture, J. Phil Campbell, at an Earth Day observance said,

"The whole urbanization process has become an increasingly troublesome environmental problem, and not from the standpoint of sedimentation alone. A study released some months ago by the American Institute of Planners revealed that land is being urbanized at the rate of 3,000 acres per day.

"We are not so much concerned with running out of land as with running short of land for particular uses. Even with a continued rise in total population about one-half of the counties in the United States are still losing population. A reversal of this trend is not only desirable, it is essential.

"There are many sound reasons for an orderly development of less densely populated areas. We have the space and we have the ability. Science, technology, and the ingenuity of the American farmers with the help of public agencies, private institutions, and industries serving agriculture have gone a long way toward making this possible."

Yes, the future holds great changes--and challenges. It always has for each generation. Now, as we find ourselves well into 1970, concern for conservation, ecology, and the environment is growing.

A few will simply wring their hands. But most are seriously concerned--willing to get involved. For instance: Dr. Kurt Bauer, executive director of the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, is aware of the possibilities of environmental catastrophe--and equally aware of what can be done to avert them. Says Dr. Bauer, "I don't include myself among the prophets of gloom and doom because I know, for example, that southeastern Wisconsin can absorb a million new people in the next 20 years and wind up with a better environment for life than we have today--if we use our heads."

So: -- Who decides on rural and urban land Use?

-- What kind of a community do we really want?

-- What are the "facts."

I see at least five dimensions of our great Nation that bear directly on present and future resource conservation planning and implementation.

First, population--how many people and where they live. We are an urban society. In contrast to earlier years, most of our citizens now actually live on a small portion of the land. - From report of the National Land

Although U.S. population growth has slowed (especially in the last 5 years), the prediction is that in the next 30 years another (80 to 100) million people may be added.

A major concern of our Nation, then, is how best to absorb these added millions of human beings in the city and the suburb--or in the rural community. Where can they and their neighbors find suitable living environment?

A good living environment includes:

--Air fit to breathe;

--Water fit for drinking--and for swimming, fishing, and wildlife;

--Abundant food;

--Quality shelter;

--Open space that gives freedom to man's spirit, and diversity in his surroundings; that leaves room for man's individualism;

--Acceptable community facilities--from education to waste disposal, from transportation to recreation; and

--Good job opportunities, to help man provide for his other environmental needs and to give his life a purpose.

I want to come back to these characteristics of quality living--good water, food, shelter, space, diversity, facilities, and jobs, and relate them to resource conservation in a few minutes.

A second dimension for resource use is the recently expanded public concern for the natural environment.

People are dismayed by the rate at which the natural environment is being altered or is disappearing. A popular magazine reports on the threatened inundation of New York City in its own refuse. The extent and severity of water pollution, the regional focus on smog, the spread of housing, highways & automobiles, the apparently insatiable demand for products and services--the unlimited demands on limited resources--are now the subject of daily headlines throughout the U.S. Is this environmental mess "progress?" If it is, then in the words of Ogden Nash "Progress may have been all right once, but they let it go on too long."

The picture, as portrayed by some people, has never looked more grim. But there is another point of view: never were there greater opportunities for constructive, enterprising minds. With citizen concern rising rapidly, there are expanding opportunities to take corrective steps. Large numbers of people are beginning to realize that it is inexcusable for us to continue wasting our resources and fouling our own nest.

Dr. Rene Dubos, biologist at Rockefeller University in New York, writing in Look magazine recently said:

"We cannot achieve environmental quality without changing our ways of life and even our aspirations. We shall have to limit the amount of energy introduced into ecological systems, the kinds of industrial goods produced, the extent of our aimless mobility and our population size. In my opinion, all these limitations can be achieved without causing economic stagnation or stopping real progress. Indeed, a change in social structure and goals can enrich our lives, by opening the way for a social renaissance.

"The colossal inertia and rigidity--if not indifference--of social and academic institutions make it unlikely that they will develop effective programs of action or research focused on environmental problems. Two kinds of event, however, may accelerate the process. One is some ecological catastrophe that will alarm the public and thus bring pressure on the social, economic and academic establishments. Another, more attractive possibility is the emergence of a grass-roots movement, powered by romantic emotion as much as by factual knowledge, that will give form and strength to the latent public concern with environmental quality.

"Because students are vigorous, informed and still uncommitted to vested interests, they constitute one of the few groups in our society that can act as a spearhead of this movement."

