

SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT OUTLOOK

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The story is told about a psychologist who placed two small boys in two different rooms for a period of five hours. The first was surrounded with all the toys and games imaginable. The other was placed in a room with only a small pile of horse manure. At the end of the period each was asked how he felt. The one stoically said, "The train went round and round. Every time I bounced the ball it came back to me. The games were dull. The mechanical toys all did the same thing over and over." The other said enthusiastically, "There has to be a pony here someplace, and I'll find him."

This story illustrates one of the great struggles of life: optimism versus pessimism. There are some who are in this world but do not become involved in it. They look at their surroundings and bemoan their existence. They see sickness, suffering, anxiety, wars, famines, floods and riots. Their personal lives are fraught with financial problems, rebellious children, long working hours, mortgages, sickness, atomic weapons, and even competition for friends. And then they turn their backs on life and attempt to escape, wishing they were hermits in a desolate place.

What would have happened to America if Columbus had assumed a defeatist attitude? Where would we be if Lincoln would have been content simply to collect his salary as President? Where would the world be had Winston Churchill been satisfied to merely represent his district in the House of Commons? Where would we be if the thousand nameless who have quietly advanced the cause of freedom, education, the arts, religion, and conservation Talk presented at the Soil Conservation Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Asilomar Conference, Asilomar, California, October 11-14, 1965

had taken the road of escape? Obviously, if the pessimists would have won the battle for control, we wouldn't be much beyond the discovery of the wheel.

Yes, there have always been and always will be problems, disillusionments, disappointments, and failures. But the other side of the coin is this. I say this is the most vibrant, exciting, and challenging period in all history! This can be said by any person living in any age, --past, present, or future.

We live in a new kind of world. It is today, --and is rapidly becoming, a world of urban centers, a world of technological monsters, a world of political suspense, a world of population pressure, of competition for space. It is a world in which knowledge, research, and science have come into their own. Nine out of ten of the men who might ever have identified themselves as scientists are alive and practicing today.

Every other person in the U. S. today is less than 26 years old.

We have in this century made London closer than San Francisco was in the last one. We have brought the farthest man in the world within the range of a whispered word. We are almost at a point where we can read into a man's mind and extract that which he would never express voluntarily. We have brought the highest leaders of the farthest nations into daily and momentary confrontation. We have made the genes of the world's finest livestock available in the lowliest stables in the farthest corners of the land. Three out of five of the men in the world today are living in the first generation of any genuine quality of political independence. We as a Nation, are engaged with our most powerful adversary in what

Dr. Frank Laubach has identified as the "war of amazing kindness"--a war to see who can outdo whom in the business of giving aid to other nations! It is a world in which man has moved abruptly into the province of God. On Christmas Day in 1960, and you remember that there was a launching just prior to that time, a Moscow radio broadcast had this to say: "Our rocket has bypassed the moon; it is nearing the sun; and we have not discovered God. We have turned lights out in heaven that no man will be able to put on again. We are breaking the yoke of the gospel, the opiate of the masses. Let us go forth and Christ shall be relegated to mythology."

Truly, there was never a world like this! Suddenly it's tomorrow! What answers do we give as a God loving, God serving people in a world like this?

We are now in our fourth decade of carrying out the mandate of the 74th Congress--that passed P. L. 74-46, naming the Soil Conservation Service and giving it statutory authority. National policy was thereby enacted which stated, "It is hereby recognized that the wastage of soil and water resources on the farms, grazing and forest lands of the Nation, resulting from soil erosion, is a menace to the national welfare."

A method was devised in 1937 by which we could say to farmers and ranchers and others, "You must take the initiative. You must decide. You must want to do something about erosion. You must do the planning and the operating, the policy thinking, and the acting."

We in the Service--as Federal workers--were asked to show great faith in the intelligence and resourcefulness of the farm folk of America. We were asked to delegate this vast responsibility to rural people at the grass roots.

We could and would, of course, guide and help them, but only they could do so big a job!

More than a quarter century of experience is proof that America has delegated to the common man, the local landowner, the local organization, the power of self-government in conservation.

Has it been successful? Has this faith been justified?

