

## RECENT TRENDS IN LAND USE PLANNING

I'm pleased to have the chance to join in your 12th annual Agronomic Administrators' Roundtable...and to share the presentation chores with Phil Lewis. Phil for a long time has pointed to some of the important esthetic considerations in land use, or what he calls "environmental corridors."

Many people are beginning to think more about land use and about many things that ought to be taken into account in making decisions about land use. In fact, in every state I've visited in recent years, land use is one of the prime subjects for discussion, argument, proposals, legislation, and litigation. It's certainly been a current topic in the Chicago area, and in increasing numbers of communities that discover they are part of the Chicago area--or feel the push from two or more metropolitan areas.

There is increasing support for land-use planning as a concept and as an objective. The need is evident. In one way or another, some 10,000 units of government are engaged in land-use planning; but for much of the nation's land, especially rural areas, there is none at all.

---

Material for talk by Norman A. Berg, Associate Administrator, Soil Conservation Service, at the 12th annual Agronomic Administrators' Roundtable, Chicago, Illinois, November 11, 1974.

There is unplanned suburban sprawl; wasteful conversion of prime farmlands; controversy over the siting of public facilities, industry, energy, and housing developments; and controversy, too, over the protection of wetlands, shorelines, forests, parks, and open space, as well as present and potential recreational areas.

Land-use questions have become so prominent because they touch many, many interest groups and because our land resource base is a finite one. With the help of slides, I'd like to give a quick overview of America's land and what we expect from it, and discuss a few specific issues and conflicts and the actions that may resolve them.

LIGHTS OUT SLIDE RUN BEGINS

1. The United States does have rich land and water resources, beautiful countryside, and a tremendously favorable and varied climate.
2. The ownership pattern of America's land has a lot to do with the kinds of decisions made about its use. Fifty-eight percent is in private hands--owned by individual farmers, ranchers, businessmen, homeowners, and industry.
3. From this land comes most of the food, fiber, and timber that we consume and export.
4. One third of the private land is in forest.
5. Twenty-seven percent is grassland pasture and range.
6. And about one-fifth is cropland.
7. Despite an almost 200-percent increase in U.S. population since 1900, these proportions in land use have changed very little.

- 3 -

8. The reasons for this are varied and include agriculture-related technology, government programs, and the private enterprise role. America's crop production per acre continues an upward trend, although the weather has played hob with the totals this year.
9. The second largest segment of land--34 percent--is under Federal management, largely by the Bureau of Land Management. Military land, national parks, and wildlife refuges are other Federal land.
10. More than 15 million acres of Federal land has been set aside as wilderness and primitive areas where timber is not harvested and most other uses are banned.
11. Much of the Federally owned land, however, is under multiple-use management. Recreation is a growing use of Federal and private land.
12. Another 6 percent of land in the U.S. is in State and local ownership.
13. And 2 percent is Indian land.
14. Most of America's land is sparsely populated. Over the last 20 years, 1,500 counties lost population.
15. Metropolitan areas cover 3 percent or less of our land, but include more than 70 percent of the population.
16. Land for transportation--super highways, railroads, and airports--takes up only 1.4 percent of the total land area. But it has taken up some of America's prime agricultural land, irretrievably.
17. Here's a summary of land use in America by acreage totals. We have quite a mix of public and private, rural and urban, good and bad

18. The way in which Americans use land has been, for the most part, good! Businessmen, homeowners, public land management agencies, colleges and universities, organizations such as yours, and especially farmers and ranchers have had a big hand in using land properly.
19. But we still use land in ways that are not to our credit. Thoughtless, unplanned, uncontrolled land use practices are costly to America, in terms of both economics and esthetics. These practices can no longer be ignored, and perhaps by the end of the 1970's no longer tolerated!
20. Americans still attempt to cultivate some land that is too steep and erosive--at least 50 million acres.
21. We still attempt to grow row crops on some land where frequent drought conditions present a high risk of crop failure and land damage.
22. We try to grow crops where wet conditions are equally troublesome.
23. We needlessly burn some forest land each year.
24. We concentrate livestock and send tons of animal waste into streams, adding to serious water pollution problems.
25. It doesn't have to be that way! The local people with whom SCS and other agencies work can testify that planned conservation practices--properly installed--greatly reduce erosion and pollution, and help assure good crops on agricultural land. Techniques are available to solve many environmental problems on farms.
26. Americans create unsightly scars on millions of acres of land through surface mining, polluting streams for miles around. Most of these areas are in rural America.