A third dimension relates to this second one of expanded citizen interest. It concerns the change in strategies for public action. Dr. Michael L. Brewer of Resources for the Future, Inc., pointed out to SCS State Conservationists last September that,

"If environmental quality is to be the central focus of conservation today, it implies several radical departures from past thinking. Conservation in the earlier decades was primarily concerned with the particular commodities the environment could provide for the productive processes on which the American economy rested. These questions dealt with unambiguous resources--whether it was the amount of nitrogen or phosphorous in a soil horizon, or boardfeet of timber, or tons of a particular mineral. The concern with environmental quality does not lend itself as well to unambiguous measures, and certainly contemporary conservation objectives are much more difficult to identify."

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Dr. Brewer felt that this change in the concept of conservation will be reflected in mounting pressures on local people and resource groups, such as conservation districts, to become more deeply involved with such problems as the management of waste materials, community land uses, and the methods whereby society can preserve highly valuable or unique parts of the natural environment. Local organizations in the future will need to identify their own environmental problems and establish a forum of sorts, in which different courses of action can be explored and debated. In this connection, Dr. Brewer strongly urged that there be more dialogue between government agencies and the community in exploring possible courses of action and their impact on the community.

To quote Dr. Brewer again:

"The problems of institutionalizing such dialogue through government agencies and other organizations are extremely difficult. Most of our government organizations... have been organized to execute programs largely conceived of outside of the local community in which they are to be implemented. Arrangements have been needed to receive commands from above and translate these into operable programs ... at the local level. We have had a high degree of success in establishing this type of organization in the United States. The point is, however, that we now face the much more complex task of devising organizational arrangements which can elicit participation of the local community in 1) establishing goals and 2) weighing alternative lines of action, in addition to local participation in the final implementation".

As a fourth dimension, we note the increasing conflits between the wants and demands of American people. Too few citizens have yet made the connection between the pressures on the land, water, and air--and their own consuming habits. Some people want to stop or reverse the process of resource development, but few want to give up resource use. We are asked however to change the landscape without disturbing it--to store water without building reservoirs, to build projects without taking land; to provide flood watercourses without channelization.

It is incumbent that we who profess some conservation capability, and who have accepted some responsibility for land and water resource planning and development, must seriously concern ourselves with the alternatives available in adapting modern resource knowledge to the environmental goals of the community.

Back now briefly to my first point: The characteristics of a good environment that people expect in their communities.

You will--if you check--find some of these items missing in almost any community. But some people feel that in too many communities none of the good environmental features are present. They look at their surroundings, technology, and political system and conclude that quality environment is a hopeless case. However, I am convinced that the same scientitic brainpower and technical skill that partially caused our environmental problems can be harnessed to improve the environment for man wherever he may live. It is a tremendous challenge. But it must be done. For instance, transportation and communications and power requirements once dictated that we concentrate people in giant cities. That requirement is past. We can now have viable communities of small to medium size almost anywhere in the Nation.

We have the space; we have millions of acres of good soils suitable for many uses. We have the motivation; a recent Gallup poll indicates that of every 100 Americans, only 6 percent prefer living in a large city. And we have much of the basic resource information and planning techniques that are needed. What remains is to use the information and techniques, and to have close cooperation among all the disciplines involved--planners, engineers, soil scientists, geologists, hydrologists, biologists, architects, economists, educational experts, ecologists, and others.

We need good community planning before land becomes urbanized. We need to allow in our plans for all the foreseeable community needs, and then to leave open space for the needs that we can't predict or foresee.

Modern man in a democratic society exercises a key role in determining priorities affecting life and living in his total environment. More and more, the individual wants to become involved in decision-making about matters that affect his environment. This is as it should be; but to be effective, the individual should be well-informed about environmental influences and his relationship to them, and about the various uses available, with due regard to proper conservation and other needed safeguards. To properly inform people about environmental management and conservation and appropriate uses of land, water, and related resources is perhaps our Nation's greatest problem.

A fifth dimension for resource conservation is the encouraging evidence that public agencies today are concerned about a wider range of resources and a broader set of objectives, including environmental quality.

Conservation leaders are enlarging their goals to include:

--sediment reduction as a measure of water pollution control,

--streambank and roadside erosion control,

--solid waste disposal,

--recreational development,

--surface-mined land reclamation,

--economic development,

--development and presentation of resource information, and

--multi-district land and water resource planning and development.

These enlarged goals are in addition to, and not a replacement for, regular farm and ranch concervation goals.

The State laws governing the purposes and operations of soil and water conservation and natural resource districts also are undergoing change. In more than half the States, basic legislation has been strengthened in one way or another during the past three years, and the process is accelerating.

My agency, the Soil Conservation Service, is also well aware that we are in a new decade where change accelerates, problems multiply and pressures mount. We have focused attention on what the Service should be doing during the 1970's.