There is no question that Conservation Districts have made remarkable progress in achieving physical conservation objectives. But they have made an even greater contribution. They have brought into being a throng of informed and concerned people who have given freely of their time and efforts to learn about their resource problems and to help make the decisions needed to solve them. Districts have by their actions exemplified the principles of democracy and Federal-State-local cooperation. They have achieved great things in the American tradition. They have proven again that democratic government controlled by the people themselves liberates the powers of the people into creative growth and plenty. But success and fame are fleeting. What would have been sufficient for yesterday is apt to be too little and too late for tomorrow.

The trends for conservationists are fairly easy to discern. Our Nation is facing the prospect of unlimited demands on its limited resources. All the evidence of our times supports a forecast of ever increasing needs for intensive management of its limited resources--including their planning, development, use and conservation.

There can be no turning back--change and its effects press heavily upon us. New problems roll over the horizon in increasingly complex numbers. Districts see the need for better and more representative governing boards. Planning for "Conservation" by farms, ranches, and communities must be accelerated--putting the plans into operation must be speeded up. A proper role must be carved out for conservation districts in watershed and river basin work in rural and non-rural areas, in community development, in recreation areas, in cropland conservation, in Appalachia, and in land use adjustment.

Public Land Conv.
The expansion of urban and suburban areas, now tending toward great metropolitan regions, is another dramatic instance of change with real meaning for conservationists. Partly it is a matter of intelligent, planned transfer of land from agriculture, grazing, forestry, and other uses into living space.

On many of these matters I feel that we and our allies may no longer have a black-and-white kind of decision. The kind of complexity that we're going to face in the future suggests no more black than white, nor vice versa. We're going to have to begin choosing from several colors of gray.

How do we as a Nation go about making such decisions?

What we do too often is make the decision by answering much less demanding questions. Already, we're making many of these decisions by default. My wife and I were allowed to purchase a half-acre of ground with a house on it a few years ago. The only question asked was, "Do you have the money?"

At that moment, a decision was made about population level, because as long as my house and trees are on that acre, it cannot be used for producing food. The same is true every time a superhighway is built; a decision is made about future population level. At the moment, somewhere between three and five percent of the arable land in this country is covered by asphalt and concrete. That's an area the size of Georgia. And so decisions are being made, but they're being made by default. It is important for us to realize that we will answer not the big question of why we're here, but rather much more immediate questions.

We think we live in three eras of time--past, present, and future. This is not true. The present is merely a fraction of a second. None of us is emotionally capable of operating with fractions of seconds in our daily routine. This leaves us two eras of time--past and future. In all creation, everything is geared for forward movement (future-ward). Generations are born. They live. They die. The next one takes over. Time marches on. Seasons come and go. Everything, including humanity, is moving toward eternity. This is natural law. If we live in the past, we fight natural law and hence become frustrated people. The past is only useful in history. It contributes to the future only in educative values. It is not for us to live in it. We are to anticipate the future and accept its challenge. Accept it with joy for it leads to eternity with God. This in itself breeds optimism.

We attained our position by refusing to accept the status quo, by refusing to fear change, by ever pushing forward. If we stalled, it was only for a moment until we could either go over or around the obstacle or push it out of the way.

For of one thing we can always be sure: Change, constant change, is as certain as death and taxes. Times change, and swiftly, and those who would maintain their position of leadership and discharge their responsibilities must change with the times. Time does not stand still. Needs do not remain the same. Problems alter. New solutions develop. To stand still is eventually to turn back.

It would be foolish indeed to believe that the problems of conservation districts are exactly the same today as they were in 1937--or that the solutions to them are the same, or that farming and ranching have not changed, or that the social pattern of our population is the same as it was.

A rural and limited soil conservation concept will no longer suffice in a society that has become increasingly urban, a society in which the interests of the users of resources have become equal to those of the owners of resources.

This increasing urbanization is as apparent here as it is in any part of our Nation. You are aware of the trend, just as you are aware of the lessening numbers and influence of rural people--even on the basis of representation in your State legislatures and the Congress. Do you realize, for example, that 40 percent of the Congress is from the Northeastern States?

And you know that the California legislature just passed a law authorizing local governments to create agriculture preserves and contract with landowners to limit land use to agricultural purposes.

In signing this bill, Governor Pat Brown said: "California's continuing growth has already caused the loss of much prime agricultural land as our urban areas leapfrog into the surrounding countryside. The result has been unsightly urban sprawl, high costs for community services, and destruction of productive agricultural resources."