27. Mining doesn't have to ruin the land! Strip-mine spoils can be reclaimed and revegetated to serve multiple uses.
28. Americans discard 250 millions tons of solid waste each year, mostly in open dumps in rural areas where the stuff pollutes air, water, and land.
29. But solid waste can be disposed of safely in properly located and managed sanitary landfills that later can serve other beneficial uses.
30. In urbanizing areas, often spreading out onto choice farmland, Americans tear up the land for building, leave it bare for long periods, and let it produce sediment to mess up the site itself and land and water downstream. Sediment is America's heaviest-by-volume water pollutant, and a growing proportion of it is produced on urbanizing land.
31. Americans pave over large areas with no provision for managing storm water, and thus add significantly to flooding problems.
32. Half of the annual flood damage still is suffered in small upstream watersheds.
33. It doesn't have to be that way! Builders can find out about land suitability and land-use hazards before any construction is started...
34. And when things are torn up, sediment can be held on site in a temporary basin just like the ponds that farmers and ranchers have been using for decades. Some of these silt traps later become attractive lakes.
35. Structures can be built to help streams safely handle the vastly increased stormwater runoff that occurs when the land is paved over.

Kt. 6

- 6 -

36. Unplanned, checkerboard development too often squeezes the farmer until eventually someone makes him an offer that he can't refuse.
37. Here's a comparison between an area on Rock Creek in Maryland in 1937...
38. And the same area in 1957.
39. It doesn't have to be unplanned or checkerboard. Proper land use planning can help protect and develop natural resources in both rural and suburban areas. More and more people are beginning to demand some kind of sensible land use planning--and with the one-man-one-vote system in operation, they are likely to get what they want.
40. What all of us want is a high-quality environment where we vacation and where we live.
41. We want high-quality food, dependable in quantity and reasonably priced at the market place...
42. And that means that land use planning must first and adequately consider the needs of a high-quality sustained agriculture.
43. We want space and facilities for a variety of recreation experiences.
44. We want space and habitat for fish and wildlife.
45. We want to protect and preserve shorelines on the oceans and the Great Lakes, along with other unique or critical environmental areas.
46. We want to preserve areas of historical importance. (Lincoln's boyhood cabin)

48. Any land-use planning process needs natural resource inputs along with recreation needs, population density and trends, economic factors, and related data.
49. A planning process needs to cover the Federal assistance programs, including those of USDA--and needs to blend Federal programs with State and local objectives.
50. Interchange of ideas and data among agencies of all kinds will be vital--for example, useful new imagery from the Earth Resources Technology Satellite (ERTS).
51. Exchange of ideas with the public will be equally important. People--you and I--will not support plans that we don't understand and that we had no hand in formulating.
52. Some of the land-use decisions that, particularly in rural America, have always been totally private decisions in a free-market system with limited local overview...
53. May need a stronger overview in the form of regulation, control, legislative or State approval, or perhaps litigation. How much control? By whom? Over what land uses?
54. The private landowner may need reminding that he has duties as well as rights in the matter of using and caring for the land and water resources he manages.
55. Above all, we must not forget that land use planning begins and ends with people. After all, land use planning is for people.

