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Cover: Irrigation canal near Loomis, Washington. A dependable irrigation water supply is important; so is clean irrigation water (see page 17). Photo by Henry Ritzer, South Deerfield, Massachusetts.

The Soil Conservation Society of America is dedicated to promoting the science and art of good land use, with emphasis on conservation of soil, water, air, and related natural resources, including all forms of beneficial plant and animal life. To this end, SCSA seeks through the *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* and other programs to educate people so that mankind can use and enjoy natural resources forever.

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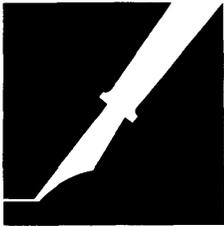
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PEN POINTS

Whose interests represented?

I read with interest the short item in the latest issue of the "Conservogram" [December 1985] regarding SCSA's legislative committee. I am writing this as a member of SCSA for two related reasons. First, I wish to highlight the important role I feel SCSA—and hence this committee—should be playing in the legislative process. Second, I feel it necessary to share with you concerns I have regarding the composition of the committee.

I think it is likely that legislative initiatives will have a far more profound impact than ever before on the soil and water conservation agenda and how it is pursued. Fiscal pressures will dictate substantial program reforms. In the absence of leadership and foresight, change

will come through attrition and across the board cuts. This would be most unfortunate given what we know today about conservation needs and opportunities. The rapid emergence of water quality concerns is bound to soon find expression in legislative initiatives. Within a decade, I suspect that water quality parameters and objectives will dominate the conduct of soil conservation in most regions of the country.

I personally feel Norm Berg has done an effective job speaking on behalf of SCSA. The organization has had some impact, but far less than other, comparable professional organizations. SCSA has also been conspicuously silent on many key technical issues that the organization is uniquely qualified to address. A prime, current example is how to classify lands in the context of the conservation reserve and sodbuster provisions. Because of the great many changes that can be expected in appropriations and other legislation, I urge SCSA to consider an enhanced role in the legislative arena. We all are aware of developments adversely impacting the effectiveness of other key conservation groups in recent years. There is a great, unmet need, and the need is growing as other groups become less substantively engaged with these issues.

For SCSA to effectively fill this void, however, the organization must develop a process that draws upon the expertise of its members and allows for a more credible and forceful expression of SCSA's views. It will be tough for SCSA's new legislative committee to do so in light of its membership. For obvious reasons, senior officials in SCS [Soil Conservation Service] should be systematically isolated from SCSA decision-making on conservation policy—in particular positions on budgets and legislation. The independence of NACD [National Association of Conservation Districts] officials also needs to be taken into account in putting the committee together. I would not prohibit NACD officials from playing a role, but it is important to recognize that the objectivity of an individual closely affiliated with NACD on many of these issues may be constrained by positions or interests that organization has taken.

I believe a committee is needed to prepare and advise SCSA's executive

committee on the positions that should be taken on legislation and to work with Norm Berg in gaining the strongest possible expression for these views. A committee with strong credentials, and independence from established interests would be most effective. A six-member committee might include a well-qualified academic chairman, like Maurice Cook, and two other academic members. These members should have agronomy/soil science, land use/policy, and water use expertise. Another one or two members should be active in and have expertise on state and/or local conservation programs. There should be at least one active farmer on the committee and probably one conservationist/activist with an environmental leaning.

As currently composed, I am afraid that SCSA's legislative agenda and recommendations will be perceived in Washington as an expression of SCS/NACD institutional positions. If SCSA wishes to consolidate, indeed expand, its base of membership, the expertise and concerns of all professionals working in these areas need to be heard within SCSA. It is equally important that the activities and positions of SCSA remain independent of all and any group of conservationists linked by employer or other strong affiliation. This latter challenge is, I fear, not going to be an easy one for SCSA to face squarely.

Charles M. Benbrook
Board on Agriculture
National Research Council
Washington, D.C.

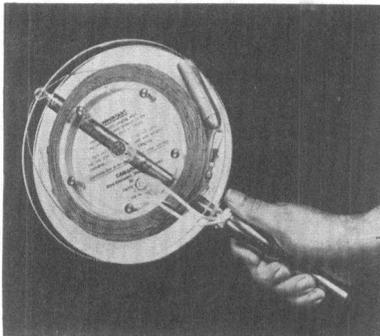
Good ideas implemented

I would like to commend you on Philip D. Gardner's recent article "Wildfire: Managing the Hazard in Urbanizing Areas," which appeared in the August 1985 [p. 318] JSWC.

The article was loaded with useful fire prevention information pertaining to rural areas that receive the most damage in wildfires.

The article suggested many ideas to minimize the damage caused by wildfires and preventive techniques that have since been implemented around our mountain retreat.

Dan Smith
San Luis Obispo, California



Windy Weather?

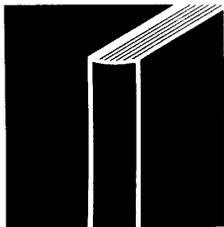
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BOOKS, ETC.

The History of Soil and Water Conservation: A Symposium (published as an issue of *Agricultural History*, Vol. 59, No. 2, April 1985). Edited by Douglas Helms and Susan L. Flader. 244 pp., illus., index, 1985. Agricultural History Center, University of California Press, Davis.

