

REPORT FROM WASHINGTON

Is soil, water, and watershed conservation still relevant to the needs of the Nation?

Your May 25 Tuesday Letter said the recent "head-long attack on one of the most constructive and broadly supported water resource programs in the Nation's history, "followed by a "brutal verbal attack" on the Administrator of the Soil Conservation Service at a House Hearing on Public Access in mid June "marked by misrepresentations and distortions of fact, insults, and emotional outbursts, " all raise questions that need to be aired. Your Area Meeting theme is most timely--"What are we doing? Where are we going?"

The SCS and others have mapped 70,000 different kinds of soil in the United States. This thin layer of mineral particles, organic matter, living things, air, and water on the thin surface of this earth is where plants grow. We live, work, play, and travel on soil--and our grain, grass, forests, flowers, fruits and vegetables grow in soil.

--A family of four depends on nine acres of agricultural land for food, clothing, and shelter.

Material for remarks by Norman A. Berg, Associate Administrator, Soil Conservation Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., at the Northeast Area Meeting of the National Association of Conservation Districts at the Sheraton Motor Inn, Burlington, Vermont, August 2, 1971

--From birth to 70 years each American will use:

- 26 million tons of water
- 13 thousand pounds of meat
- 10 tons of milk and cream
- 5 tons of wheat
- 50 cords of wood,
- plus thousands of pounds of other food and fiber.

More than 206 million in this Nation depend each day on our rich land and clean water. Only a comparative few--less than 5 percent this year--produce the good things that flow from the land. They--you not only produce--they--you love and care for, and conserve the soil and water resources for me and everyone. And only a handful of people directly help soil tillers conserve and develop our Nation's land. Soil and water conservation district directors, commissioners, and supervisors are a key group. Our SCS people are another. These, and other Federal, State, and local groups help land users keep our land strong, our water clean, and its bounty plentiful!

Collectively, we need to tell the true story. Somehow we must bring home more clearly to the 19 out of 20 people in our Nation who are not farmers and ranchers that agriculture is still basic to this country. Somehow we must point up the key relationship between agriculture and the Nation's environmental problems. My three decades of experience says it's a lot (more than "lip service"! How do you read it--feel about it from your own experience? And there are thousands of man years represented in the 18,000 governing board members in the Nation.

We need to emphasize that, as a whole, farmers, ranchers, forest and woodland owners--with the help of USDA--and some other governmental units--have done more than any other part of our society to improve the natural environment in every aspect.

Virtually all the non-Federal soil conservation and land and watershed improvement that has been achieved in this country has been done by these people. They (you) have carried out the major proportion of our soil and water conservation and flood prevention efforts on a majority of the U. S. lands.

At the same time, through your stewardship of soil, water, and woodland resources--you and others have made possible the most abundant food supply the world has ever seen--plus safer drinking water for a higher percentage of our people than in any previous generation--plus facilities for outdoor recreation unmatched in history, plus vastly increased opportunities for fishing and hunting.

We in USDA think these facts need to be clearly established in the public eye!

Having said that, let me go on to add that not enough has yet been done. Under Secretary Phil Campbell has said, ". . . Much more must be done if the Nation is to solve its environmental problems. We must improve the management and use of our land, timber, and water resources . . . and there is need for mutual understanding between farm and city people."

So, yes, soil, water, and watershed conservation is relevant--more so every day to the Nation's needs. Malcolm Crooks asked that I briefly touch on several items--especially as to how they would affect district operations. Let me proceed down a short list:

First, funding for FY 1972 is more promising than in prior years.

The President, as part of a package of actions designed to aid American agriculture, amended his budget request for the 1972 fiscal year to provide substantial increases for SCS assistance to conservation districts and watershed construction.

In his "Salute to Agriculture," a national radio network speech explaining his actions, the President agreed with the case that NACD and the districts of the Nation had been making in the halls of Congress this spring when he said:

("Another area where government should do more to provide technical assistance for farmers is that of soil and water conservation. Long before most Americans were thinking very much about the environment, our farmers, our ranchers, our woodland owners were working together with government to conserve our natural resources. I believe we should now be providing more help for our dedicated corps of soil conservationists whose number has dropped sharply in the past four years.

