Agency Coordination, State and Public Involvement in Resource Planning

Highlight: *The early years of this country's development were years in which relatively little interplay was exercised in the exploitive endeavors of society, whether these were in range resources, wood products, minerals, or water. It is questionable whether the present generation, given the same set of circumstances, would manage these endeavors any differently; yet each generation would be operating on a common base of facts. These facts consist of some simple but fundamental environmental truths having to do with soil, water, and vegetation—how and for what they are used, their capacity for yielding the needs of society, and their integrity for future use. The immutable interrelationship between this environmental trinity—soil, water, vegetation—and between on-site and off-site interests, are the genesis of the absolute necessity for coordinated resource planning.*

Viewpoint of the Concerned Public

PHILLIP W. SCHNEIDER

The subject of resource planning has been with us a long time. It has taken many forms and has reflected the objectives of many and varied interests.

While resource planning has been under way in other parts of the world for many centuries, we have, even here in America, over a century of experience. The national interest in an area we know as Yellowstone National Park was a resource planning effort; the Homesteader of yore reflected a resource plan of a benevolent government; the mining law of 1872; the Creative Act of 1891 for the establishment of forest reserves and the Organic Administrative Act of 1897 provided for the protection and managed use of forest preserves. A host of later laws reflect an effort at resource planning consistent with a nation's needs and the desires of the times. Furthermore, the evolution in the application of the large body of state and federal law which followed reflected, in large measure, a response to the desires and needs of various groups, ranging all the way from grazing to residential subdivisions.

In a nation endowed with abundant resources, a growing population, and a continent available for exploitation, we moved to the exploitive task with increasing capacity and enthusiasm. In less than two centuries a continent was settled, an economic system solidified, and a world power achieved. Although it is an exciting example of man's energies, skills, and vision, it is not without its frailties. Endless growth buttressed with a fantastic technological and mechanized capacity fostered the "sacred cow" of Gross National Product, which became the byword for all that was good and wholesome.

Discretion and prudence in the exploitation and use of our resources was not, until recently, the cardinal principle in resource planning. On the contrary, institutional, political, social, and economic postures sought minimum restraints and maximum individual opportunity or maneuvered for a dominant position in the decision-making process. The rugged and lusty virtues of the free enterprise system have abundantly demonstrated the potentials of a competitive doctrine that yielded returns to society in goods and services that exceeded any developmental experiment in any previous societies.

Sought Objectives Unilaterally

By and large, this achievement was done by the earnest and energetic thrust of many interests seeking their objectives unilaterally. Whether it has been in range resources, wood products, national treasures of unique areas in water or minerals, the early years of this country's development were ones in which relatively little interplay was exercised in the exploitive endeavors of society.

Whether this performance has been good or bad depends upon each individual perspective. Whether this generation, given the same set of circumstances, would do any differently is questionable. In either case however, each generation would be operating from a common base of facts.

These facts, as I believe a large body of the interested public view them, are some simple but fundamental environmental truths. These truths have to do with soil, water, and vegetation—how and for what we use them, their capacity for yielding the needs of society, and their integrity for future use. Furthermore, what we do with one is reflected in the other two and on society elsewhere. The immutable interrelationship between this environmental trinity and between both on-site and off-site interests are the genesis of the absolute necessity for coordinated planning.

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Coordinated resource planning integrates livestock use with wildlife habitat needs and other uses of the resource such as for watershed.