We haven't formulated the specifics for Service work in the next decade, but I think you will be interested in some of the general recommendations made at the last meeting of our State Conservationists.

A major point was that inventory capabilities to provide better data, faster, on a wider variety of resource conditions and problems should be strengthened. It was recommended that SCS:

--Speed up work on the national cooperative soil survey and reduce the time lag between mapping and publication;

--Broaden the perspective of river basin surveys to deal more fully with water quality, pollution abatement, municipal and industrial water supply, and other needs;

--And undertake comprehensive surveys of erosion, sedimentation, pollution sources, flood damages, water impoundment sites, scenic areas, and other resource concerns.

Sprinkled throughout all discussions was the thought that we ought to look at and strengthen our relationships with conservation districts and their associations, and with other organizations in the conservation field.

In the area of planning, we will streamline our assistance; be more flexible; and relate conservation planning on individual land units to planning for neighborhoods, communities and multi-county areas.

Watershed projects and RC&D project needs were emphasized including how to provide for more flexibility in planning and for greater coordination with special interest groups such as wildlife agencies.

It was the consensus of the state conservationists that State, local, and private interests will have to continually provide a larger proportion of the technical assistance for installing conservation work on individual land holdings. SCS will evaluate how best to provide the overall direction and technical assistance related to our responsibilities.

Goals for the 1970's include participation in land, water, and related phases of comprehensive area planning as a basis for the swift growth ahead for this Nation. Planning starts with land and water, and it succeeds as the people concerned work together in a spirit of cooperation and rational compromise.

SCS, in turn, has the responsibility to be there at the time of planning and decision-making and when the plans take form on the land. Land use and health ordinances and building codes relating to land and water resources are specific areas in which SCS technical help can backstop the efforts of local governments.

Also at the national level, the whole business of conservation and environmental improvement is being studied. This includes specific policies as well as the institutional arrangements for carrying out those policies. Many bills have been introduced in the U.S. Congress that would change some of the present arrangements.

Some of the new arrangements being suggested for conservation work will raise eyebrows but we are firmly convinced that the process of questioning current methods is a healthy one. We cannot assume that any of us is making the highest and most effective contribution at the "old stand." We look at ourselves and our work and where there are improvements to be made we ought to make them.

To sum up, I believe that as we go further into the 1970's, we must keep these five dimensions actively in mind:

--the rapidly increasing population pressure on our land, especially in urban areas;

--the growing public concern about the environment;

--the emergence of environmental quality as a major national goal;

--the need for conservation education among the general public (I translate general public, here, to mean your

--and the general broadening of goals and aims among conservation leaders across the Nation.

I see much that's heartening about this list.

USDA Under Secretary Campbell said recently:

"...History has revealed--(that) without man's stewardship, Nature itself has rarely been productive enough to meet men's needs... certainly not in the numbers...(in which) we exist today and will exist in the future. Yet our resources must serve every economic and social need of mankind.

"The challenge is to assure that beauty and bounty as well as conservation development and use are maximized simultaneously into the very long future.

"It is probably well to remind ourselves of something too easily forgotten in the present rising tide of public concern with environmental quality. The environmental issue is not a new one.

Fifty years ago and more, men were fighting for acceptance of the concept that soil, water, wildlife, forests and water power were renewable resources which might last forever if they were treated and harvested scientifically, instead of being consumed faster than they reproduced.

"They made some impact. Men like Hugh Hammond Bennett, first Chief of the Soil Conservation Service, who also founded the Soil Conservation Society of America; Gifford Pinchot who persuaded the government that conservation was a management tool and who was also first Chief of the Forest Service; and John Muir whose longtime dream saw fulfillment in the establishment of the National Park System.

"There were others who sounded a warning of things to come, but faced with our custom of waiting until we're sick before calling the doctor they achieved only a modicum of success."

In other words, "facts" alone can not sell the idea of wise use of our resources. Facts must be joined to persuasion--and that's as true today as ever. Certain parts of the earth, like certain persons, may have only one vocation. Our own version of the Garden of Eden must be created in our own back yards and in the hearts of our cities--as Voltaire painted out in his short novel, Candide. The main character discovered at the end of his adventures that the surest formula for happiness was to cultivate one's own garden.

I continue to have faith that local people working together with State and Federal agencies <u>can</u> shape and plan the environment on their terms. Changes are inevitable. The question is, on whose terms and under what criteria? To that question, we can <u>all</u> contribute some answers. Best wishes as you guide and persuade others making the Nation's rural and urban land use decisions.

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