

March-April 1992 Volume 47, Number 2

## Conservation

To advance the science and art of good land and water use worldwide

#### CONTENTS

#### **Features**

#### 126 Viewpoint: Securing the fate of Landsat

George E. Brown Jr., looks at the value and future of Landsat remote sensing satellites

#### 127

#### Farmer to Farmer

Kamyar Enshayan, Deb Stinner, and Ben Stinner tell how a mentoring program in Ohio is passing along farmers' accumulated knowledge to other farmers, university personnel, and others

#### 131

#### PEP\$: A dollar-andcent approach to conservation tiliage

Peter R. Hill and James E. Lake look at the early results from this unique Indiana program that proves farm profits and conservation tillage are not mutually exclusive

#### 134

#### **Enhancing CRP values**

Ted Hawn and Mike Getman share CRP success stories of soil erosion control and improved wildlife habitat in Montana

#### 136

#### Local resource planning for water quality improvement

Dale A. Boyd tells how residents in Mason County, Illinois, have found that they can deal effectively with agricultural-related threats to drinking water

#### 139

## Tiered pricing motivates Californians to conserve water

Dennis Wichelns and David Cone report on efforts by a San Joaquin Valley water district to conserve water use and reduce drain water flows to downstream users

#### 145

## Resource-conserving crop rotations and the 1990 farm bill

Jeffrey R. Williams and Penelope L. Diebel analyze three programs offered under the 1990 farm bill that could reduce the negative impacts of farming practices on the environment

#### Commentary

#### 152

# The role and capacity of conservation districts in resource management

Pete Nowak says conservation districts must address the fundamental questions of who they are and what they are capable of working toward

#### 156 Achieving soil sustainability

Joe A. Friend sets down the case for the belief that a majority of the worlds' soils are nonrenewable resources on the scale of a human lifetime

### Personal enrichment

#### 158

### Fostering credibility to build public support

Jim Caplan outlines some guidelines to help resource managers build credibility for themselves and their programs

#### Research reports

#### 179

Classifying remotely sensed data for use in an agricultural nonpoint-source pollution model

Mark E. Jakubauskas, Jerry L. Whistler, Mary E. Dillworth, and Edward A. Martinko

#### 183

Nitrate in drinking water wells in Burlington and Mercer Counties, New Jersey Eileen A. Murphy

#### 187

# Stale seedbed production of soybeans with a wheat cover crop

C. D. Elmore, R. A. Wesley, and L. G. Heatherly

#### 191

improving the costeffectiveness of retiring erodible land from crop production Keith Kozloff and Yingmin

Keith Kozloff and Yingmin Wang

#### 194

Sunflower dry matter production and plant structural relationships for wind erosion modeling

J. D. Bilbro

#### **Departments**

122

The SWCS view

124

Pen points

160

In the news

174

Professional services & classifieds

175

Upcoming

176 **Books, etc.** 

Cover: Passing knowledge of natural resources from generation to generation has been the heart of agriculture for centuries (see page 127). Soil Conservation Service photo by Tim McCabe.

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#### **PEN POINTS**

#### Fairness in the land ethic

I read Richard Collins' commentary ["Land Use Ethics and Property Rights," JSWC, November-December 1991, page 417] on land use ethics with the full expectation of understanding it. But was I ever surprised. On several apparently important points I found myself asking, "What did you say?"

His treatment of ethics as though it was a concept inherently promiscuous to choices and transitory in time found me disbelieving and skeptical of his definitions. The land ethic defined by Aldo Leopold is not at all victim to the whims that confound Collins. Where man and the land are concerned, Leopold's ideas are about as fleeting as the laws of nature themselves.

And of Leopold, Mr. Collins says, "The fairness issue is one that Aldo Leopold did not address." (This is one of the places where I exclaimed, "What did you say?") Leopold paid a great deal of attention to fairness, recognizing two distinct types: fairness between reasonable people and fairness among extortionists. Mr. Collins seems to legitimize a form of extortion fairness where private property rights are concerned.

Does anyone really believe that the development value and tempting profits that attaches to open land that happens to lie in the path of progress is the direct result of the landowner's skill and sacrifice? Surely we know development value is created by society; that it is the direct result or, perhaps even more often, the byproduct of public works and programs and cooperative community promotion. We know too that communities pay a high price in environmental pollution and social sacrifice when they approve and promote the gift of higher land development values.

Fairness is not violated when the community denys an owner the fabricated values he did nothing to create. Neither, however, can the community contradictorily tax the owner and still remain fair. Too often the advalorem tax system thwarts land conservation objectives and makes rascals of planners and community leaders.

Fortunately, more flexible taxing options are becoming available to landowners each passing year. With the changing property tax scene, the question Mr. Collins finds so critical, "Who pays," becomes much less so—if in fact it was ever creditable. "Who's profit is it anyhow?" might be another way to look at it. The community need not, as it always has, favor speculators with excessive land development profits simply because they were at the right place with the right title at the right time.

What Collins sees, then, as a plain issue of fairness, Leopold would see as an equally plain issue of private material greed. Ethics, we believe, is humanity's only universal weapon against greed and I believe it's a fair weapon.

Dale E. Marsh Madison, Wisconsin

#### Rethinking values and practices

How fortuitous that I ran across a copy of your November-December 1991 JSWC accidently left at a restaurant where I was having lunch recently. Seeing that Wendell Berry and Lester Brown were two of the featured writers increased my anticipation of what I might find within.

