Award w: mag 86.1

WATER ACTION FOR THE 1970's

Mrs. Erickson, dist. guests, friends of Watersheds

It is a privilege to take part in your eleventh annual watershed workshop. The Salt (Wahoo) watershed is an appropriate place to gather for your discussions. - Have it a great day.

This is a good time, as we begin the 1970's to review watershed action and progress in the 1960's, and to reward some of that accomplishment. And it is a good time for looking at the likely shape of the decade ahead.

In getting ready for today's remarks, I came across something a President said in a special message to Congress: "The time for playing with our waterways is past. The country demands results!" The President wasn't Nixon, but Roosevelt--Teddy Roosevelt--and he said it in December 1908!

Material used by Norman A. Berg, Associate Administrator, Soil Conservation Service, at the Eleventh Annual Watershed Workshop, Lincoln, Nebraska, February 26, 1970.

Sometimes we think that in planning and investigating and waiting for funds and taking single-purpose corrective measures, America is still playing with her waterways. She should be wrapping up that kind of business and getting on with the job of water resource action.

Insert - Secy's quote - 2/12/70 - Des Moines

The sixties were certainly a decade of strong watershed action here in Nebraska--and in the Nation. Communities and contractors and conservationists now have completed more than 240 watershed projects under Public Law 566. More than 600 others are in some stage of operation, and more than 500 others authorized for planning. These are already bringing significant results on many accounts. I want to come back in a few moments to picture some of these benefits.

There are indications, however, that we need to step up water resource efforts in the 1970's. On the one hand, upstream flood damages still total about a billion dollars annually.

86.3

Let's discuss these trends one by one.

The first is the likelihood that a growing number of watershed projects--and individual measures within projects--will serve two or more purposes at the same time. This is nothing new to you in Nebraska; you had several multi-purpose projects in the 1960's. For example: The Bowman-Spring Branch project (16) (Thayer Co.) brought recreational fishing 30 or more miles closer to watershed residents. In Wildhorse Creek, (3) (Morrill Co.) one of the watershed lakes provided 720 man-days of trout fishing last year. And in Wilson Creek, (11) (Otoe Co.) (Cass Co.) more than 30 watershed lakes now have fish of harvestable size, and boating, water skiing, swimming, and picnicking are also enjoyed. There are 300 man-days of fall hunting.

Benefits like these used to sneak in the back door of early PL-566 projects, as secondary or "incidental" benefits. But many communities have found new recreation opportunity to be anything but a secondary benefit. They are planning for it as a dignified purpose of the watershed project along with flood prevention and watershed protection.

Now we can give some cost-sharing on recreation and fish and wildlife, and this will give a further boost to their interest.

There are many other community benefits besides recreation that once "jest growed" out of watershed projects, that are now being given more direct attention in project aims. We called attention to them in a recent publication called "Let's Grow!" As the preface says, "Watershed projects spur community growth in many ways. Dams built to prevent floods often add to a community sparkling lakes that bring new opportunities for recreation, increase the supply of water for farm and home and industry, and enhance the beauty of the landscape. Conservation treatment and careful use of the land to manage water and control sediment bring better quality farm crops and make the community more attractive. Watershed projects make the watershed community a better place to live and a nicer place to visit. There are more jobs, and wages are higher..."

The last two items to BS & wages were shown graphically in a private study reported in "Let's Grow!" Spindletop Research, Inc., KY, took an in-depth look at two watersheds. In Brush Creek, West Virginia, they credited more than 1,200 new jobs and nearly $20 million in wages to the watershed project and estimated a total of $32 in community development benefits for every $1 of project cost. In Mud River, Kentucky, Spindletop credited the project with 1,300 new jobs in a 7-year span, and estimated a return of at least $21 for every dollar of project cost.

The publication continued that "business and industry like to be where local people care enough for their community to work toward good land and water, a strong agriculture, space for recreation, and other community assets." And as was brought out in the Spindletop study, the provision of dependable water supply often can remove the primary limiting factor in a town's economic growth.

Other pages in the publication point up how communities save money on other community improvements by planning them in conjunction with watershed measures--such as replacing highway bridges and culverts with earthen dams. A recreation section includes a photo of canoeing in the Oak Middle watershed here in Nebraska. Benefits to agriculture and to the environment are featured, too, as well as the final test of a community's attractiveness, the evidence of new homebuilding and new residents.

4 Co. Dawson, Lancaster, Saunders, Butler

The booklet is very much a tribute to the work of the people in this room. And it represents our belief that in the 1970's many communities--whether ~~or not~~ they ~~already~~ yet have a watershed project--or it's on the way--will work to get the most out of such a project by planning from the beginning for some of the benefits I've mentioned or by amending their work plan to include additional purposes.