("I am therefore increasing my new budget requests for the Soil Conservation Service by \$12 million to provide more manpower for this valuable work. I am also proposing that Federal grants for small watershed projects be increased by \$28 million to a level of \$105 million, and that 75 new projects be authorized. I am further recommending quadrupling of loan programs to help local communities finance their share of these projects. "

The House acted promptly to decisively reject a proposed moratorium on watershed projects--and to approve \$2 million more than in the President's budget. This action taken in support of Representative Jamie Whitten's subcommittee added up to a strong vote of confidence in the Nation's soil and water conservation program in general--and the small watershed program in particular. An additional increase in funds of \$13,587,000 by Senate action enables the Service to substantially overcome the personnel and construction fund deficit that has slowed down vital conservation work in the 3026 districts and 1,000-plus watersheds across America. These increases total over \$55 million in all and over 1,200 man-years, plus construction funds above 1971 operations.

The action is most welcome and right in line with NACD recommendations. We expect that we can soon tell our State Conservationists--and you--exactly how to plan.

Second, Revenue Sharing and Executive Reorganization. (At Malcolm's request, I'm relating the current facts--not speculating on the future.) The President's proposals to improve the workings of government by more decentralization, rural community development, revenue sharing, and reorganizing seven departments and OEO into four are of special concern to all employees of USDA--and can eventually influence the operation of conservation districts. You should know that these are proposals to Congress. Hearings are being held--and there will be opportunity to make your views known prior to any final action. ~~The Administration proposes~~ the Congress disposes *of Executive recommendations.*

The \$1.1 billion for Rural Revenue Sharing is one of six proposals in the areas of:

- transportation
- education
- law enforcement
- manpower training
- urban development, and
- rural development.

The President proposed that the funding for 11 existing programs operating directly in rural areas and smaller cities be united in a rural community development revenue sharing package and that \$179 million of "new money" be added to it. He asked that this be enacted and effective January 1, 1972. Assimilation of 8 programs from USDA would affect ASCS, ES, FHA, FS, and SCS. Directly concerned would be \$11 million of GPCP cost-share-funds-- and \$4 million of RC&D construction money and indirectly the \$140 million for REAP and \$10 million for the Water Bank, plus Appalachia and ED

Each State would receive its share of the \$1.1 billion on a formulae basis using population, income, and population change. States would need to file a development plan--but these would not be subject to Federal approval. Every State would receive at least as much from revenue sharing as it would have received from the 11 existing rural assistance programs combined. This proposal is not legislatively tied to the other five special revenue sharing bills, or to the four reorganization bills. If rural revenue sharing passes without reorganization, the Secretary of Agriculture would administer this program. If both are enacted, this proposal would be administered by the new Department of Community Development.

Executive Branch reorganization has a long history. The need for improved Federal government has been a major concern of every President since World War II. Indeed, the proliferation of natural resource functions alone has been the subject of a number of studies over the last 50 years. We know, too, that governors and State legislatures are increasingly looking at State government. It's a popular topic.

So reorganization of the Federal government is not something the President dreamed up overnight. President Truman formed the first Hoover Commission. President Eisenhower set up the second Hoover Commission, and Presidents Kennedy and Johnson each had similar groups. President Nixon is following through on the recommendations of the Ash Commission made up of Roy Ash, Governor Connally of Texas, and leading businessmen who said that the Federal government needs to be reorganized according to its major purposes and objectives so as to serve America in the best way possible. It is clear that Federal government eventually will be restructured--the only question is when. And this, too, concerns you.

Four new departments are proposed and some of USDA's present functions would be reassigned to each, focused on a major purpose of government.

I. Community Development

The Department of Community Development-HUD-would provide assistance to State and local governments for balanced growth and development. USDA functions which would transfer to the Department of Community Development include the Rural Electrification Administration, the economic development division of the Economic Research Service (except the human resources branch), and Farmers Home Administration's loan and grant authorizations and funds for housing and for water and sewer systems.

II. Economic Affairs

The Department of Economic Affairs would include those programs which relate primarily to a particular sector of the economy such as labor, agriculture, industry, small and minority businesses, and transportation carriers.

Most of the agencies in USDA and most of the funds budgeted for USDA would become part of the new Department of Economic Affairs. The new department would focus on commercial agriculture through a Farms and Agriculture Administration. The rest of the new department would be organized into a Business Development Administration, National Transportation Administration, Labor Relations and Standards Administration, International Economics Administration, and a Social, Economic, and Technical Information Administration.

The Export Marketing Service, the Foreign Agriculture Service, and the Foreign Economic Development Service would be placed into the International Economics Administration.

The Statistical Reporting Service and the Economic Research Service (with the exception of its natural resource economics and economic development research) would transfer to the Social, Economic, and Technical Information Administration.