It is a sign of hope when professional periodicals like yours deal with such issues as aesthetics, ethics, and values in regard to land use, sustainability, the devasting plight of the family/small-scale farm, and the increasing encroachment of nonagricultural development on productive farmlands. I congratulate you for promoting a new vision of what our relationship with the Earth might be.

We are learning much in these times and realize the dramatic need to rethink prior practices that have brought us to the brink of global devastation. But I believe we need to have a fundamental change in how we view our place in the continuum of life.

For centuries, mankind has held on to the belief that the Earth and all of its gifts were for our taking, to benefit our lives. These gifts had no inherent goodness or value in themselves. Their value was based on how mankind could benefit from their use. We raped the Earth to retrieve her wealth and poured tons of toxic garbage into her waters and air to satisfy our consumption addiction. No longer can we continue to put ourselves above and outside of other forms of life. The Earth is home to both human and nonhuman life as well as landforms, the winds, and all bodies of water and deserves our care and respect.

I thank you for printing those thoughtprovoking excerpts from the presentations at SWCS's 1991 annual meeting. I hope that you will continue to provide your readers with articles and interviews from a deeper ecological perspective. They can be constructive vehicles that provoke and encourage us to rethink prior values and practices based on an anthropocentric framework, one that has alienated humankind from respect for and communion with the Earth and all her lifeforms and landscapes.

> Terry McCarthy Duluth, Minnesota

#### Wetlands manual revisions

Please give us a break! How stupid do you think the public is?

The clip in your "In the News" section of the January-February 1992 issue entitled "New wetlands definition alarms conservationists" closes with the claim against proposed revisions "that under the proposed definition some of the nation's well-known wet areas, such as parts of the Florida Everglades, Virginia's Great Dismal Swamp, and San Francisco Bay marshes, would not be considered wetlands." Do you really believe these swamp areas will cease to be wetlands? Of course not. It is no doubt the higher, drier fringe areas that may change. And aren't those fringe areas what this great quarrel is all about?

We would appreciate an honest reporting of the facts in a technical journal such as yours. We hear enough of that pandering sensationalism in the general media.

> Donald D. Etler Emmetsburg, Iowa



BOOKS, ETC.

Land Stewardship in the Next Era of Conservation. By V. Alaric Sample. 32 pp., bibliog., 1991. Grey Towers Press, Milford, Pennsylvania 18337. \$4.95.

This book is a brief report of a twoday conference (November 5-6, 1990) held at Grey Towers for 28 panelists on land stewardship to help celebrate the centennial of the Creative Act of 1891. The conference might be viewed as part of the continuing search for the appropriate new forestry for the future.

The president proclaims the search for a new world order. The 50 governors search for a new, more viable federalism. In every theater of world operations the search is for "the new order" appropriate to begin the new century: in Europe, behind what was the Iron Curtain, in the Middle East, in the Pacific rim, within the western hemisphere. Not only within the political sphere is the search for the new order commencing, but also within many other segments of our society: the search for a new affordable, perhaps universal medical delivery system and similar systems.

It is appropriate that in the area of forest conservation, broadly defined as the care and management of wildland resources, the search for a new order should also dominate. The search for new, more appropriate "orders" appears to be ubiquitous in our current culture. A set of acceptable guiding principles is sought, a philosophical and perhaps an ethical framework as well. The principles that emerged and served in the past 100 years may not be appropriate, that is, help us resolve resource conflicts today for the foreseeable future. Additionally, the principles of conservation in the past may not be a viable framework for the future. One must infer from this brief report that these were the assumptions that provided the matrix of the conference.

Sample reports: "The concepts of stewardship that should guide the management of our forest resources emerged as four principles: (1) management activities must be within the physical and biological capabilities of the land, based upon comprehensive, up-to-date resource information and a thorough scientific understanding of the

ecosystem's functioning and response; (2) the intent of management, as well as monitoring and reporting, should be making progress toward desired future resource conditions, not on achieving specific near-term resource output targets; (3) stewardship means passing the land and resources—including functioning forest ecosystems—intact to the next generation in better condition than they were found; and (4) land stewardship must be more than good 'scientific management'—it must be a moral imperative."

These four principles are presented in the foreword as "The Grey Towers Protocol." They are the main points of the second chapter and are repeated in the conclusion as the four key principles defining land stewardship.

A careful reading of the entire report leads this reviewer to two conclusions. First, the conference was a good, neutral beginning of a dialogue between representatives from many diverse professional positions in the area called conservation.

The second conclusion may be more relevant. The historical underpinnings of conservation from the Civil War through the immediate post-World War II period are obvious and adequately presented. But the public policy revolution that transpired from 1969 through roughly 1976 is ignored, with minor exceptions.

It might be profitable to predicate a second conference on two related positions. The Constitution of the United States gives complete and unbridled authority solely to the Congress to set all policy for one-third of the nation's land, that is, most of the nation's wildlands and everything on them or that uses them. Until 1970, the Congress utilized this power in the area of conservation policy with only the broadest brush, leaving the details to forestry professionals. The change that occurred, obviously not yet absorbed, during the first half decade of the 1970s was that the Congress filled in the broad outlines of its painting of conservation policy with a great more detail relative to every natural resource.

Our concentration during the past two decades as professionals within forestry (broadly defined) has been with the processes developed under this body of congressional direction as opposed to the policy substance inherent in it. It might just be possible (perhaps even practical) to assume that the leadership function sought by all forestry (conservation) professionals exists outside the professional academy. The policy substance of the 1970's legislation might be the starting point for the "new order" sought for "land stewardship in the next era of conservation."—RICHARD E. SHANNON, School of Forestry, University of Montana, Missoula.

#### General

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