As cities enlarge, serious problems of land-use erosion, sedimentation, pollution, recreation and the like spring up around urban areas. This is a whole new series of major conservation problems affecting large numbers of people that simply did not exist a few years ago.

These are problems demanding solution, and the demands come from the urban society that is now in the majority, that now decides what programs we shall have, including conservation, and how much financial help they shall receive. And these people, as I have said, are looking at the picture from the standpoint of resource users.

Adlai Stevenson capsuled the changing scene when he said: "There is a new America every morning when we wake up. It is upon us whether we will it or not. This new America is the sum of many small changes--a new subdivision here--a new school there--a new industry where yesterday there had been vacant swampland--changes that add up to a broad transformation in our lives. Our task is to guide these changes, for though change is inevitable, change for the better is a full-time job."

This is the new America that we face. This is the new resource climate in which we exist. What are the central issues?

First, there are steeply increasing demands on resources.

Second, the kinds of demands on resources are changing. The quality of resources is becoming more important, and the location of resource problems is shifting.

Third, it is apparent that resource matters are growing more complex. We face new problems of conflict and competition. A given resource may have to do double-or triple-duty. Concurrently, the interests of resource "users"--as well as resource "owners"--are assuming greater importance. Somebody is going to have to make decisions--unpopular decisions in many cases--about the allocation of resources to any given uses.

This raises another significant problem--the effect of resource demands on local self-government and our democratic system. As the Nation grows, will the requirements of larger economic units and higher levels of government take precedence over smaller units and lower levels of government? Is this the basic economic and social trend reflected in the replacement of smaller farms with larger ones and small industries with industrial giants? Is it the trend which has sent more and more power to the central government in Washington?

These are the challenges that conservation poses in our age as we confront the new America. The question that concerns us today is the role

of conservation districts in this more complicated resource picture. What should districts attempt to contribute, what responsibilities would district boards seek to fulfill? How can districts strengthen their capacity to meet the challenge of the times?

The history of districts has been one of steady and progressive evolution. As new problems have appeared, districts have moved to help solve those problems. At first they worked mostly with individual farmers. Next came work with groups of farmers. Later, programs expanded to include whole communities--in watershed projects, resource conservation and development projects, and planning and zoning programs.

In other words, as the times have changed, districts have changed.

Now the question becomes one of the next step. Are districts ready to move ahead? Are they ready to make further adjustments in their programs and legislative authorities to enable them to do an even better job?

The NACD believes that this is a question which must be faced by every district in the Nation. To help explore its ramifications, NACD President Marion Monk appointed a Special Committee on District Outlook two years ago. He charged the committee in these words:

"It is incumbent on your National Association to look beyond the events and programs now current to the probable needs and developments of the years ahead, not only in terms of the resources involved, but in terms of districts as serviceable units of government. We must anticipate future

needs, identify potential problems associated with meeting the needs, and chart a course most likely to bring about the desired results."

John Wilder, of Somerville, Tennessee, NACD Treasurer, is chairman of that committee. It includes supervisors, representatives of State Soil and Water Conservation Committees, and others closely associated with the district program. It has worked hard and long, and will soon present its report to the NACD Board of Directors at their meeting in League City, Texas.

The Committee has discovered that many districts across the country have already geared up to make a useful contribution to the solution of modern resource problems. By analyzing the experience of these districts, as well as examining the problems faced by other districts, the Committee has studied a number of questions that appear significant in the development of broader and more effective district programs. Let me list these briefly:

1. Do districts effectively utilize all the technical, financial, and educational help available to them from Federal, State, and local agencies? Do they utilize their opportunities to help State fish and game agencies advance their work; do they cooperate with forestry, parks, and recreation agencies? Have all districts developed this kind of cooperation at the local level in order better to coordinate natural resources work within their jurisdictions?

