

THE BROADENED RESPONSIBILITIES OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS IN LAND USE TRENDS

I am pleased to help you discuss your timely theme of "Strengthening Districts for Broadened Responsibilities."

Facing a group of men and women who have lived with the job of governing conservation districts, who have had to marshall all possible help to meet the forces of change, I know I can't get away with any nonsense about the future role of districts in soil and water conservation. But, perhaps I can point out some trends that will concern you.

We are in an era of "new" everything--new math, new left, new look, the fresh approach. A provocative new economic idea I read the other day goes like this:

"All the knowledge in the field of economics can be summed up in nine words--there is no such thing as a free ride."

Of course, this is not a new idea, and I'm certain conservation districts understand this fully. In resource development we are concerned with meeting the needs of local people, but they must accept most of the responsibility and do the work.

These needs are met in direct relation to the way people participate either directly or indirectly in planning for the use, care, and development of their land, water, and related resources.

Resource development means local citizens: 1) determining their needs and desires, 2) taking stock of their resources and resource potentials, 3) establishing their objectives, 4) setting priorities, and finally,

Material used by Norman A. Berg, Deputy Administrator for Field Services, Soil Conservation Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., at the Annual Convention of South Carolina Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, December 2, 1968, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

5) setting in motion an action program to reach their goals and objectives. It is a continuing process and people must continually be involved every step of the way. These fundamentals are not new, but they are still very sound.

Psychologists tell us most people can be divided into two broad groups. First is the minority challenged by opportunity and willing to work hard to achieve something. Second is the majority who really do not care that much. Your record of accomplishment demonstrates that you and your cooperators care.

I feel that now is the time to speak for the unity of the city and the countryside for all values and uses. Now is the time to advocate the protection and development of our resources as a whole, in accordance with their capabilities and the goals of the community. Now is the time to speak for action that will meet the oncoming demands of a growing Nation.

Above all, now is the time to help 45 South Carolina conservation district governing boards to assume fully their responsibilities of local leadership in soil, in water, and in related conservation and resource development work.

The key, as always, is people, and their desire, urge, or will to achieve. This is in the hands of your 45,000 cooperators.

We also need to tell the soil and water resources story to many new people. We need to be more specific about the benefits of soil and water conservation efforts to all people and their institutions.

We need (1) to reach new audiences, including people who live in towns and cities, with material designed to interest them, and (2) to reach our traditional audience with fresh material reflecting current areas of emphasis such as pollution, how watershed work helps develop communities, RC&D project

benefits, surface-mining rehabilitation, improving the economic status of small farmers, and rural job opportunities.

We need to make soil and water conservation as meaningful to the families who live in our towns and cities as it is to those who live in rural America.

How many citizens, for instance, know that conservation is a national goal? How many know how essential it is that the Nation's natural resources be able to support the economic and social needs of society for all future time? We must convince everyone that

- conservation's objective is the dignity of man's spirit and his welfare.
- conservation's concern is with the total relationship between man and the environment in which he lives.
- conservation values extend throughout the entire fabric of human aspirations,
- we need a creative conservation of selective use, protection, development, restoration and innovation, and
- we must consider the future and recognize that society's long-term interests may be jeopardized by seemingly rational short-term objectives.

In short, our land is a national resource as well as a private one.

A national goal of conservation requires us to install and operate conservation systems of crop, pasture, range, and forest lands that produce multiple joint outputs. And it means also creating natural resource conditions that will support a viable and sustained agricultural industry as a major objective.

It seems clear to me, therefore, that certain fundamentals will have increasingly high priority.

First, we must continue to sustain the most productive and efficient agriculture in the world. Conservation procedures and techniques must be modernized and accelerated to protect and fully develop the cropland and forest production base through soil and water conservation.

Second, we must protect and improve our water quality and supplies through better land management.

Third, we must do a better job of solving land-use problems in areas of population growth, especially the rural-urban fringe areas.

Fourth, we need a more balanced pattern of national growth. This requires that rural America must become a better place in which to live and work and play and educate coming generations.

Now, how do we do all these things?

The answers are complex, but available; the execution is difficult, but possible.