The Farms and Agriculture Administration would receive the largest number of USDA functions, but not the greatest number of employees. To it would belong the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (including Commodity Credit Corporation programs), the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation, the Commodity Exchange Authority, the Packers and Stockyards Administration, the Extension Service, the Cooperative State Research Service, the Farmer Cooperative Service, the National Agricultural Library, the Consumer and Marketing Service (except meat, poultry, and egg inspection, and the authorizations and funds for farm loans from the Farmers Home Administration. The plant and animal disease and pest control functions, plant and animal quarantine, and farm produce, marketing and utilization research from ARS would also transfer.

III. Human Resources

The proposed new Department of Human Resources would bring together all programs directed at the development and well-being of individuals and families. Its activities would fall into the three general areas of income security, health, and human development.

The food stamp and commodity distribution programs for families and individuals from the Food and Nutrition Service would transfer to the new Income Security Administration. The special milk, school lunch, and other child nutrition programs from FNS would go to the new Human Development Administration. The new Health Administration would receive C&MS meat, poultry, egg inspection programs; ARS human nutrition research division and consumer and food economics research division; and the human resources branch of the Economic Research Service's economic development division.

IV. Natural Resources

Responsibility for management of onshore Federal lands is presently divided among the Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service, the National Park Service, the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, the Bureau of Reclamation, the Department of Defense, and others. The Department of Natural Resources would bring together these numerous natural resource and physical environmental programs.

The largest number of USDA employees would become part of this new department, which would incorporate the Forest Service, the Soil Conservation Service, the soil and water conservation research division of the Agricultural Research Service, the natural resource economics division from the Economic Research Service, and the loan authorities and funds for watershed protection and flood prevention from the Farmers Home Administration.

The SCS would be transferred in toto to the DNR and assigned to the Water Resources Administration. Also, included in this component would be the Bureau of Reclamation and the comprehensive planning functions and budgeting overview of the Corps of Engineers Civil Works Functions; the Office of Saline Water, Office of Water Resource Research, Power Marketing Agencies, and the functions of the Water Resources Council.

The other similar component in DNR would be the Land and Recreation Resources Administration. This administration would include the Nation's two major land management agencies (Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management), two land-based resource management agencies (National Park Service and the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife), the major coordinating and assistance unit for outdoor recreation (Bureau of Outdoor Recreation), and related functions (including soil and water conservation and economic research) from other government organizations.

Status of Soil Surveys

Progress is being made in reducing the backlog of unpublished soil surveys. In FY 1970, 40 soil surveys were sent to GPO. In FY 71 we increased this 50 percent over the previous year. The plan calls for doubling this in FY 1972. Our goal, is to get up to 120 soil surveys in GPO in FY 1973; and then staying in balance.

Soil surveys for operational planning were made on 48.8 million acres in 1969 and in FY 1970, 43.2 million acres. Our estimate for FY 1971 and FY 1972 is 45.0 million acres. We plan to increase this figure by 1.0 million acres each succeeding year until we reach 50 million acres in FY 1977.

Adjustments upward in our personnel ceilings now permit us to hire additional soil scientists. By this increase, we believe that we can attain the increase in mapping each year and, at the same time, reduce our publication backlog.

The State Conservationists do recognize the need for additional field soil scientists to provide soil surveys in high priority areas with critical soil limitations.

Land Use

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S. 632

Service Role in the Seventies

As you know, we in the Soil Conservation Service have been developing a long-range plan to guide our future efforts in working together with districts. Our plan is oriented to the technical aspects of the soil and water conservation mission and is made to support the district outlook report--"The Future of Districts."

It focuses on the things which need to be done to improve and maintain the resource management systems that make up our landscape so they meet quality standards for current and long term use. We give attention to the effects and benefits that can result from such improvements and to the kinds of technical things we in the Service need to do in working with districts and the people they represent.

Basically the plan calls for: 1) broadening activities to ^{inventory &} monitor the quality condition of natural resources, 2) adjusting our technology to changing conditions and to important concerns such as pollution prevention and abatement, 3) improving our planning assistance so it contributes more fully to planning efforts that may be made all the way from the district cooperator to the Nation. Importantly, it calls for joint efforts with districts to incorporate soil and water conservation principles and techniques into planning and ordinance criteria so they are fully used by State and local governments and private groups and organizations. We think our long range plan will help us and people we work with put the soil and water conservation job in better perspective. It is designed to help us improve our skills in helping others to develop alternatives and to understand the consequences of decisions.