57. In the Soil Conservation Service, we work through conservation districts to tell landowners and users about the technical information they need, where to get it, and how to use it in improving their land and their lives.
58. We work with other State and Federal agencies to compile useful technical information, starting with soil surveys. Soil survey data now are available in some form for over half of the nation and nearly three-fourths of the areas where housing and industry are rapidly expanding.
59. We help make inventories of soil and water conservation needs, flood-hazard analyses, studies of recreation potential on private land, snow surveys, and others that provide useful facts.
60. SCS also helps local groups look at flood prevention and other needs in small watersheds. The more than 1,000 projects that have been approved for installation under Public Law 566 cover nearly 70 million acres. The completed structures and land treatment practices have significantly lowered upstream flood damages and improved the environment.
61. We work with other agencies in large river basin studies. Each one is different, but all will provide facts useful in identifying resource conditions and needs and in deciding on ways to improve resources for people.
62. We work with local organizations and other agencies in Resource



63. All of these activities have as a central thread careful decisions about the use and management of land. For example:
64. In an Iowa community, population increased 35 percent in 10 years.
65. Iowa City's regional planning commission uses soils and other information as an aid in making land use decisions...
66. From where to put a new sanitary landfill where they can safely put the solid waste from 60,000 residents...
67. To locating critical sources of sediment in the area so they can encourage farmers to build terraces and ponds to keep sediment and other pollutants from reaching major lakes and rivers.
68. Shelby County, Alabama, is expected to double its population in the next 20 years, as people spill over from neighboring Birmingham.
69. But county officials plan to restrict development of land for housing and other needs on the basis of slope, water table, hard rock, and flood frequency.
70. Responsible builders in the area also consider environmental protection their business. They save large trees, sod the exposed land quickly, adapt other conservation practices.
71. In Birmingham, SCS helped develop an outdoor classroom at the new Huffman High School that is used by nearly every department in the school to relate textbooks to the real world.
72. A new Pennsylvania law requires builders with tracts of 25 acres or more to make an erosion-control plan based on soils data before they

164,110

from 22 acres in 1920 to 11 acres today to perhaps 7 acres in the year 2000--we will work to develop and advertise the information needed to help communities and governmental units make valid land-use decisions.

80. To get the kind of America we want tomorrow, we'll have to get the discussions going, the decisions made, the plans implemented, the land and other resources protected. There's a long way to go.

END SLIDE RUN    LIGHTS ON

You have seen a glimpse of the setting in which some land-use policy decisions are being made in rural and urban America. We think that every Federal agency and department, every land-grant university, every governmental unit and every interested private organization ought to take a reading on what's coming, what's wanted, and what's needed in his activity. We need to get informed and help others understand what's going on.

Today, people are becoming more aware that bad land-use practices or choices damage air and water quality and harm the productivity of the land. But in rural or urban America, there is not always agreement on what constitutes a good or bad land use.

It's a question of balancing local concerns based on the specific characteristics of a site, with some broader public interests on a community-wide or nationwide level.

It's a question of finding an equitable balance between private ownership rights to land and a broader public interest in environmental quality.

It's a question for you of deciding where you stand on particular issues and then advocating your position strongly with all of the information you can muster--not just all of the emotion. If, for example, you believe that in a specific area or the nation as a whole it is a good idea to have an equitable supply of prime agricultural land to assure enough food and fiber for America on a sustained basis, I would say that prime agricultural land needs all the spokesmen it can get. On the strict basis of dollars bid for an acre of land, agriculture will lose out every time.

It's a question of helping design or interpret new legislation in the land-use policy field that will come about in the next few years, but it also is a question of helping communities decide for themselves what their resources are and what they want to do with them

Communities will need facts about the natural resource base, such as soil surveys, inventories of soil and water conservation needs, geologic data, research information on agronomic and engineering practices, and a host of other kinds of information. You can help there, and USDA will help all it can.

Communities will need increased public participation and increased public awareness to make decisions, and many of you can help here too. No one will get everything he wants--there will have to be some tradeoffs in deciding land-use patterns. But we can find out what the tradeoffs and the impacts will be in advance, and make decisions that reflect that knowledge.

America does have enough land for all uses for all citizens and a high-quality environment, if we use our land carefully.

The American land needs all the help it can get.