

FEB 19 1966

Soil Conservation Service - Norton, KANSAS

For Congressman Bob Dole, Kansas

I am happy to be here with you at this twentieth annual meeting of the Norton County Soil Conservation District.

In 1946, the farmers and ranchers of Norton County began a new era of cooperative effort to control erosion and flooding on the land, and to develop the soil and water resources of the county.

Today, 626 Norton County landowners and operators are district cooperators. Of these, 596 have basic conservation plans on 236,000 acres of land. These cooperators, I understand, represent 58 percent of the farmers and ranchers in the county.

You have realized noteworthy accomplishments in the 20 years the Norton district has been in existence. I understand that 33 percent of the land in Norton County is adequately treated from a conservation standpoint. Your district ranks third highest in Kansas in the construction of terraces with 5,800 miles completed--70 percent of the conservation need.

Statewide, 105 organized soil conservation districts blanket Kansas. District cooperators number more than 87,000. Nearly 24 million acres of Kansas land is covered by basic soil conservation plans.

The State of Kansas has come a long way since the days of the Dust Bowl when the great need for soil and water conservation became dramatically evident across the Great Plains.

FEB 19 1966

2

More than 2,100 Great Plains Conservation Program contracts have been completed in the State, embracing over 1,660,000 acres of land. I see that more than 67,000 acres of cropland will be converted to grass under Great Plains contracts, and that more than 140,000 acres of rangeland will be improved.

I note that soil surveys, basic to proper land use planning and development, have been completed on more than 31 million acres in Kansas, over 60 percent of the State.

Local initiative and participation has been active in seeing to the completion of 5 projects under the pilot watershed program established in 1953, and in the many small watershed projects developed under Public Law 566, approved in 1954.

Kansas is one of the Nation's leading States in watershed project applications, planning, and construction. Kansas has 23 small watershed projects completed or under development, and four of these are multiple purpose projects for municipal water supply and recreation, in addition to watershed protection and flood prevention. An additional 18 projects have been authorized for planning assistance.

Just as most of the soil conservation districts in Kansas have, admirably, broadened their conservation programs for better land use planning and development to meet updated needs, so small watershed projects should be designed to take full advantage of their potential to serve a variety of needs in the watershed.

FEB 19 1966

3

The small watershed project, I believe, offers the best opportunity for soil and water resource development within the soil conservation district. It is a basic program, designed to meet particular area needs. These projects are inspired and initiated by local people, and developed largely through local effort. The multiple purpose watershed project best serves the rural and urban demands upon the area's soil and water resources.

I think we Kansans can be proud of the interest in soil and water conservation thus far shown by the State and local governments.

A recent amendment to the State Soil Conservation District Law makes State financial assistance available to districts, and the 1963 State Water Plan Act provides for further State participation in water conservation programs.

The Kansas Legislature has appropriated \$120,000 for watershed planning in each of the past four fiscal years, an increase from \$90,000 appropriated in fiscal years 1961 and 1962.

Total State appropriations for soil conservation work in fiscal year 1966 amounts to \$345,071. The value of local governmental contributions to help carry out the program of the local soil conservation districts in the current fiscal year is approximately \$187,500.

These highly encouraging developments at the State and district levels are benchmarks that establish the progress being made in meeting soil and water conservation needs. We know that there is much more to be done.

For example, 236 of 305 small watersheds in Kansas have been found to need works of improvement. Yet, only 72 applications for watershed development assistance have been approved by the State and forwarded to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

FEB 19 1966

4

The 23 watershed projects under operations represent fewer than 10 percent of the needed projects in Kansas

In Norton County, a total of 15 Great Plains contracts cover 6,700 acres of land. This represents only a beginning in a most important area of conservation here on the central plains.

While we may be proud of the 24 million acres covered by basic soil conservation plans in Kansas, this acreage represents less than half of the State's total area, and only 2,382,000 acres are covered by plans fully applied.

A shortage of technicians to assist landowners and operators develop and carry out conservation plans is partly responsible for this backlog. I believe more help can and should be provided by State and local agencies and organizations, in support of the substantial Federal effort.