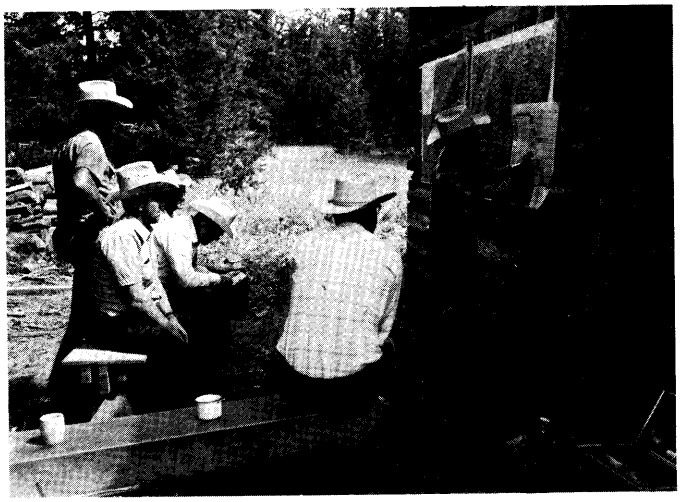
Resource planning and coordination, however, can take many forms. Historically, it has often reflected the objectives of those doing the planning and the values being sought. By and large, plans have been based upon maximizing commodity yields and in turn, economic returns. There is nothing wrong with such objectives. On the contrary, they are legitimate and essential. Until recently, statutory direction having to do with resource planning cast the objectives, participants, and criteria in primarily economic terms. Again, this is legitimate. The weakness has been in the dimension, because if an effective planning job is to be done, many values must be considered, not all of which have been sufficiently represented or understood.

Data not Necessarily Used nor Adequate

Although large amounts of data have been accumulated with regard to land and water resources, this has not assured that such data have always been cranked into the planning process. Nor does it mean that adequate data have always been available. Thus, comprehensive baseline information must, it seems to me, be the starting point in any meaningful planning process. I'm fully aware there are many who will challenge this point, maintaining that we have more information now than we know how to use. The present magnitude of our research and inventory effort, however, ranging from the quiet pursuit of information and experience by the individual landowner to the ERTS effort of our Space Program, would indicate we are far from having an adequate data base upon which to do comprehensive planning. In my view then, ongoing accumulation and use of inventory and research findings becomes a priority essential for planning and coordination.

Recently, we have heard much of the concept of open planning. As I view this, it means that the planning process must involve the broadest possible spectrum of participation by recognizable interests and by accepted disciplines before a decision is made. In many areas of past resource planning, there has been something less than open planning in the context of either interdisciplinary skills or in societal interests. Such omissions have spawned recent environmental legislation and the doctrine of public standing in court. As onerous as these mandates are to both old line bureaucracies and our long-established economic system, they are principles which society in general demanded and which will be retained in one form or another in the future.

Land, to all of us and to future generations, is the source of our strength, viability, and our existence as a society. Rangelands make up about one-half of our land legacy. More importantly they make up a part of our land base from which springs a wide array of values which society desires. While these desires and needs are dynamic, with constantly changing priorities on the part of our total society, many established priorities continue and, indeed, sharpen and grow as well. In



Coordinated resource planning in action in Oregon–Bill Anderson, SCS State Range Conservationist, working with Marr Flat Grazing Association ranchers and Forest Service personnel.

short, rangelands are a significant part of our total environment which is constant in quantity but changing in quality or in demand. Recent patterns of land sales, land allocations, and land use attest to the enormous pressures now bearing down on all land types. These pressures will continue to grow. What is not going to change is the capacity of the land to satisfy the wide array of needs and desires. This capacity is an inherent characteristic of land which varies from place to place and in relation to such environmental factors as terrain, climate, soil, and vegetative type. It is a resource, which in its totality is renewable and productive of many outputs if properly used. While land as a commodity has offered many attractive economic opportunities, we have reached a time when our land base must be recognized as a resource to be husbanded and protected if long-term values are to be sustained. This simply means that land use planning must recognize a limit to land capability and within that capability, limit the impact of man's use to a degree that preserves the basic components of soil, water, and vegetation.