For one thing, we must become involved in resource planning and development at all levels, from the individual tract of land to multi-ownership regions. This means developing working relations, through conservation districts, to help small communities, towns, cities, and multi-county planning areas.

This challenge to future conservationists suggests that conservation districts will do more of the following:

--erosion control on farm and non-farm lands, roadsides and streambanks

- restoration of surface mined areas,
- improvement of fish and wildlife habitat,
- reduction of uncontrolled flooding,
- protection and development of water resources,
- upgrading of water quality by reduction of sediments and other pollutants,
- outdoor recreational development by creating opportunities from the agricultural resource and from the off-site lands and waters that crop, pasture, and range land conservation systems enhance,
- creation and preservation of natural beauty by providing for harmonious use patterns and blending uses into the natural landscape, and
- resource work for economic activity in rural areas thereby stemming the migration of people to urban centers,

We need all this to assure the availability of land and water to satisfy human needs.

We must also

- improve conservation training in schools and youth organizations by helping professional educators strengthen this work,
- work with all types of organizations and groups to help them improve their own conservation and education activities, and finally
- improve the quality of the environment in whatever way resource conservation can contribute.

There is a rising interest in "cleaning up" the environment. The accomplishment of this objective, however, depends on how "clean" we want the Nation's environment to be.

We are looking at SC&S work for possible impacts on quality of the environment. Specifically, we must learn about possible alternatives for disposal of feedlot, poultry, and crop-processing wastes, domestic sewage, garbage, and refuse. We need to know both the utility and the limitations of lagoons, landfills, septic tanks, infiltration ditches, and spray systems for treatment of a variety of wastes.

We should use every opportunity, where feasible, to promote putting organic wastes back on the land where they originated. Can we convert potential environmental pollutants back to production and use, and if possible, show a profit by doing it?

Although sewage and industrial wastes are heavy contributors to the pollution problem, sediments from eroding land are still the main burden of pollutants in surface waters. Suspended solids from farms, roads, streambanks, surface-mined areas, urban development, and similar sources amount to 700 times the loadings caused by sewage discharge. Sediment is not only a pollutant, it also carries other pollutants along with it--such as organic wastes and inorganic chemicals and infectious agents.

Aside from clogging our streams and reservoirs, a large sediment load detracts from recreational uses, reduces fish and shellfish populations, and impairs the oxidation of organic pollutants. In addition, sediment greatly increases the cost of treating water for municipal and industrial uses and damages power turbines and pumping equipment.

Every year as much as 4 billion tons of sediment reach our waterways. That's tantamount to stripping the topsoil from about 4 million acres of land.

More than a billion cubic yards of water-carried sediment settles into our reservoirs each year, robbing us of space for storing water to satisfy the daily thirst of 5 million people.

Although it may be assumed that three-fourths of the sediment that reaches our streams comes from agricultural, forest, and range lands, construction in developing urban areas is also a heavy contributor.

Sediment is a product of soil erosion. Soil and water conservation districts have a clear cut charter in this area. You can help to:

1. accelerate erosion control on the private lands not yet adequately treated,
2. provide technical assistance and guidelines to counties and municipalities in soil interpretations, site selection and erosion control during construction activities, and
3. work with local officials and individual landowners to attach erosion problems on critical sediment source areas such as roadbanks, streambanks, and old surface mined areas.

In retrospect, I think we conservationists take too narrow a view of our mission. We see ourselves as technicians rather than as agents of social and economic change. We talk about interrelationships--of soil, water, forests, and wildlife in conjunction with its habitat. But environment is more than physical properties. Resource management must include physical, aesthetic and psychological relationships. We need to think beyond what is "good land practice," "sound water management," and other conservation concerns from a strictly technical viewpoint, and consider how all this fits into man's relation to the total environment.

We know a great deal about soil and water management--and we are learning more. Now we must also learn more about basic resource relationships--including human resources--and be prepared to apply what we have learned.

We must become even more people oriented. We must increasingly relate our efforts and accomplishments to the needs of the individual in our society.

We must seek new allies for the conservation effort. We must mobilize forces--public and private--interested in sound resource conservation programs. We must help to diminish inter-group conflicts, and encourage compromise. All of this requires improved communication--discussion in terms that special interest groups and the general public understand.

