

THIS WAS THE START OF SOMETHING BIG

I am honored to be with you to mark a special place in history.

It was August 25, 1933 that the Soil Erosion Service was established as a temporary organization in the U. S. Department of the Interior, without formal order. It was pursuant to a resolution adopted on July 17, 1933, providing an allotment of \$5,000,000 for soil-erosion prevention work on public and private lands.

On March 25, 1935, the SES was transferred to the USDA. Forty erosion control projects and 51 Emergency Conservation Work Erosion Camps had already been established. They were listed with their headquarters and regional directors:

- Project 1 - Coon Creek and Gilmore Creek, LaCrosse, Wisconsin.
- Project 5 - South Tyger River, Spartanburg, S. C. - T. S. Buie.
- Project 30 - Fishing Creek, Rock Hill, S. C. - T. S. Buie.
- Project 33 - Shue Creek, Huron, South Dakota.

A key erosion camp for me was at Pocatello, Idaho, for terracing the watershed above town.

On April 27, 1935, Congress formally established the SCS in the Department of Agriculture.

Material for talk by Norman A. Berg, Associate Administrator, Soil Conservation Service, at the 40-year commemoration of Berry's Gully, Spartanburg, South Carolina, June 7, 1974.

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Berry's Gully is a hallowed piece of South Carolina land. I wasn't here when that yawning chasm of raw earth--800 feet long, 50 feet wide, and 35 feet deep--was an open wound in the Spartanburg countryside. I can't personally claim credit for helping heal it. I have witnessed the results of comparable work all over the United States.

I have had the privilege of meeting several of you who are here today--and others who are absent--that did have a lot to do with transforming the Berry Gully.

Some of you might have been among those first 75 young men who reported to work at the Berry farm on a cold December morning in 1933. With shovels and axes and a few other tools brought from home, and led by people whose technical knowledge of soil and water conservation was only slightly less rudimentary, these young men and hundreds of others that followed them started a nationwide conservation program.

As many of you know, the Berry Gully work was part of the South Tyger River Soil Erosion Control Project. There were no conservation districts at the time. The agency that paid the workers their forty cents an hour was called the Soil Erosion Service and it was in the U.S. Department of the Interior. There were no guidelines, no handbooks, no ready answers.

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The late Dr. Thomas S. Buie, who directed these early efforts and who later distinguished himself as one of America's foremost conservationists, said:

"The important thing is that a beginning was made--that we were so optimistic as to believe the job could be done. Possibly, it was well that we had no precedent to guide us, for discouragement might have overwhelmed us."

Progress was slow the first day, the first week. But the perpendicular sides of the great gully began to assume a more gentle slope. Water was diverted from the active head and sides. Rows of dams made of nearby fieldstone were built along the gully floor.

Annual plants, such as rye grass...perennials, especially honeysuckle...and trees, mostly black locust, were put in. Berry's Gully began to rejoin the landscape.

The treatment, though perhaps expensive in today's terms, was effective. In 40 years, scarcely a ton of soil has washed into or out of the gully.

The work at Berry's Gully showed for the first time that soil erosion was not, as many agricultural leaders thought at the time, a natural force just as uncontrollable as lightning and as inevitable as major floods. This early work of soil erosion control marked a new stage in man's use and treatment of the land.

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Since the pioneer efforts of 40 years ago, conservation ideas and practices have changed some and broadened quite a bit. But many of the same principles that were established here are still being used. Soil erosion and the related hazards of sediment and poor water quality are still major environmental problems.

Many soil and water conservation activities had their beginning in the historic event that we commemorate here today. Gullies did not begin just at Berry's farm. By the mid-1930's, according to the Soil Conservation Service's first Chief, Dr. Hugh Hammond Bennett, there were at least 20 million ugly, unproductive gullies in the Piedmont area from New York to Alabama. He was quick to point out that there were virtually no gullies when the Indians had the land, and that it was mostly poor farming practices that ravaged the land of the Piedmont.

Gully control did not end with the healing of Berry's Gully. Thousands of acres in South Carolina, millions of acres throughout the United States, have been reclaimed and are helping produce trees and farm crops and wildlife and communities. Gully control still is a major conservation practice carried out with the help of Soil Conservation Service technicians. In fact, some of the most innovative gully treatment work in America is going on right now in this county where it all began four decades ago. Treatment of gullies and other critically eroding areas above Lake Bowen (Spartanburg's water supply) promises to prolong the life of the reservoir and improve the quality of the water.