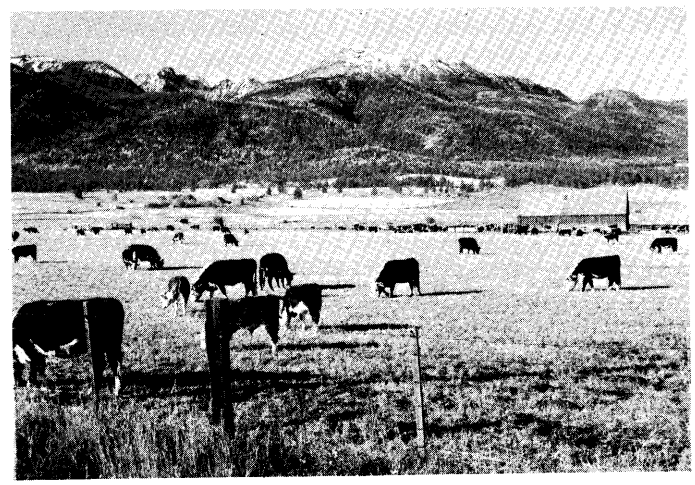
No Group Wishes to Maintain Trend

The fact that significant areas of western rangelands are alleged to be in need of rehabilitation; that often expressed concern about soil erosion is widely demonstrable; and that water quality from rangelands is in need of improvement, are eloquent, albeit negative, testimony to the record of past stewardship. These manifestations simply say that violence has been done to the land; I do not know of any group that desires to maintain this trend. On the contrary, there is general agreement that where land condition indicates potential for improvement, it should be done. The rub comes in how such improvement will be achieved. It is for this reason that the doctrine of alternatives has surfaced as a provocative and effective tool of planning. Furthermore, the employment of the alternative doctrine, when coupled with open planning, provides a meaningful device for coordination.

We now come to the question of conflicts, which in a free society are inherent characteristics of resource planning. Society is a heterogeneous mix of desires, expertise, and objectives. Furthermore, this mix is in a constant state of flux, both in needs and in attitudes. In a democracy, such changes are of profound importance, because every citizen has the sacred right to express his convictions and to vote. The desires and rights of society have long been a cornerstone of social order and are persuasively expressed through institutional, scientific and statutory changes which respond to this principle. This premise cries out for broadening the base of societal input in one direction and the availability of facts in the other direction in the planning process. This is not without hazard, however, namely the range manager's failure to convey the known facts of range science to a broader base of interested public. Whether those facts tread on the toes of one or more groups is beside the point. The need is to assure they are available in such a form that they can fill an essential role in sound land use practice. By training and experience, the range scientist recognizes the need for planning and for the execution of those plans. Not unlike other fields of endeavor, however, there is more disposition to confer among peers than with other groups. Here is where coordination means a broader dimension. Here is where the citizen group plays a prominent place in the opportunities for developing an interface for coordination. The absence of coordination will spawn extremes which in due course can distort decisions, even though such decisions spring from a planning process.

The contemporary deluge of planning effort has generated violent reaction in many circles. Established systems view it with alarm and distrust because out of plans must ultimately come decisions. From decisions may come change, and all resist change. This concern is probably good because a process which will serve all interests equally is not yet perfected. Indeed, equity may not be an achievable objective in the short term. Current experience in the legislative process for land use planning, whether it be municipal, county, state, or federal, attests to the difficulty of mounting a universally acceptable vehicle. Nevertheless, advance planning in the field of resource affairs is here and I don't believe it's going away.

The planning effort on federal land or with publicly funded projects has traditionally been preceded by planning of one type or another. It has been an accepted part of the job of getting things done, but most often with the leverage of citizen groups fostering the need in terms of single-interest desires. Large scale rehabilitation efforts or water development projects are examples. In the private sector, however, it is more traumatic. The rights of private property and the constitutional restraints to public control of those rights is something else. It has created the so-called "taking issue"



Resource improvement, such as this Nevada bluegrass meadow, is one goal of coordinated resource planning.

about which we will hear more in our time. Here is where communications become urgent and where the best in factual information is essential.

Much is being said about the techniques of planning. That is the province of the planning technician, whose expertise has advanced the state of the art to its present competence. There is a need on the part of the decision makers, whether they be individual property owners, corporate conglomerates, or public land administrators to avoid too much preoccupation with the details of the technology. Of equal importance are the conceptual questions that establish the parameters for decisions. It is abundantly clear that changes have occurred in American attitudes toward the environment. These changes are reflected in the mounting array of in-depth studies, in new and proposed legislation, in case histories of court actions, and in people involvement.