We must seek to amend or modify traditional organizational patterns where necessary. This includes multi-county planning; encouragement of more local participation in planning; support of closer conservation district ties with counties; support of broader representation on district boards; shift of more conservation work to non-Federal interests; emphasis on State and local financial support of conservation work; and encouragement of more private involvement in conservation efforts.

I would challenge all of us to consider whether we conservationists have fully met our responsibility to put more effort into solving resource conservation problems wherever they exist!

We cannot go on talking about the farm and ranch as though they were something apart from the total resource conservation picture. The deep interest we have for soil and related resource conservation must extend to every piece of land in the Nation--rural and urban alike.

There are many divisions in our society, but a clear-cut distinction between city and countryside is not one of them.

The boundary between rural and urban is fading rapidly. There is only one America with one set of interlocking natural resource problems. They can be solved. But it won't just happen.

Administrator Williams believes we are also coming to a time when there must be a national program and national standards of performance in land development. He does not mean that this should be or can be a Federal program with Federal standards. These issues are for the States and local governments to solve. Only when the general public and State and local leaders recognize the essential need for protecting their natural resources and developing them wisely--for their own long-term benefit--can the necessary programs and standards come into being. Some States and communities are making progress in meeting these needs, but the problems they are encountering attest to the magnitude of the challenge.

There is plenty of land available for the Nation's growth--but the question is what land for what purpose.

The voice of the resource conservationist must be heard in arriving at this decision. As a basic need, land owners and developers must conform to reasonable and effective standards of site selection and site development. To guide this development, it is imperative that soil surveys be completed as rapidly as possible in critical areas of rapidly changing land use. More State and local government help is essential to get this done.

We must continually redefine our roles and goals as resource conservationists.

As SCS Administrator Williams said to the State Conservationists at their 1968 meeting:

"At times there may seem to be more questions than answers, at least thoughtful answers that are geared to the challenges and changes all about us. May I pose a few of these questions-- questions which we are wrestling with at the national level?

1. Must the Nation protect an agricultural land-use base sufficient to meet the needs of our population 1980, 2000, 2010, and beyond? Who should do it?
2. Does our presently ample supply of land mask the seriousness of the misuse of resources in local areas, especially those associated with the concentration of 'people use' of land for non-agricultural purposes? What should be done? Again, who should do it?
3. If shifts in land and water use result in conflicts of use, how do we and other conservation leaders offer criteria which can help America choose between private and public needs?
4. Should technical services in resource conservation be limited to certain economic or social categories or recipients?
5. How can more of the workload of conservation practice installation be shifted to non-Federal sources?
6. How do we and districts determine and keep current meaningful priorities of work?
7. How realistic are requests for additional authority and funds to deal with reduction of sediment and other agricultural pollution?
8. How can the Service and districts further develop and strengthen their image as action organizations that get things done?

These, gentlemen, are but a few of the realistic questions that together we must face. If we professionals, and resource organizations, do not meet new needs of our people, the job is going to be handled by some other device, organizational set-up, or even by government edict. For the public needs must be met--and this fact will continue to bear more heavily on the Nation the longer they go unmet.

Of course we've got to remain as flexible in our approach as circumstances require. The primary aim must always be to extend the benefits of sound conservation policy and practice effectively.

We must develop a national vision that is a rational alternative to urban congestion and suburban sprawl. We must have a workable scheme that will assure ample opportunity in the countryside for everyone who chooses to live and work in such an environment.

There are other problems afflicting the country now--other challenges, other needs, new priorities.

You know that success and fame are fleeting. What would have sufficed yesterday is apt to be too little--too late for tomorrow. The past is history. South Carolina conservation history is a proud chapter--but only a chapter. There are many more chapters to be written. There is no set deadline to complete the book. Urgency, yes,--urgency to get man and his environment in harmony. And as long as we have millions more who will depend on the land; we will have new chapters in the book.

I see this as the challenge confronting us today. It is broad, complex, and demanding. But if we meet the challenge with resolve, our accomplishment will be the most rewarding of any yet realized in any society.