

48 Reasons Why Land and Water Resources Are Being Neglected

Oscar Pederson and Joe Wirak

Three ranchers and an agricultural representative of a bank were almost unanimous in their identification of reasons why land and water resources are not being taken care of better in Montana. The occasion was the Montana SCSA Chapter's annual winter technical session held February 29 and March 1, 1980, at Bozeman. The panel members were invited to present their views in hope that by uncovering some weaknesses steps could be taken to correct them.

The panelists were: *Keith Edwards*, Big Sandy, farmer-rancher, a conservation district supervisor for many years and formerly on the Chouteau County Planning Board; *Chuck Jarecki*, Polson, rancher, former director of the Montana Stockgrowers Association and at present a director of the Society for Range Management; *Howard Lyman*, Great Falls, farmer-rancher, developer, and Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) farmer-committeeman; *Wayne Gibson*, Bozeman, vice-president of the First National Bank of Bozeman and a former County Agricultural Agent.

The following is the panel's list of 48 reasons with appropriate comments and recommendations:

Public Lands

1. Public lands under the administration of state and federal governments are poorly managed and set a poor example for land management.
2. Public lands administered by the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) produce no better than private lands because the agencies are hampered by the influence of uninformed people.
3. The Bureau of Reclamation sets a poor example in resource management: disturbed areas are left to grow weeds instead of protective grasses; its heavy equipment machinery operates in the streams.

Administration and management of state and federal lands need to set a better example of resource conservation than they do. The implication of the panel's remarks was that all public lands should set a good example of moderate stocking for maximum livestock production, for esthetic values, for watershed quality, and for wildlife habitat. If public lands can't be managed properly because of the undue influence of uninformed ranchers and environmentalists, then perhaps the public shouldn't expect the private landowner to do any better than the public lands administrators.

Education

4. We lack a good conservation education program in our

public schools. Much of what we have is agencies "patting themselves on the back" through some fancy movie.

There is a need for more leadership and support to establish and develop environmental education as an integral part of the public school system in the counties. This should include intensive training in soils and grassland management for all young farmers and ranchers.

Research Efforts

5. There are too many glorious schemes for securing maximum yields from the land with little regard for the natural health of the land resource and with resultant bad long-term effects. Range fertilization is a case in point.
6. There exists an excessive push by experiment stations to sell more and more fertilizer without due regard for the land and water resource. Perhaps we need to stop experiment station income that comes from sale of fertilizer.
7. Experiment stations push for more production when instead they should help develop long-range efficiency of production. Their emphasis is reliance on chemicals for fertilizers and weed control.
8. Too many agencies promote chemicals and commercial fertilizers. Our chief agricultural publication is the *Montana Farmer Stockman*, a good publication, but it's a continual stream of articles by the Extension Service and others, telling farmers and ranchers that it's wonderful to continuous crop by heavy application of weedicides and fertilizers. These people are trying to please the farmer when maybe the thrust should be to improve the resources and bring about a halt in their degradation.
9. Because of their great size, large cash-grain farms bypass the careful and desirable land management that is feasible on smaller units. Instead, they rely on fertilizers and sprays as a poor substitute.
10. There is too much push for rangeland fertilization that may increase production for awhile but will result in degradation of the natural plant community.
11. There is a continual promotion of expensive irrigation sprinkler systems that use too much energy and fertilizers for production of low-value hay and grain crops.

Directions should be more towards a total environmental quality and less push for "maximum yields now." The excessive promotion of commercial fertilizers and pesticides by our public agencies and institutions is too short-sighted.

Lending Institutions

12. High interest rates hinder conservation efforts.
13. Lending institutions show a lack of knowledge on what should be long-term decisions; they tend to place the main emphasis on short-term cash flow.

14. Many long-term lenders lack the proper background for resource management.

Programs are badly needed that promote good long-term decisions rather than maximum short-term cash flow. This requires lenders who have the proper background and training. Instead of "piecemeal, no-direction" approaches, lending efforts should be "one-shot" capital improvements followed by sound "long-haul" grassland management.

