

JOURNAL OF SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION

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12A AS THE PLANET HEATS UP, WILL THE TOPSOIL MELT AWAY?

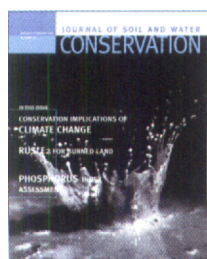
The conservation implications of climate change is explored. [See the special applied research section on the same topic found on page 43.]

By Paul D. Thatcher



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RAISE YOUR VOICE

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

Far out accountability

I read with great interest Andrew P. Manale's article "Assuring Accountability" in the July/August issue of the *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* (JSWC 58(4): 86A-89A) and was impressed by the connection, whether intentional or not, to the preceding article by Sharon Guynup and Nicolas Ruggia "Far Out Environmental Monitoring" (JSWC 58(4): 84A-85A). Manale articulates very well the need for credible data to evaluate the effectiveness of conservation programs while Guynup and Ruggia show us that remote sensing by satellite can now provide such information.

In "Assuring Accountability" Manale starts by noting that "Our perception of the success of government conservation programs depends upon trust...But trust alone has its limits...we demand accountability." Manale then points out that "Accountability, in turn, requires data." In order for data to be useful, it must be factual, objective, and based on good science.

Methods for impartial monitoring of the impacts of conservation policy must be developed. Remote sensing by satellite may well be part of the solution. The use of satellite imagery has another advantage; real-time data. Manale appropriately quotes Albert Einstein "Today's problems cannot be solved with yesterday's knowledge." The existing time lag between program implementation and determination of results that are important to the public is much too great to keep up with our changing conservation needs.

While individual farm or project monitoring by satellite may not yet be possible with today's technology, watershed scale monitoring of land conditions may not only be possible, but practical for providing timely information about program effectiveness to policymakers. Field conservationists like myself must continue to provide site specific progress regarding conservation practice applica-

tion, but the general public and policy makers are concerned with the big picture, or as Manale puts it "the collective impact of the land management across the landscape or watershed." Reporting acres planned, management systems designed and applied, buffers installed, and other individual conservation practices and systems is necessary for a conservation agency like NRCS [Natural Resources Conservation Service] to show accountability. Nevertheless, it's time we use available technology to see the big picture in order to guide our conservation policy.

— James Newman, NRCS district conservationist, Corozal, Puerto Rico

Negative spin of conservation

In the stack of a month's worth of correspondence was my July/August 2003 issue of the *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation*. I casually picked it up with the expectation of either being bored to death or buried in scientific double-speak rendering some of the articles incomprehensible to us average laymen.

Although some of my expectations were met, I was struck by the, for the lack of better terms, the negativity and uncertainty in many of the articles. Craig Cox wonders how we can deliver credible conservation information in this time of constant change. Jeffrey Zinn thinks we need more meat with our conservation potatoes. Pete Nowak (Raise Your Voice) is concerned with the bureaucracy in accounting for our conservation dollars. And finally, the two opposing research editorials seemed to be merely an argument about the definition of terms, such as is it "soil quality management" or "quality soil management?"

Why must we make everything so difficult? Many of us are conservationists because soil erodes. Soil erodes when we bury Mother Nature's protection (crop residue) and destroy its structure with

tillage. That's it! If all land was farmed without tillage, we could spend our resources on such things as growing lawns on roofs.

Until then, any conservation effort that doesn't encourage the farmer to implement no-till crop production is, at best, "Bandaid medicine."

— Jerry Crew, Webb, IA

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