The Federal commitment to soil and water conservation programs as a matter of deep national interest depends upon dynamic and far-seeing State and local initiative and participation.

Congress, over the years, has displayed an admirable bipartisanship in supporting sound soil and water conservation development as a benefit to all the people.

I am proud to have supported much noteworthy legislation in this area of national concern. Last year, Congress passed, and the President signed into law--

the Water Resources Planning Act, which authorizes the President to establish river basin planning commissions and a Water Resources Council;

FEB 19 1966

5

the Water Quality Act, which establishes a new water pollution control agency and authorizes additional funds for pollution control efforts;

the Rural Water Facilities Act, which makes possible the planning and building of community water supply and sanitation facilities in rural areas;

the Water Resources Recreation Act, which establishes a uniform policy for fish and wildlife enhancement and recreation in Federal water projects.

This, and other Federal legislation, has indicated the strong bipartisan support Congress is prepared to give sound resource conservation programs. But, I believe, and I think you will agree, that the soil and water conservation job will be done--in the Norton Soil Conservation District, in the State of Kansas, and in the Nation, only with wholehearted State and local cooperation.

This broad support is particularly necessary and justified because watershed protection and development serves the urban community as well as the rural countryside.

The watershed project that prevents a flood in the valley may provide a reservoir for municipal and industrial water storage; a site for swimming, boating and fishing; or a refuge for waterfowl.

Land under conservation plans that is not needed or suitable for growing crops may be converted to grass and trees and used for recreation or wildlife conservation, for the benefit of both the urban and rural resident.

I am told that 40,000 visitor-days of recreation have been provided by watershed projects in Kansas since the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962 made conversion of land to recreational purposes, as part of small watershed projects and on private land-holdings, more readily possible.

FEB 19 1966

6

Also, 900 income-producing recreation enterprises established by nearly 300 landowners and operators benefit the rural economy and satisfy the growing urban need for more outdoor recreation opportunities.

Kansas is very much a town-and-country State, and we must strive to build a meaningful and mutually beneficial relationship between town and country living.

Kansas had only 107,000 people in 1860, and over 90 percent of these residents lived in rural areas. By 1960, the State's population had grown to more than 2 million, and rural residents accounted for only 39 percent of the people.

The total land area of Kansas still is 90 percent in farms and ranches, but the 15 percent increase in population between 1950 and 1960 represented urban growth. There has been a dramatic shift in numbers of people from the farm to the city in Kansas, as elsewhere in the Nation.

Soil and water conservation directly affects the growing urban development and the complex needs associated with it. Nearly 2,000 non-farm landowners and operators in Kansas received technical assistance through soil conservation districts in fiscal year 1965.

There is a leading role to be played by soil conservation district leaders in this dual town-and-country responsibility. It is for you at the district level to promote sound conservation measures wherever possible.

The evidence is clear that the soil and water conservation message has spread in Norton County and throughout Kansas.

FEB 19 1966

7

But you conservationists are evangelists, just as the late Hugh Bennett, the first administrator of the U.S. Soil Conservation Service, was an evangelist as he sought--with outstanding success, I may add--to impart to the Nation's landowners and operators, to Members of Congress and to State legislators, and to officials and leaders in both public and private life the urgent need to bring dynamic soil and water conservation measures to the land.

And as evangelists you will not be content with a message half told, with a job half done.

I am convinced that no group in the Nation deserves higher praise than you soil conservation district supervisors and cooperators--for your dedication, your determination, and your accomplishments.

And that is why I am sure you will not be satisfied until every farmer, rancher and other rural landowner--in Norton County and in the State--becomes an active participant in soil and water conservation district programs; until every acre of Kansas land is under a conservation plan--for the benefit of the agricultural economy, for the wise and necessary marshaling of our precious soil and water resources, and to assure sound land use planning and development in the growing urban corners of the State.

Your continued dedicated efforts are needed by the people of Norton County and the State of Kansas. Your efforts deserve the support required to spread the message and the good works of soil and water resource conservation throughout the land. You are assured of my continued, unwavering support of this most worthy endeavor.

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