USDA Programs

15. Too frequently there is lack of involvement. The Resources Conservation Act (RCA) provides an example because it has bad alternatives and perhaps few will respond as all will be invited to.
16. Rural Area Development (RAD) is an old folks gathering for social purposes—a total waste of time.
17. There is too much competition among government agencies trying to decide who will provide service to the landowner.
18. Technical services include little or no economic figures.
19. Landowners don't want big handouts and money with strings attached to it.
20. Our cost-share programs aren't working—they're mostly for production practices. We don't need these annual cost-share programs.
21. We lack and need strong national goals and a real desire to *implement* a policy that really addresses the overall problems. There's just not enough concern yet on the part of everybody.
22. We have a government program designed to furnish cheap food at the expense of the land and barely at break-even prices to the landowner and producer. He can the landowner afford long-range soil and water conservation practices? The public must learn that it is not entitled to "cheap" food at the expense of the resource.
23. The political structure and bureaucracy in the United States is such that it is constantly changing funding levels. We lack a good long-term conservation program policy in this country.

The need is for a streamlined program, free of the present competition and duplication of programs among agencies. Technical services should include good cost-benefit information to the operator before development of decisions to go ahead.

USDA Employees

24. Agency personnel lack the farm and ranch background needed to arrive at practical and sound recommendations. Many are city-raised with only "book-learning" to go on. Needed are more common sense and rurally oriented employees who can provide a more sound technical service because they understand the farm and ranch operation.
25. SCS field office staffs are not in balance with the needs of the district and spend too much time fiddling with paper work instead of getting work done.
26. Most agency representatives are paid to please the farmer with higher production schemes when they should be paid to improve the soil and water resources for the long-term future.
27. We need to do what the good Lord commanded—take care of the resources. What is lacking is commitment by employees—not just holding down a job!

28. There are too many uncommitted agency people who don't join and support their professional organizations that work for the future of America's resources. Instead, they gripe and moan if their way isn't paid to meetings and conventions.

29. Too many professional people have little job motivation. Their first priority is job security and retirement.
30. Many are 8:00 to 5:00 conservationists. These hypocritical government employees don't come to meetings unless they are held during the work week and unless their expenses are paid for by the public.
31. Too many are professional coffee drinkers.

Needed is more commitment: a higher motivation to work with landowners and operators, to join and support professional organizations such as the SCSA and SRM. Essential, as well, is more field time and less office time.

Local Governments

32. Too many "do-nothing" conservation districts exist for the sole purpose of providing technical services in their own interests.
33. There are too many "do-nothing" conservation district boards of supervisors whose program for resource protection is a farce.
34. Our state streambed preservation law (310) is administered by lackadaisical district supervisors that render the act ineffectual.
35. Too often we find many "hangers-on" who sit on ASCS farmer committees and district boards.
36. ASCS offices are not really conservation offices. Rather, they are a place for the land owner to pick up his check for various gimmick programs.
37. Too many local committees and boards provide "lip-service" that results in nothing.
38. For the land manager whose farm looks like a "moonscape" after severe winds, there is no answer. ASCS committees and conservation district boards are ineffectual in dealing with the problem.

Conservation District Boards of Supervisors and ASCS County Committeemen need to administer programs in a manner that renders more than lip service and provides more than self-interest. At present, local government appears to be ineffectual in dealing with the many kinds of land and water abuse.

Farm-Ranch Operators

39. Landowners' management decisions are too short-run, especially in locations where land has higher potential value for non-agricultural developments.
40. There exists a lack of leadership and involvement by farmers and ranchers—especially in those conservation districts where it's needed most.
41. There are too many landowners who just don't give a darn.
42. Farmer-rancher apathy is in abundance.
43. Many landowners are reluctant to change poor management practices for modern techniques that are more effective.
44. Landowners make land decisions without development of resource plans based on soil and rangeland inventories.
45. There is a lack of awareness that the land operator bases his decisions first on the pocket book and second on

pride. If there's no pride, then it's all pocketbook.

46. Overstocked ranch units are out of grass all summer and buy hay all winter. Montana's ranges are producing less than half their potential because of poor management.
47. There are just too many cowboys and not enough real grassland managers.
48. We owe our very existence to the top six inches of soil and we are squandering it.