2. Do districts have sufficient funds and administrative assistance to carry on expanded programs? District supervisors and governing boards are volunteers, and much of their success is due to the fact that they can function as disinterested policy-makers. But as the work load has expanded--and it shows every indication of increasing sharply in the future--how long can districts get along without staff to carry out their decisions?
3. What role does the district play in helping with community planning and zoning? Can districts perform work in non-rural, transition, and suburban areas where needed?
4. Are districts sufficiently representative of all community interests involved in resource programs? Are non-farm interests such as downtown businessmen, recreationists, and townspeople afforded an opportunity to participate directly in the decisions of the district? Increasingly, these are the people who will vote the taxes to pay for conservation programs.
5. Do districts have available to them techniques that allow them to band together to solve problems that are multi-district or regional in nature? How can they plan and carry out programs that include several districts; how can they express their views and participate effectively in large-scale river basin planning, regional public works and economic development programs, and similar activities?

6. Are the powers that districts possess adequate for the performance of their new and increased responsibilities? Are they able to conduct watershed programs without recourse to complicated administrative and legal arrangements? Do they need access to the powers of taxation and eminent domain in order to advance watershed work, resource conservation and development projects, and other community programs?
7. Are district responsibilities defined sufficiently broadly in State enabling laws? Today's conservation programs must be truly comprehensive in order to be effective. Land and water considerations cannot be divorced from forest and recreation considerations; and recreation and fish and wildlife resources can only be treated in relationship to all the other resources.
8. Do the State Soil and Water Conservation Commissions themselves across the country need strengthening? Are there adequate funds for districts; do the Commissions conduct effective training programs for supervisors?

And, finally, does the general public have sufficient opportunity to participate in the total district effort? Do the people have a chance to approve and modify district programs? Is conservation work presented to the public in such a way that it becomes as vital and significant to them as new highway plans, school, and education policy, and health and welfare issues?

Now, with these questions in mind, let us consider a few examples of ways districts are working right now to find creative techniques to help solve the new and more complex resource problems that they face:

1. In Nebraska and Virginia they have changed election laws so that district supervisors are elected at general elections, thus affording all citizens an opportunity to participate directly in the program.
2. In Massachusetts and the Virgin Island, district responsibilities have been redefined by legislation in broad terms, giving the districts the authority to pursue more comprehensive efforts in conserving and developing land, water, wildlife, forest, and open space resources.
3. In Pennsylvania, a new law makes it possible for districts to have some non-agricultural supervisors, rather than solely farmers. In some of their urban districts, they found there were hardly any farmers left to serve as supervisors. But the interesting thing is that the first districts to take advantage of the new law are in rural areas where they want to broaden their support and the participation of all community interests in conservation work.
4. In Montgomery County, Maryland, the district has helped to establish a sediment control program whereby builders and developers will be required to install erosion control devices in accordance with an approved conservation plan. The supervisors there found that the amount of soil washing from

from areas of new construction was 10-50 times as much as that washing from farms and forest lands upstream.

5. In one district in Arkansas, the supervisors have hired a full-time executive secretary to provide administrative assistance. The supervisors make the policy, and their staff man carries it out. State associations, also, are beginning to employ staff help because their programs are growing so rapidly. North Dakota, Colorado, Texas, and California have already taken this step.
6. And again in Nebraska, the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission has been designated by the Governor to represent the State in river basin planning work under the new Water Resources Planning Act. This is a major step forward.

In a host of other places, districts are working with planning and zoning organizations to provide information on resource potentials, are working with highway departments to minimize land damage and erosion hazards during construction and maintenance, are organizing Neighborhood Youth Corps programs like in Nebraska, are developing and operating recreation facilities where needed, are rejoining with other districts in multiple-county economic development programs, and are contributing to conservation and resource development in many other ways.

The key to the new approach in a nutshell seems to be the involvement of more people in resource work, the extension of district services to additional people, the placing of more emphasis on broad resource planning as well as program promotion, and the utilization of the district as a local, broad-based, effective action organization to get as many aspects of the total conservation job accomplished as possible.

This is a fortunate development, for there is evidence that if districts do not assume these responsibilities and carry out truly active and comprehensive natural resource programs that meet today's needs, somebody else will. For example, since 1954, over 700 special-purpose water improvement districts have been formed to perform responsibilities under Public Law 566, responsibilities that conservation districts were either unwilling or incapable of assuming. In several States, including Arkansas and North Carolina, laws have recently passed authorizing establishment of "rural development authorities," many of whose powers and responsibilities duplicate those of conservation districts. In New England, towns conservation commissions are being organized to carry out recreation and open space planning and development work that was not being done by established groups or agencies. And in the new regional economic development programs, special-purpose groups called "economic development districts" are being formed.

