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**Cover**

Abandoned mined land site in Dickenson County, Virginia
As a multidisciplinary membership organization, we advocate the protection, enhancement, and wise use of soil, water, and related natural resources. Through education and example, we promote an ethic that recognizes the interdependence of people and the environment.

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To the editor:

After reading “Lessons learned in RUSLE technology transfer and implementation” by Tim Kautza, D.L. Schertz, and G.A. Weesies in the September-October 1995 issue of the *Journal*, I am more convinced than ever that SWCS should abandon the model distribution business. As reported in the article, we have been widely criticized for copyrighting what many people consider public domain software and for the high price of the software. The article states that even at $275 per copy, we are only at the break-even point. Even worse, we have only distributed about 500 copies of the software (250 at training session and 250 “off-the-shelf” packages) in three years. If we have only distributed 500 copies, then it appears to me that we are failing in our mission to “advocate the protection, enhancement, and wise use of soil, water, and related natural resources.” If we are truly interested in advancing the art and science of soil and water conservation, then we should find a way to get the RUSLE model into as many hands as possible as rapidly as possible. Right now, we appear to be a bottleneck to the distribution of RUSLE.

How can RUSLE software and documentation best be distributed? I think the Agricultural Research Service came up with the best solution with WEPP—via the Internet and an ftp site. I have talked with WEPP personnel concerning the distribution of WEPP via the Internet and they seem very satisfied. Why can’t they do this with RUSLE? A few years ago this might have severely limited distribution, but that is not the case today.

In summary, I recommend that SWCS get out of the business of copyrighting and selling public domain software. We have not been effective in distributing RUSLE and the controversy and ill will created outweighs the benefits of any income generated by RUSLE sales. Let’s go back to what we do best: “advocate the protection, enhancement, and wise use of soil, water, and related natural resources.”

—Theo A. Dillaha, Blacksburg, Virginia

Reply:

Dr. Dillaha’s letter does a good job of highlighting the very purpose of publishing the article “Lessons learned in RUSLE technology transfer and implementation.” There are lessons to be learned from our experience in transferring RUSLE technology.

When the Agricultural Research Service came to SWCS asking if we would be willing to transfer RUSLE technology cooperatively, the first thing we did was ask ourselves if such technology transfer was within the scope of our mission “to advocate the protection, enhancement, and wise use of soil, water, and related natural resources.” Our reply was, obviously, “yes!” And, when ARS came to us to discuss the prospect of transferring WEPP technology, our answer to the question regarding its relationship to our mission was still “yes.” However, both ARS and SWCS had learned some lessons and discovered new questions in our experiences with RUSLE technology transfer. SWCS fully supported ARS’ decision to transfer WEPP via the Internet. We hope that method proves to be effective, but the few months it’s been on Internet is not a sufficient amount of time to evaluate its effectiveness.

Whether SWCS has been effective in distributing the software “off-the-shelf” is difficult to know. What would one compare it to? At first glance, one would expect the market to be quite large for such software. We thought so. Of course, the largest market for RUSLE technology in the United States is the Natural Resources Conservation Service and conservation districts. Distribution to the nearly 3,000 field offices and district offices was done through a special training agreement between NRCS and SWCS and is not counted in “off-the-shelf” sales. The RUSLE market for most agencies and companies that work closely with NRCS and districts was a shadow market. Until NRCS implemented the technology in its field offices, there was no need for them to use the new technology. NRCS implemented the technology this past summer. We learned that the foreign market was severely limited because RUSLE was not available in metric—units which, we understand, will be corrected with RUSLE 2.0.

Whenever ARS has spoken publicly regarding its view of our effectiveness in transferring RUSLE technology, their comments have been supportive and complimentary. If there is any doubt, readers are invited to contact Dr. George Foster, director of the USDA-ARS, National Sedimentation Laboratory at Oxford, Mississippi, who is currently responsible for RUSLE implementation within ARS.

The RUSLE product offered by SWCS is not what would otherwise be considered a public domain version. As pointed out in the article, SWCS members and staff have worked hard with ARS to incorporate improvements to the original model, produce and distribute detailed instructions and background information, conduct certification tests, and incorporate data from other
agencies. That, along with the development of courses and instructional materials, has added value to the original model.

As for SWCS’s future in distributing RUSLE, our current commitment to ARS is to continue our involvement through the development and implementation of RUSLE 1.05 in 1996.

—Timothy J. Kautza,
Director of Program Development, SWCS

To the editor:

I received the September-October issue of the Journal on the same day as I received the September-October issue of Land and Water—The Magazine of Natural Resource Management and Restoration.

When my year’s membership expires with SWCS I will not be renewing it mainly because the Journal contains way too much research and not enough practical articles on what is going on in land and water resource management. I have been a member for about 30 years and enough is enough.

In 1994 I retired from the Soil Conservation Service and am now employed in a private-sector job as environmental consultant. The Land and Water magazine really is just what I need.

You should take a look at Land and Water magazine and redesign the Journal to make it more practical for the natural resource people in the field. I think a large number of my friends in SCS (now Natural Resources Conservation Service) would agree with me.

—William G. Moulton,
Gardiner, Maine

To the editor:

It was good to see that the concepts and practicalities espoused by the Association for Better Land Husbandry strike sparks as far away as China [see Pen Points, 50(5):414].

