

## THE BEAUTIFUL THING IS...

Thank you for inviting me to this scenic corner of Minnesota.

The lakes <sup>we dedicate and</sup> that you will name today are the showcase of the small watershed program. Over the country, there are now 6,000 of these lakes built under the Public Law 566 program and watershed action under earlier laws. They add a great deal to the landscape, particularly in areas ~~like yours~~ where there are not already <sup>ample</sup> ~~a number of~~ natural lakes. They add new supplies of good-quality water, which in many cases have literally saved rural towns or help them grow beyond anyone's expectations. They add new recreation space, and high-quality habitat for fish and wildlife. And they quietly <sup>their prime</sup> do ~~a tremendous~~ job in holding back potential floodwaters to protect land and people.

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Material for speech by Norman A. Berg, Associate Administrator, Soil Conservation Service, at dedication of two lakes in the Crooked Creek project, Houston County, Minnesota, October 7, 1972.

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These lakes are the showcase...the trademark...of the watershed program. But as you well know, <sup>projects are</sup> ~~this effect~~ is more than ~~a~~ dam-building ~~project~~. In an area as steep as yours, these dams would fill up with sediment before you could say "single purpose floodwater retarding structure" if you did not have the land tied down with conservation farming practices. The land-treatment phase of a watershed project is every bit as important as the dams and other structures and the streambank stabilization and other channel improvement work.

I make that point because landowners cooperating with the Root River Soil and Water Conservation District have done an unusually effective job in applying nearly 85 percent of the needed conservation land treatment in the Crooked Creek watershed. Half a million feet of terraces, some of them about the oldest in the state and still being maintained. Contour stripcropping on nearly 12,000 acres. And a baker's dozen of other practices that do their own quiet job of keeping soil <sup>to</sup> ~~where it can~~ grow <sup>crops</sup>.

<sup>grass & trees</sup> ~~things~~ and helping rainwater soak in or move off the land at a safe rate.

These practices also add a great deal to the scenery of this part of rural America. And for wildlife they contribute food ~~and~~ homes and travel lanes. What a change from the 1930's when raw gullies and sheet erosion caused farms to produce less or be abandoned in the upper part of the watershed, and cause<sup>d</sup> the floodplain to build up by the foot. ~~My agency's predecessor,~~ the Soil Erosion Service, had a project here in 1933. Six years later the Root River Soil and Water Conservation District was formed, the third to be established in Minnesota. The district's efforts are readily seen throughout this watershed.

The conservation work on your farms hasn't been easy. It has taken ~~liberally of~~ your time <sup>dedication</sup> and money. Some ~~of it~~ has required a change in ~~the way you farm,~~ <sup>new</sup> and acceptance of different ideas takes time and courage and persuasion. But I'm sure you will ~~readily~~ agree that the thing about soil and water conservation practices is that they work! They have helped you make and keep this area of Minnesota highly productive in corn, dairy, meat animals, and other crops...and at the same time they've cut soil erosion and sedimentation remarkably.

Likewise, ~~I am sure~~ you will readily agree that your watershed project has not been easy. It has taken time in liberal quantities to come up with a plan of action; get it approved through a highly complex review system that extends from here all over Washington, D. C.; and <sup>plan to</sup> get the funds and favorable weather to do the needed construction. It has taken a great deal of cooperation and perseverance among individual landowners; the Root River SWCD; the Crooked Creek Watershed District; and the Houston County Board of Commissioners. It has taken cooperation and compromise among these sponsors and the agencies that have helped them, such as the SCS and the U.S. ~~Dept.~~ Forest Service and the Minnesota Department of Conservation. It has taken money--\$600,000 just for the four <sup>reservoirs</sup> ~~lakes~~ and <sup>The</sup> total cost so far <sup>is</sup> ~~of~~ more than \$1 $\frac{1}{4}$  million dollars. And it has taken elbow grease.

But the beautiful thing about watershed projects is that they work! We get more evidence every day of their contribution to the American environment.

*What is the impact of the small watershed program on the environment?*

First

frequency &amp; depth of

--They work because they reduce flooding. Nationwide they have prevented flood damages on the order of 300 million dollars, and they almost certainly have saved human lives as well. Let me illustrate this by discussing the effect of one storm in June of this year.

Most of you have read about Hurricane Agnes that ripped through several Atlantic States, causing about 4 billion dollars of flood damage and snuffing out the lives of more than 180 people. In the path of the hurricane lay 46 watershed projects either completed or under construction. The 161 floodwater retarding structures and 150 miles of channel improvement work did their designed job beautifully--helping prevent a regional catastrophe from becoming a series of even greater local disasters. Not one structure failed.

The watershed projects prevented an estimated 22 million dollars in flood damages to farm and urban property. Let me put that in a little better perspective. The dams and the channel work in those projects cost a little over \$38 million to install, including the purchase of land rights. So in one storm...not the 100-year design life of a project, but one storm... these communities realized benefits totaling almost 60 percent of the entire cost.

That makes for a pretty favorable benefit-cost ratio. And for whatever storm may be on tomorrow's weather map, these watershed projects ~~will be~~ <sup>are</sup> ready to do their assigned task again.