From the public standpoint, I believe there is an interest in the three essential legs of effort; namely, planning, coordination, and execution. The mission of execution is the point most difficult to achieve. Often the question relates to individual or small group needs and inputs. At other times it may relate to community, regional, or national desires. To accommodate all is most difficult.

Objective Consideration of All Inputs

To accomplish the kind of land stewardship I believe the public is demanding will require an objective consideration of all inputs. From the point of view of the general public, the commodity user, the preservationist, and the multiple-use disciple, there is nothing evil in their particular objectives. Evil comes into play in permitting violence to the land itself or to society elsewhere. This is often difficult to define. Firm support of environmental restraints is required as well as a dedication to long range integrity of the land in its totality. Dominance by any one interest must be rejected; instead, the land must be husbanded in its basic components with appropriate allocation of uses in keeping with land capability and uniqueness of each area involved.

I believe there is a way to do this, but it is going to be difficult because the historical pattern of uses is not the same today as it was in the past. It will be difficult because institutional devices for administering rangelands came into being at a different time and for different objectives. It will be difficult because there are more people and those people view rangelands in various ways. It will be challenging because we have new and persuasive laws and judicial decisions which emphatically assert that things will be done in another way. It will be far more complicated by virtue of emerging technologies not heretofore having a high priority.

Such recent events as BLM's problem with off-road vehicles in the California Desert or their recent issuance of geothermal resource leasing regulations demonstrate the broadened base of interest in rangelands. The fact that the U.S. Forest Service proposed regulations for mining activities of December, 1973, after 70 years of nonregulation demonstrates a response to the times. The potential spatial requirements of a breakthrough in solar energy technology and the enormous impact of strip mining on rangelands, as examples, portend to the future.

The implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act or the many judicial decisions either pending or already issued suggests the rapid evolution in the need for coordination.

Change creates challenge and the range manager is in the middle. Rangelands have simply assumed a more important place in the scheme of things. The customary values of commodity production will continue, but they will continue along with such sought-after values as energy resources, open space, attractive or unique landscapes, natural phenomena, water, fish and wildlife, and clean air. To accommodate these varied and growing demands the system of management will expand and become more complicated. This challenge can be successfully met so long as the following program objectives are developed to the maximum degree possible: (1) a solid base of resource data; (2) open planning with appropriate institutional changes where needed; (3) involvement of the widest possible spectrum of people and interests; (4) the identification of alternatives before a decision is reached; and (5) recognition of land as a resource.

Conceptually this suggests the application of the currently over-used term of ecosystems management. Call it what you will—and it's been so designated by many range managers—it speaks to both the land itself and to the desires of people. It focuses attention and responsibility for protecting the range environment and its basic components of soil, water, and vegetation. Any use which does irrevocable damage to any range component becomes subject to restraint. Because these uses originate with people, they must be brought into the planning process, but not unilaterally. All interests should be simultaneously represented, and with that representation goes responsibility for input. The acid test of stewardship must ultimately be the record on the ground in soil stability, vegetative condition, and water quality. The use of any other criteria may temporarily accommodate short term objectives of some, but it will not assure the long term mission of preserving a precious land legacy which can yield many values to society in perpetuity, both on the land itself and elsewhere. In short, the ecosystem itself becomes the dominant value to preserve. In that context the profesional range manager should be the most militant of all preservationists.

Viewpoint of a Federal Agency

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The most current issue that resource managers, politicians, and public administrators are facing today in resource management is planning for the future. Resource managers and our federal and state legislators have spent much time wrestling with this subject. The goal is to put an end to destructive expansion and to allow for the orderly classification of land and the harvest of resources. Along with the need to identify land uses, we must also meet increasing demands for products. As an example, we need to step up red meat production on our public and private lands.

Demands for meat are increasing. Ranges are capable of producing more forage to raise animals, and this can be done competitively with other feed sources. In this day of energy shortages it is even more important that a well-managed rangeland can produce feed with much less fossil fuel. *Science* magazine in an article in November, 1973, reported that it

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