Needed are wiser, long-range decisions by operators who have a greater knowledge and appreciation of the land resource. As it is now, many ranchers know a lot about livestock but very little about the grassland they harvest.

They need more readily to adopt farm practices and grazing systems that are effective, and will sustain the resource. Farmers and ranchers need to care more for the quality of organized resource conservation efforts at all levels of government.

Editor's Note: *The panel's list is long but has something in it for everyone. These men performed a real service by voicing their frank and honest views. It's now up to the citizens of Montana to find remedies for the faults uncovered.*

Hopefully, this report will stimulate and encourage people in other areas to hold similar sessions for the benefit of our natural resources.

OCA's President Writes. . .

I am told the first proposal for a Prairie National Park was way back in 1936. Since then it just keeps turning up like a bad penny every few years. The latest attempt is via H.R. 5592, 96th Congress, introduced by Morris Udall and Kansas Congressman Larry Winn. This bill is simply a backdoor, roundabout method of acquiring the property, on a right of first refusal, rather than out-right condemnation. The end result would be the same however; valuable range land covered by a magnificent renewable resource would be lost from production.

The OCA has gone on record many times opposing this federal land grab in its many different forms, as have other state and county associations; but it is obvious the forces behind this crusade are not going to give up. History has shown when you consistently take a position "agin" something without offering an alternative you end up losing eventually.

The Society for Range Management has come up with just such an alternative. Dick Whetsell, Osage County rancher and President of Oklahoma Land and Cattle Co., introduced the following resolution at the society's recent annual meeting in San Diego:

"The Society for Range Management encourages increased recognition of, and appreciation for, range ecosystems and sound management practices that maintain them.

"The Society recommends that the most effective means of furthering these aims for the tall grass prairie would be to consider extension of the existing Prairie Parkway with small acreages selected as lookout points and campsites. These acreages would be maintained as National Park sites with outdoor classrooms and study areas to show the native plant and animal communities, and the history of the area. Information centers would provide brochures, displays, and automated audio and/or visual presentations on the area.

"In addition, consideration should be given to voluntary acquisition of blocks of approximately 160 acres in states where true tall grass prairie previously existed. These acreages should be reestablished, as nearly as possible, to the original plant community to provide study areas in close proximity to population centers for maximum use for education and appreciation.

"The Society believes these means would be more effective and less costly than federal acquisition of large contiguous areas for use as a National Prairie Park.

The Society for Range Management has long been a friend and trusted ally of the Cattle Industry. I would like to take this opportunity to commend them for proposing what I consider a viable alternative to the Prairie Park question.—**John Hughes**, in *The Cowman*

BLM Is Moneymaker

Eliminating the Internal Revenue Service, because it merely collects money from others, Uncle Sam's biggest moneymaker is the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management (BLM). During fiscal 1981, which begins in October, BLM is expected to generate \$7.046 billion in receipts from oil, gas, coal and other minerals, grazing fees, timber sales and other activities on more than 2.2 billion acres of surface, subsurface and offshore public lands. Of this total, \$400 million will be shared with the states and counties, \$317 million will be funneled to other federal agencies (mainly for irrigation and reclamation work), \$84 million will fund BLM programs, and the remaining \$6.175 billion will stay in the U.S. Treasury. (International Wildlife)

Wildlife Group Opposes Use of '1080' Poison to Eradicate Coyotes

The National Wildlife Federation has taken a stand against Congressional passage of a bill that would legalize the use of a deadly poison, Compound 1080, against coyotes and other livestock predators.

In a letter to Rep. E. (Kika) de la Garza (D-Tex.), chairman of a House Agriculture subcommittee studying livestock losses, Thomas L. Kimball, executive vice president of the NWF, asked the committee to reject H.R. 6725, a so-called animal damage control bill.

Since it was developed in 1944 to control coyotes, Kimball said, Compound 1080 has killed "many thousands" of dogs and animals other than coyotes, while the coyote "is flourishing." Coyotes, Kimball argued, subsist mainly on rodents, rather than livestock.

"Because coyotes play such a vital role in the ecosystem," Kimball said, "it would be a great mistake to eradicate them." Coyote populations are greatest where there are large rodent populations, he added, and therefore elimination of the coyotes should be "disastrous to the other elements of the environment."