In the meantime, these projects and yours and hundreds of others will be bringing several other benefits to the environment.

*Second* They improve water quality through reduction of sediment yields, management of agricultural wastes, increase in base flow of streams, and increased capacity of the soil to absorb runoff. Watershed projects already have prevented nearly 15 million tons of sediment from accumulating in streams and lakes and on the land.

*Third* They increase the supply of municipal and industrial water in many cases, which will help improve the quality of life by helping to increase income and employment in rural communities. Watershed project plans already include nearly 200 multiple-purpose reservoirs with over half a million acre-feet of storage that will supply 206 communities with a population of  $1\frac{1}{4}$  million. Three-fourths of these communities have fewer than 5,000 residents.

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These communities have all paid the full cost of adding the extra water storage. ~~It wasn't until~~ <sup>Ann</sup> August this year ~~that~~ Public Law 566 was amended by the Rural Development Act of 1972 to authorize SCS to share the cost of municipal and industrial water supply. I'll say more about that new law in a moment.

<sup>South</sup> Watershed projects also enhance the environment by improving fishery habitat through increased base flows, reduction and cleanout of sediment, and creation of opportunities for lake fisheries. The major item left to do in your project is streambank stabilization and log dams along four miles of Crooked Creek in an effort to make it a trout stream again. Watershed projects will be improving wildlife habitat through creation of improved food and cover conditions; reduction of damage to ground nesting areas in flood plains; ~~dry~~ walkways in flood-prone areas; and increased "edge" conditions. More than 400 fish and wildlife and recreation developments or related improvements in 45 States already have been planned, and habitat improvements have been made on a quarter

*Right*

Watershed projects also help reduce vector and other

health-related problems through better water management, and greatly

improve many esthetic values of the landscape.

*These are a few of the favorable benefits - there are others - each year there will be more.*

In the Rural Development Act of 1972 that President Nixon

signed on August 20, Congress and the Administration fully recognized

the contribution of watershed projects in making rural communities

better places to live and work. The law <sup>now</sup> authorizes <sup>S</sup> SCS to provide

technical and financial aid to watershed project sponsors in water

quality management, groundwater recharge, control of

agriculture-related pollution, disposal of solid wastes, and municipal

and industrial water supply. The Act also permits the use of Federal

funds other than PL-566 money for land-rights acquisition, and

authorizes long-term contracting for conservation land treatment work.

The Act has a number of other provisions that will directly

or indirectly influence the progress and the flexibility of watershed *& Acq*

projects.



It extends to multi-county resource conservation and Development

Projects several of the new items I just mentioned for watersheds. It

permits SCS to help rural communities store water in reservoirs for

fire protection. It broadens the credit assistance of the Farmers Home

Administration. It also authorizes an inventorying and monitoring

program including studies and surveys of erosion, sediment damage,

flood-plain identification and land use changes and trends. USDA ~~is~~ *will*

~~to~~ issue a land inventory report on the nation's soils, water and

related resources every five years.

We're ~~just~~ now gearing up to provide these new kinds of help

to local communities. But they're going to make watershed projects

work even better to bring environmental and economic improvements ~~to~~

to areas like yours.

*I've learned it is risky to generalize about the motives of local people personally involved in watershed projects. Some critics say farmers are motivated only by gross economics - and that only scientists are concerned about the state of the environment. We all live in this environment together. Farmers, biologist, businessmen & businessmen. All share a concern about the kind of world we pass on to our children, & well*

The possibilities ~~are~~ limited only by the ideas and participation and initiative of people like you, and the cooperation of the state and federal agencies that work with you. You will get out of your project what you put into it.

In a year or so you'll have that last stream improvement work done, and somewhere in the files of the SCS a big "completed" stamp will be pounded on the face of the Crooked Creek work plan. But your responsibilities and your opportunities in this watershed project won't be over by a long shot. You have an excellent record in conservation land treatment. But all these practices need to be kept up, through changes in land ownership, land use, or farming methods. The structures like the lakes we dedicate today must have good maintenance whenever they need it. Those are your responsibilities as local sponsors.

Certainly the long history of participation & over 2 million dollars of cooperation - and the work of thousands of farmers in soil stewardship & wildlife improvement is ample evidence that you are motivated by far more than the \$ sign. As one farmer told me "If I were, in this business just for profit, I believe I'd get out of it"

Finally, in an effort as complex as a watershed project you've gained a lot of experience in working together to reach community goals. That experience can be very helpful to you in working to meet other community needs besides watershed protection and flood prevention. *Those who appreciate the virtues of small watersheds should be more willing to speak up more forcefully in its behalf.* You can help the Crooked Creek watershed project really make a contribution to rural development in your corner of Minnesota. You can help your corner of Minnesota meet the needs and desires of its present and future citizens and at the same time keep its land as scenic and well-protected as it is now. *The P.L. 566 program is not coming to an end, it is just beginning. Only 10% of the job in the Nation is done.*

That's quite a challenge. But the progress that you are marking today is an indication that *people* you are equal to that challenge.

Best of luck to you in Caledonia and Freeburg and in between as you leave one success and work toward some more. We in the Soil Conservation Service are glad to be a part of your team.

*more*