A considerable acreage of gullied land around Spartanburg has been reclaimed recently for use as sanitary landfills. The cooperative agreements among landowners, local units of government, and the conservation district are signs of teamwork and progress of which all of you can be proud.

Gully control and other forms of conservation land treatment are important parts of a wide range of conservation activities that are changing the face of South Carolina and the rest of the nation. There now are almost 48,000 landowners and operators in your state--more than 2 million in the nation--who have asked their local conservation district for help in managing soil and water on farms, industrial sites, shopping centers, parks, and more. The requests have come from the successes begun at Berry's Gully.

Last year the Soil Conservation Service also assisted 182 units of local government in your state in resolving land use questions and in making natural resource improvements. Those requests developed from successes on farmland.

The National Cooperative Soil Survey Program is showing excellent progress, with the helpful participation of the South Carolina Land Resources Conservation Commission and Clemson University. Soil surveys have been published for 14 counties and field mapping has been completed in 14 others so far. Soils information--vital in stopping gullies or starting communities--now is available to land users in more than 60 percent of South Carolina counties.

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An early lesson learned at places like Berry's Gully was the value of controlling the movement of water across the land. From this principle developed the small watershed program under Public Law 566. Progress has been excellent in protecting, developing and using water and related natural resources in South Carolina watersheds.

Fifty-five applications for help have been received from South Carolina communities since the program began with the Twelve Mile Creek Pilot Project in Pickens County. Twelve watershed projects have been completed and four others will be finished this year. Construction has been authorized or is underway in 20 others.

There are 65 new lakes as a result of watershed work in your state. All of them stand ready to protect the land in time of heavy rains. Some are providing new water supplies for people and industry. Many have brought a new chance for water-based recreation.

These and other structural measures are sometimes the most noticed or the most costly.

But one of the most significant aspects of watershed projects is one we don't hear enough about. It's a primary emphasis on proper treatment of the land--such as gully control--that makes watershed projects unique and makes them so effective. Through the use of conservation practices, a large amount of water can be kept useful where it falls, or guided safely away. In other words, we're still using some of those 40-year-old Berry-Gully pioneered methods. And they work.

More and more communities, units of government and others continue to ask for help under the watershed program. The national total of applications is up over 2,900 and more than a thousand projects are in some stage of installation. The approved projects cover more than 68 million acres.

Another community-oriented effort that holds great promise for improving natural resources is the Resource Conservation and Development project. There are three RC&D projects in South Carolina-- the Lowcountry, Crossroads of History, and Santee-Wateree. A plan is being prepared for the Ninety-Six District project. These projects offer assistance to 23 counties through many USDA agencies. They are helping to speed up resource programs as a base for economic development and social improvements. Nationally, these projects are nearing the 150 mark.

There are many other projects and practices and principles whose roots can be traced back to this first earthmoving venture in soil and water conservation. The work at Berry's Gully was an effort to save one man's land. But it was part of a long-term investment to save a country. We who are here to commemorate that effort have invested a lot. For the young people of today who will do the investing and the investigating and the conservation work tomorrow, it will be helpful to have the historical perspective provided by the Berry Gully experience. It will be helpful to have an understanding of the natural environment and the challenges of today. For that reason, South Carolina's good success in establishing conservation education programs and outdoor

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classrooms is extremely encouraging. With more than 300 schools in the state already involved in outdoor education, you are helping children learn about the environment and from the environment

South Carolina carved its name into conservation history in 1933. You have been steadily carving away ever since at environmental challenges that seem to grow bigger every year. Perhaps forty years from now people will be talking about how Lake Bowen was saved or how outdoor classrooms got started. Perhaps there will be other places for monuments. But the gully on Mr. Berry's farm will always be close to the hearts of conservationists because in this wooded valley is where soil and water conservation got started.

I hope we all will use the memory to make soil and water conservation keep going. There are many difficult challenges ahead, in technical solutions and in social interaction. There are questions of how much soil and water conservation, how many adjustments in land use and treatment, can be achieved through voluntary cooperation and how much must be done through legal action.

Certainly, if people understand the problems clearly, know the alternative land uses or actions open to them, and realize the value of adjustments in farming or subdivision planning or highway construction and will make those adjustments freely because they see it in their own best interest, that is the most satisfying way that

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Those who have practiced soil and water conservation voluntarily and well lend not only a historical perspective but a real hope for the future.

The need for evangelism about wise use and care of natural resources to serve people's long-term needs is not past. South Carolina has been in the forefront. I hope you will keep at it.

Thank you.