A second trend in the 1970's will be further legislative changes--at the local, State, and Federal levels--to refine and broaden water resource activities. And the shape of that trend may very well be affected by what is happening in Nebraska. For you are making what could be a significant change in the direction of resource conservation activities--the proposed formation of 25 to 50 natural resource districts. This permissive action by your State Legislature exemplifies (and even extends beyond) the major recommendations of the National Association of Conservation Districts' Outlook Committee. Many other States are watching Nebraska with interest. How you blend the present 150 or more districts and boards of various kinds--and what boundaries are set--can definitely influence many other States.

From our point of view, under the present organization of conservation districts and watershed conservancy districts you have an excellent history of many many local leaders with a keen community interest who are personally devoting a lot of their time and resources to carrying out the small watershed program.

It is our understanding that the new administrative arrangements and boundaries will retain that kind of leadership and support. This is important, because local initiative and responsibility are vital--for example, in carrying out the land treatment phase of watershed projects & many other actions in planning & operation that is very local in nature.

We know we are in a time of change. As Warren mentioned We find a growing emphasis on comprehensive multi-county planning, and resource conservation and development. Rural development will undoubtedly call for strengthened and more viable institutional arrangements. New organizational entities, therefore, face the challenge of working harmoniously with already established groups in order to help forward the objectives of both the old and the new.

In the 1970's, many other administrative changes in watershed activities can be expected, including particularly some new monetary authorities for conservation districts and increased state and local assistance to districts.

86.10

Here in Nebraska, watershed planning funds went from nothing in 1960 to $220,000 in 1969. Direct state assistance to conservation districts went from $6,000 in 1959 to $150,000 in 1969. Nationwide, State and local support of conservation district activities rose to more than $31 million by the end of the 1960's. As more legislators and more local governments see the value of these investments in environmental improvement and community economic growth, we're convinced the level of direct support will continue to increase.

At the Federal level, there are already many bills in Congress relating to land and water resource activities--from shore erosion control to water quality control to several on environmental quality control. Of particular interest to the watershed program are bills that would provide cost-sharing for low-flow augmentation to improve water quality. One of these proposals also provides for the use of other Federal funds for land acquisition, and provides for long-term contracting for land treatment.

None of the bills is currently under active consideration, but I'm convinced that in the 1970's some water-quality provisions will be cranked into Public Law 566. Other changes being considered or proposed for PL-566 would:

-- Permit SCS to administratively approve projects that cost up to $500,000, double the present limit. (This reflects the great increases in construction costs since the mid-1950's.)

-- Permit Federal cost sharing for water storage for rural community use.

We are encouraged by the close attention our basic watershed act received by the Congress in the last decade: In 1962, recreation became eligible for cost-sharing. In 1965, the allowable floodwater storage space was more than doubled. And in 1968, SCS was authorized to administer construction contracts when desired by the local sponsors. Each of these amendments served to strengthen the program and enhance the Nation's investment in this activity. So with this background--and with Nebraska's representation on the Congressional committees that deal directly with watershed activities--we think that you can expect some attention to further improvements in the 1970's.

A third trend that we see for the 1970's is more intensive land and water resource planning, with more and more useful basic resource data. Let me outline the reasons simply by giving two examples from one State--Virginia. One BAd - ONE Good

The Bad Four Mile Run, a small tributary to the Potomac River, has a drainage area of about 19 square miles. As a rural area, or even with low-intensity development, it had no significant flood problems. But these conditions changed as the Nation's Capital grew. The watershed is now covered with shopping centers, apartment complexes, townhouses, and single-family homes, and paved streets. Most of the rainfall runs off, carrying with it various types of debris. Time of concentration is short, and runoff volumes exceedingly high. Opportunities for installing most water control facilities have been pre-empted. Within the last 6 years, there have been 5 major floods on Four Mile Run, 2 of which occurred in July and August 1969.

The Corps of Engineers has attempted several times to develop a flood control plan for this watershed. But the costs have been so great that it has not been feasible to install the necessary works of improvement--a concrete-lined channel and enlarged culverts under railroad and highway rights-of-way. The increased frequency of flooding, the high-damage values in the flood plain, and the threat to life and health now have made such a plan justified. But the costs will exceed $16.6 million.

The flood Just to the west, in Fairfax County, lies the Pohick watershed. Here, on 35 square miles, a watershed project and a county master plan are meshing together to urbanize Pohick's rolling hills and valleys intelligently. Rather than send 3 million tons of sediment to the Potomac during the development period, builders will stay off the steep slopes and flood plains. They'll work on only part of the watershed at a time, and they'll spend $3 million on conservation measures. They'll cluster homes to leave open space. Watershed lakes will be developed for intensive recreation use.