In many cases, conservation districts could perform some of the work being taken on by these new groups, the result being less duplication, better coordination, and a more efficient and useful program. But if this is to be so, districts must take the initiative. It is not a case of taking

on responsibilities already being performed effectively by others; but rather digging into the work that remains undone, and which needs to be done.

Secretary Freeman, in a speech before the Public Advisory Committee on Soil and Water Conservation at the Department of Agriculture in Washington, D. C., on Thursday, October 7, 1965, said:

"I believe the Nation's soil and water conservation districts have a tremendous potential for helping rural people obtain the benefits of this new legislation.

"The districts have the manpower, the geographic coverage, and the necessary State legislation to enable them to effectively utilize these new programs. They have proved a dynamic mechanism through which Federal, State, and local governments can work with the community and with individual landowners to solve local resource problems.

"Moreover, the districts have shown in recent years that they are ready to move into a much wider areas of cooperation.

Besides their widely recognized role in protecting and conserving private land, they have played a significant part in the development of resource related activities, such as the watershed program, the Great Plains Conservation Program, the Agricultural Conservation Program, and in developing outdoor recreation for pay, and in the Resource Conservation and Development projects.

"In addition, some districts have entered into agreements with Federal and State agencies in the fields of forestry, wildlife, public land management, highway development, river basin planning, parks, water quality control, and the like.

"I am convinced that the districts can and are ready to assume a leading role in bringing a new era of opportunity to rural America. I urge this advisory committee to think through the ways that the districts, and other conservation organizations, public and private as well, can contribute even more effectively to closing the opportunity gap between rural and urban America.

"The opportunities to move ahead in resource conservation and development are all around us. All that is asked of us is the imagination to see these opportunities and to have the vigor and enthusiasm to act on them."

The challenge that lies ahead is an exciting one. Whether it will be met depends on local district leadership--it does not depend on the NACD, the State associations, the State Soil and Water Conservation Committees, the SCS, or any of the other agencies with whom they work. Local leadership is the key to moving ahead; and the opportunities are restricted only by the state of people's minds. Your role is the traditional one--that of guidance and counsel.

The new America offers the same opportunities for resource management that it always has--and they are the objectives of the district movement: conservation, development, and self-government.

What will this mean now--and in the future--to the Soil Conservation Service? Frankly, we don't know yet. In Chicago a few months ago Secretary Freeman said, "

"No longer can there be separate compartments in the conservation world--no compartment for soil conservation apart from beauty preservation, no longer a wall between wildlife protection and agricultural conservation, no longer a forestry objective separate from the interests of the grasslands, no longer a policy question as to multiple use of water resources and, finally, no more a disunity between city and open country...

"The conservationist of 1965 is an exponent of natural beauty in its many forms for the enjoyment of all the people--he is an enemy of preventable ugliness...

"The modern conservationist is a proponent of the principle of sustained economic use of resources--an opponent of mere hoarding and an enemy of waste--waste in any form, including erosion, fire, or uneconomic production...

"The conservationist of 1965 is an advocate of open space and quiet areas--an enemy of crowded slums, filth, and air filled with stench, poison fumes, and fallout...

"The true conservationist of today sees the union of resources and values on which humanity depends, and he would preserve that union! He sees the world of conservation as one world."

Now it may be that we can't restyle the world. Chances are it wouldn't be a much better world if we did! And it would constitute a grievous idolatry if we were to insist upon proposing our own blueprint. But there are devices of study and discussion and earnest quest that can reveal to us glimpses of what ought to be. And there are many points at which we can see deviations from what ought to be--what clearly ought to be. And there are many points at which we are the only ones, or we are among the ones who could have some impact in effecting correction.

No single person--public or private is going to make the judgments that will have to be made if conservation districts and their advisors are going to rise to the challenges that really face them in the decades that stand so glaringly in front of you and me. We will rise to these challenges together--or we won't rise. We hope you are interested in engaging in this kind of earnest search and encounter with like-minded similarly concerned men. The stakes are too high--as a community of free men--to turn our collective backs to a promising future.

This will simply take the same sort of deep commitment and dedication and hard work that I know you can do--and will do. Good luck.