This volume contains 18 papers presented during a symposium held at the University of Missouri-Columbia in May 1984. There is also an introduction by the editors and a brief but valuable epilogue on sources by the dean of American agricultural historians, Wayne D. Rasmussen.

The symposium was convened to look at the 50 years of American experience with soil and water conservation since the federal government first entered the field in the early years of the New Deal. Publication of the collection was timed to mark the golden anniversary of passage of the Soil Conservation Act in April 1935.

The perspective is broad and multidisciplinary. The papers were prepared by authors from both academia and action agencies, such as the Soil Conservation Service, and from a variety of disciplines, history as well as economics, engineering, geography, and soil science.

The breadth of perspective is the source of both strength and weakness in the collection. Taken as individual pieces, there is much in this volume for both the specialist and the general reader. Readers interested in the history of science, for example, will find much of value in the contributions by L. Donald Meyer and William C. Moldenhauer on research about water erosion and by Leon Lyles on research related to wind erosion. Similarly, students of bureaucracy and public policy will find fresh material in Harold T. Pickett's examination of the relationships between SCS and the Forest Service and the Extension Service and in J. S. Headley's account of conflicts between SCS and Extension.

The lead paper by Sandra S. Batie and a contribution from Jeanne Kay provide useful and perhaps provocative insights into the continually evolving social matrix within which soil conservation policy is formulated and private conservation decisions made.

An international perspective on conservation is provided in papers by Michael Stocking and by Norman W. Hudson. Thomas D. Ishern's examination of federally sponsored erosion expeditions to the far corners of the earth makes for a

fascinating adventure story.

There is much more—papers on early efforts to control erosion in the southern Piedmont, on conservation problems in the Pacific Northwest, on the national grasslands and stabilization of sand dunes, and on work with Indian tribes. Each, in its own way, merits attention from both professional and lay conservationists.

Yet because of its eclectic nature, this collection of papers is not the place to look for a systematic and thorough treatment of the history of soil conservation. That is not its purpose. Nor does this volume present a consistent point-of-view or theme. Such unity would have been possible only by foregoing the broad, multidisciplinary perspective the papers offer.

Scholars in specialized fields may find the volume disappointing because it lacks a systematic treatment or a unifying theme, and historians, particularly, may be critical because some of the papers rely almost exclusively on secondary sources. But such criticisms are a bit like complaining because a Hereford does not give as much milk as a Holstein. A Hereford has one purpose, a Holstein another. This volume may not have enough meat to please some, nor enough milk to please others. Yet it has both meat and milk in not inconsiderable quantities. As such, the volume can be compared to a dual-purpose best of high quality. Seen in that way, this collection of papers is an achievement of merit deserving perusal by anyone interested in soil and water conservation.—*JAMES HITE, Department of Agricultural Economics and Sociology, Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina.*

U.S. Forest Service Grazing and Rangelands—A History. By William D. Rowley. 269 pp., illus., refs., index, 1985. Texas A&M University Press, College Station.

This book is a history of grazing on forest lands and the administration of range activities on the national forests. Rowley begins with the establishment of forest reserves by Congress in 1891 and follows grazing use through various bureaucratic changes to the present. Thus, it is not just a history of the Forest Service, but a summation of grazing on U.S. forests. It documents the reasons why grazing and water became equally important to timber in the early administration of forest reserves.

The book is at its best when discussing political, philosophical, and policy issues. For instance, the reader cannot escape Pinchott's role in making social reform a top priority of the Forest Service, probably without the blessing of his patron and boss, Theodore Roosevelt. Rowley shows how the Forest Service to this day has kept the concept of local community stability and the welfare of the small operator paramount, regardless of the philosophy of the person in the White House.

Other political issues, such as grazing fees, are handled thoroughly—often to the point that the reader understands well the adage that “history repeats itself.” Throughout, one sees the consistency of purpose with which the Forest Service operates. The resiliency of the organization and its willingness to make concessions and take minor defeats, yet doggedly sticking to the principles of good land use, comes through in the study of grazing control.

The book is weakest in its history of the technical underpinning of grazing control and the establishment of the profession of range management. Although it gives credit to such early stalwarts as Arthur Sampson, James Jardine, and W. R. Chapline, the book largely ignores the role of the Forest Service in the establishment of the Society for Range Management. One short paragraph describes SRM's establishment, but neglects to give credit to many workers in the Forest Service or to the agency.

In other places, Rowley identified L. A. Stoddart as having “long been associated with Texas A&M,” Vernon Young as a professor of forestry at the University of Idaho, and E. J. Dyksterhuis as doing his major research at Texas A&M. Although all were associated with the institutions named at some time in their careers, none were at those locations when they made the contributions cited in the book. Such carelessness, plus the frustrating way several citations are identified by a single footnote at the end of a paragraph, detract from an otherwise useful book.

In spite of its shortcomings, the book is a major contribution to the understanding of the Forest Service, early attempts to regulate grazing, and many continuing issues relating to range management today. It should be read by anyone interested in those subjects.—*THADIS W. BOX, College of Natural Resources, Utah State University, Logan.*