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Geographical information systems (GIS) are helping planners utilize a wide range of natural resource information for land use planning.

By Brian Lavendal



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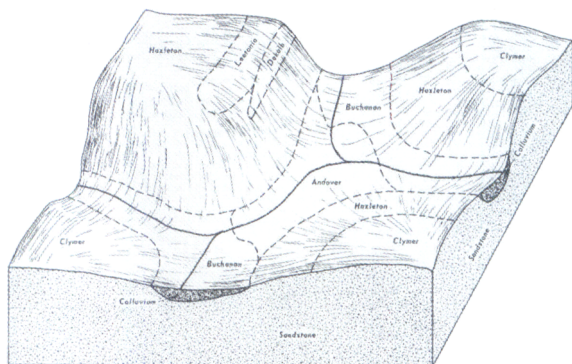
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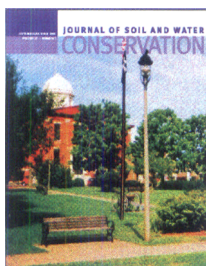
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On the Cover
in Woodstock, Illinois,
pictured here, they are
using GIS for land use
planning.



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RAISE YOUR VOICE

YOUR FORUM TO REACT TO PUBLISHED ARTICLES, TO EXCHANGE IDEAS, AND DESCRIBE INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO CONSERVATION INCLUDING LEGISLATION

"We now have incentives for all-out production and an embarrassment of riches for conservation programs. The latter has the potential to swamp targeting, exhaust technical assistance resources, and make conservation dollars less cost effective during budget deficits. How we implement programs will be critically important!" —Otto Doering

Farm bill doesn't follow the principles laid out by the Administration

I'd like to offer a response to the "Viewpoint" written by Secretary of Agriculture Ann M. Veneman in the July–August 2002 *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation*.

The tragedy of the 2002 Farm Bill is that it did not follow the principles laid out in the administration's "Food and Agricultural Policy." Instead, the commodity title insulates farmers from the market, creates problems with our trading partners, and ignores public concerns about commodity payment equity. It increases incentives to produce no matter how low prices fall, encouraging more crop acres and more intensive production. True, the conservation title brings more dollars to conservation, but the richer commodity program increases a

farmer's opportunity cost to set land aside or adopt conserving practices that might restrict yields. Have we just bid up the cost of competition between more intensive production and conservation?

The cornucopia of dollars for conservation will force important changes in conservation programs. EQIP was both budget limited and tightly targeted, but Congress's concern was that too few constituents benefited from the program. The many-fold increase in the EQIP budget will induce participation well beyond that previously limited by budget restrictions. Will the result be reduced targeting, further strained technical assistance capacity, and income enhancement above the value of the conservation benefits?

We pass farm bills that address past problems—low prices for many commodities and concerns that more people should receive conservation payments. We now have incentives for all-out production and an embarrassment of riches for conservation programs. The latter has the potential to swamp targeting, exhaust technical assistance resources, and make conservation dollars less cost effective during budget deficits. How we implement programs will be critically important!

Can we meet these challenges?

—Otto Doering, *Purdue University, Indianapolis, IN*

Where are the funds to address poor soil management?

This is responding to your article in the March/April issue of the *Journal*. We concur that we must keep talking, and hopefully the Society will begin further discussion about soil management issues. The article, beginning on page 66, Targeting soil-conservation policies for sustainability: New empirical evidence, discusses the need to implement policies that sustain soil quality.

This article asks: Why do we continue to pour millions of dollars into conservation practices that fail to address sustaining our soil and water resources? And it notes funds are being used that marginally support soil quality. A key question remains:

When will we target funds and policies for the prevention of poor soil management and its treatment?

—David Friedman, *Ocean County Soil Conservation District, Forked River, NJ*

Perspective on future landscape

I commend you and the Society for the *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation*. It is delightful. The recent article [March–April 2002] by Nassauer, Corry, and Cruse on The Landscape in 2025 was of special interest.

As we think about the future—25 to 100 years and more—it seems to me that someone or group could provide a service by beginning from "scratch" and envision a landscape uncluttered by boundaries, roads, etc. Perhaps the three mentioned above could use their selected watersheds and just begin with a soils and a native vegetation map and see what they could come up with.

—J. Rex Johnston, *Amarillo, TX*

Readers are invited to express their views on land and water management.

Please make your letter less than 150 words. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

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— Deb Happe, Editor