

ISSUES IN LAND USE POLICY

1. Of all the nations on earth, the United States is among the richest in terms of its land and water resources, its beautiful countryside, and its tremendously favorable and varied climate.
2. The future of the land resource is in the hands of millions of people who every day make decisions--good or bad--on how it is used.
3. What is the ownership of our land? Fifty-eight percent of it is in private hands--owned by individual farmers, ranchers, businessmen, and industry.
4. From this land comes most of the food, fiber, and timber we consume and export.
5. One third of the private land is in forest.
6. One third is in range and pasture.
7. And a little less than a third is in cropland.
8. Despite an almost 200-percent increase in U.S. population since 1900, these proportions in land use have changed very little.

Material for use by Norman A. Berg, Associate Administrator, Soil Conservation Service, at the annual convention of the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts, Dodge City, Kansas, December 3, 1973.

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9. The reasons for this are research, extension, conservation and other agriculture-related technology, and financial programs. The primary reason is private enterprise. America's crop production per acre continues an upward trend.
10. The second largest segment of land is under Federal management. This includes 34 percent of our total land area--759 million acres--half of it in Alaska and most of the remainder still west of the Mississippi. Some 187 million acres are managed by the USDA Forest Service. But the largest segment is public domain, under control of the Bureau of Land Management. Military land, national parks, and wildlife refuges add up too.
11. Some of those vast acres--more than 15 million acres--have been set aside as wilderness and primitive areas where timber is not harvested and most other uses are banned.

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12. Much of the Federally owned land, however, is under multiple-use management. Recreation is a growing use of Federal and private land. For example, more than 80 million Americans participate in picnicking, 70 million in swimming, 40 million in boating. Horses are making a comeback. Almost 10 million bicycles were sold in 1972. Skiing has increased 100-fold since 1940--now there are 4½ million people going downhill. All this right at home--plus the more than 8 million Americans who traveled abroad this year.
13. Another 5 percent of land in the U.S. is in State and local ownership.
14. And 2 percent is Indian land.
15. For the most part, America's land is sparsely populated. In the last 10 years, 1,500 counties lost population.
16. To find the concentrations of people, we still must look to the cities...to the metropolitan areas. Here, on 3 percent or less of our land, more than 70 percent of the population lives, works, and dies.
17. This includes land for transportation--super highways, railroads, and airports. Land for transportation is highly visible although it takes up only 1.4 percent of the total land area. And it has taken up some of America's prime agricultural land, irretrievably.

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18. This, briefly, is how we use our land--a mix of public and private, rural and urban, good and bad.
19. The way in which we use land in America has been, for the most part, to our credit. Businessmen, homeowners, public land management agencies, colleges and universities, and especially farmers and ranchers have had a big hand in using land properly.
20. But we still use land in ways that are not to our credit. Thoughtless, unplanned, uncontrolled land use practices are costly to America, in terms of both economics and esthetics. These practices can no longer be ignored, and perhaps by the end of the 1970's no longer tolerated!
21. We still attempt to cultivate some land that is too steep and erosive--at least 50 million acres.
22. We still attempt to grow row crops on some land where the risk of crop failure and land damage is high because of frequent drouth or other hazards.
23. We needlessly burn some forest land each year.
24. We concentrate livestock and send tons of animal waste into streams, adding to serious water pollution problems.
25. It doesn't have to be that way! The local people with whom SCS works can testify that planned conservation practices--properly installed--greatly reduce erosion and pollution, and help assure good crops on agricultural land.

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26. We create unsightly scars on millions of acres of land through surface mining, polluting streams for miles around.
27. It doesn't have to be that way! Strip-mine spoils can be reclaimed and revegetated to serve multiple uses.
28. We discard 250 million tons of solid waste each year, mostly in open dumps in rural areas where the stuff pollutes air, water, and land.
29. It doesn't have to be that way! Solid waste can be disposed of safely in properly located and managed sanitary landfills that later can serve other beneficial uses.
30. We tear up the land for building, leave it bare for long periods, and let it produce sediment to mess up the site itself and land and water downstream. Sediment is America's heaviest-by-volume water pollutant, and a growing proportion of it is produced on urbanizing land.
31. We pave over large areas with no provision for managing storm water. This thoughtless land-use practice and others add significantly to flooding problems.
32. Half of the annual flood damage still is suffered in small upstream watersheds.
33. It doesn't have to be that way! We can find out about land suitability and land-use hazards before any construction is started...

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34. And when things are torn up, sediment can be held on site in a temporary basin just like the ponds that farmers and ranchers have been using for decades. Some of these silt traps later become attractive lakes.
35. Structures can be built to help streams safely handle the vastly increased stormwater runoff that occurs when the land is paved over.
36. We squeeze the farmer with unplanned checkerboard development and eventually make him an offer that he can't refuse.
37. Here's a comparison between an area on Rock Creek in Maryland in 1937...
38. And the same area in 1957.
39. It doesn't have to be that way! Proper land use planning can help protect and develop natural resources in both rural and suburban areas. More and more people are beginning to demand some kind of sensible land use planning--and with the one-man-one-vote system in operation, they are going to get what they want.
40. What they want is a high-quality environment, whether it's a vista one might see only on vacation...
41. Or right in town...
42. Or right at home.

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43. They do want high-quality food, dependable in quantity and reasonably priced at the market place...
44. And that means that land use planning must first and adequately consider the needs of a high-quality sustained agriculture.
45. They want space and facilities for a variety of recreation experiences.
46. They want space and habitat for fish and wildlife.
47. They want to protect and preserve our shorelines on the oceans and the Great Lakes, along with other unique or critical environmental areas.
48. They want to preserve areas of historical importance. (Lincoln's boyhood cabin)
49. All these needs should be considered in setting national, state, and local land use policies and in making state land use plans. The individual and his community have much to gain if land use is properly planned and land is used according to plan. They have a great deal to lose if it isn't.
50. America is beginning to pick up the reins and move ahead on land use planning. It's costly, it's complex, it's too slow.

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51. The U.S. Congress feels the need for action now--it is considering a number of bills relating to land use policy. The Senate last June passed one land-use bill.
52. It's obvious that the States are going to need to organize a land use planning process that will include natural resource inputs, recreation needs, population density and trends, economic factors, and related data.
53. They'll need a planning process that will provide for all the technical and financial assistance available from the Federal government--and that will blend Federal programs with State and local objectives.
54. They'll need a planning process that provides for interchange of ideas and data among agencies of all kinds, and for training programs.
55. They'll need to exchange information and ideas with the public, too--people will not support plans that they don't understand and that they had no hand in formulating.
56. States will need to consider whether some of the land-use decisions that have always been totally private decisions in a free-market system with limited local overview...
57. May need a stronger overview in the form of regulation, control, legislative or State approval, or perhaps litigation.

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58. The States will need a process that reminds the private landowner that he has duties as well as rights in the matter of using and caring for the land and water resources he manages.
59. We'll have to tell the landowner and others about the natural resource information they need, where to get it and how to use it.
60. Above all, we must not forget that land use planning begins and ends with people. After all, land use planning is for people.
61. As conservation district supervisors exercise leadership, they can help make daily life better for people. That's the assignment we all have.
62. There's a long way to go and the clock is moving. Let's get started.

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