Water will be managed in the Pohick, not only to head off expensive after-the-fact engineering works, but also to bring about much more desirable communities.

The comparison here seems rationale enough for me to justify increased attention to planning instead of patch-and-repair. We must have a program of action rather than reaction. The enormity of problems connected with a fixed resource base and growing competiton for resource use justifies a forceful drive--a positive approach to definite goals in a planned time.

This is what SCS and other agencies are attempting to do in cooperative river basin surveys under the Water Resources Planning Act of 1965. We're currently participating in 11 river basin framework studies, and we hope to complete studies for all regions by 1980. Here in Nebraska, State Conc. Keith Myers has the leadership for USDA participation in the Missouri basin study, now in the final report-drafting stage. We're also cooperating with the State of Nebraska in detailed studies on several small river basins such as the Elkhorn. The study reports will provide valuable inputs to the State Water Plan.

SCS also is working on a revision of the Atlas of River Basins, which we first published about 1963. We have corrected river boundaries and names, and are using boundaries of water resource regions developed by the Water Resources Council. We have watershed data from the newest National Inventory of Soil and Water Conservation Needs on magnetic tape, keyed to the guide's delineations. When the Atlas is finished, it will be a highly useful reference work on the major drainage areas of the Nation and their tributaries. You won't see a copy on every library shelf, or in anybody's back pocket. The Atlas is about this big (exaggerate) and a rather expensive document. But it will be welcomed by State and Federal agencies that have responsibility in the water resource field.

The new conservation needs inventory, incidentally, shows that 92.7 million acres of agricultural land and 2.8 million acres of urban land have floodwater and sediment damages that call for watershed project action.

Drainage improvements are needed on 65.4 million acres, and irrigation is needed on another 16.7 million acres.

On the other side of the coin, there is need and potential for developing rural water supply in ~~5,540~~ 2900 watersheds, recreational development in ~~12,396~~ 6300, fish and wildlife improvement in ~~13,059~~ 6500, and water quality control in ~~8,778~~ 4400 watersheds. We truly have our work cut out for us.

We'll need greater coordination among Federal and State groups in river basin and watershed planning, to come up with feasible projects that can meet the needs of many interests. But the real test will be the extent of local involvement.

This is the fourth trend that I mentioned for the 1970's--increasing local participation and involvement in watershed activities. This is a local program, not a strictly Federal or State activity. Watershed action relies on local enthusiasm and leadership. It relies on local elbow grease and local brainpower in getting the most out of a project.

I'd suggest that you look at your watershed communities and their citizens. Aren't there a growing number of men and women--beginning school or ending a career or somewhere in between--who are interested, even enthusiastic about changing our environment for the better? Isn't there a meaningful way to involve them in a watershed-or other conservation effort? Wouldn't they take up some of your elbow-grease workload, and mightn't they contribute some useful ideas? (even ¶)

Conservation is no longer the province of a few dedicated diehards working against the grain of public apathy. Conservation is too complex and too much work today for only a handful of district supervisors or a handful of resource agencies to do it all. And the public is becoming more and more concerned about the shape of the environment. I think we can give the hand-wringers something constructive to do about their concern. And I think it will help achieve your own aims.

In summary, we think you can expect in the decade ahead 1) a continuation of the trend toward multipurpose projects; 2) further legislative changes, 3) particularly for water quality control; more water resource planning, with the aid of more basic data; and 4) greater levels of participation by citizens, local groups, and government agencies.

Our mutual aim should be to ~~make~~ strengthen rural America a ~~nicer~~ place to live, and the strong force that it should be in the Nation's economy. We can do more than take the worry out of storms and runoff. Our aim should be to help rural communities -- and Lincoln and Omaha -- shape their future.

Secretary Hardin also said earlier this month at the National Farm Institute that a major objective of USDA will be to reverse the rural-to-urban migration that has been taking place since World War II. He said, "We will seek to improve opportunity in rural America for all Americans by encouraging community development, productive employment, the enhancement of scenic and recreation opportunities, improved housing, adequate water and sewer systems."

He recognized, though that "the environmental job cannot and should not be done alone by any one agency or even by the entire Federal Government. It requires cooperation with state and local agencies and private organizations.

"Above all," he said, "this is a challenge to individual citizens--those who live in rural America and manage its agricultural lands...(and) those of all ages and origins who stand to benefit from measures taken there in the interest of the total environment."

You took up the challenge a long time ago, along with Our Dist., the State & the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Together we can make this new decade a very satisfying one. God speed in your own W.S. & Community Back Home!

- - - - - -