We are preparing a paper that we hope the Journal might publish in the next few months, about some of the details of ‘better land husbandry’ so as to disperse some of the mystery provoked by the second half of Li and Liu’s letter.

Suffice it to say at present that the idea of ‘land husbandry’ is not new: in fact it’s probably almost as old as agriculture itself, at least amongst farmers concerned about the life of their soils and other natural resources and how best to manage them. What is new is that we technical professionals are beginning to learn what perhaps resource-caring farmers have always been indicating to us but which we haven’t picked up (perhaps because we have not been listening attentively enough); the health of the land is paramount not only to maintaining its productivity but also, as a consequence, to being able to minimize the occurrence of erosion and runoff.

A key to new thinking is to make some inversions of the ‘conventional wisdom,’ such as the following:

• We should be paying much more attention to the quality of the soil that remains in situ (into which the next crop will be planted and be expected to grow), and paying a lesser proportion of our attention to trying vainly to establish erosion-loss/yield relationships in the hope of scaring the daylights out of policy makers and farmers to make them ‘do something’ (but what?)

For the soil that remains in place, good soil architecture aids water infiltration; together with good plant nutrition, this allows good vegetal production, which itself makes for good cover; the rainwater enters where it falls, the soil stays where it is. Looked at in this way, it is little wonder that physical (or even biological) barriers to water and soil already on the move don’t have the yield-increasing effects we have imputed—but seldom have been able to demonstrate.

• Another mental ‘flip’ is to perceive ‘better land husbandry’ as being not primarily about ‘soil and water conservation,’ but about looking after land. When you get it right, a consequence of having achieved (rather than ‘done’) conservation of the rainwater and soil means you need have little worry about runoff and erosion except in infrequent but dire weather conditions. Idealistic maybe, but it works.

Of all people, resource-poor small farmers in the tropics probably are those most vitally concerned that their lands be well-husbanded, since their very survival usually depends on it. Their greatest problem, it seems to me, is that they cannot find appropriate and effective advice about how best to husband their land in the face of the increasing pressures on them—with an eye to both the present and the future—among all the soil-conservation-specific recommendations that we have been producing.

Only farmers’ reactions to our suggestions about better husbandry can tell us whether our heads are in the clouds or our feet on the ground. But there is a growing number of positive examples across the tropics and sub-tropics (at least) to show that there is a whole new field of policy, research, and advisory work on improving land husbandry that is begging for attention, not just from us enthusiastic technical specialists but from farmers too.

—T.F. Shasom,
Chairman, Association for Better Land Husbandry Dorset, England

You can send your contributions to Pen Points via email:
swcs@swc.netins.net.

Even more resources from SWCS are now available on the World Wide Web. With a connection to the Internet, you can get information about CPESC, membership, news, and the Journal of Soil and Water Conservation.

Questions and comments by e-mail at the address above and our World Wide Web information can be reached with Netscape or Mosaic at http://www.netins.net/showcase/swcs/.

ERRATA

Concerning the “State Soils of the United States” article [JSWC 50(4):340-342] by Loyal A. Quandt and Frank C. Watts—Orville W. Bidwell, professor emeritus from Kansas State University, indicated that the Harney silt loam was established by legislation in April 1990 rather than in December 1990. This results in the following change in Table 1: The Kansas state soil is in a tie for 7th with the Kentucky state soil rather than in a tie for 9th with the Michigan state soil.

Concerning the article “GIS as an aid to soil surveys and land evaluation in Greece” by S.P. Theocaropoulos, D.A. Davidson, J.N. McArthur, and F. Tsouloucha [JSWC 50(2):118-124—Figure 1 is a map which shows the country of Macedonia. The security council of the United Nations passed resolution 817 in 1993 regarding the admission to the United Nations of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). Therefore, the name FYROM should appear where Macedonia appears on the map.

Goals and strategies of wise users and private property rights proponents revealed in new book

Let the People Judge: Wise Use and the Private Property Rights Movement, edited by John D. Echeverria and Raymond Booth Eby, is a book containing a collection of articles that public land managers will benefit from as will leaders of groups who see wise users and private property rights extremists as adversaries.

The book’s title, “Let the People Decide,” is a phrase borrowed from material published by the founder of the U.S. Forest Service—Gifford Pinchot—who said in 1907 “conservation means the wise use of the earth and its resources for the lasting good of men.” Pinchot undoubtedly would be disappointed to learn that his statement on the significance of wise use of natural resources today has been corruptly applied to label an ideology that more appropriately should be called the public lands misuse or abuse movement.

Environmental advocates hold a view that natural resource regulations benefit society. In contrast, wise use movement (WU) and private property rights (PPR) proponents believe such regulations burden society. In fact, resource protection and management rules both benefit and burden society. Furthermore, individual rights regarding land use cannot be uncoupled from responsibilities. Extremism among regulation burden vs. benefit adversaries and property rights vs. responsibilities advocates account for the ongoing battle that is being viciously played out among lawmakers from the congressional to the county level.

As stated by authors of several of the book’s chapters, the WU and PPR movements are expressions of a sinister alliance of government leaders and industry working to gut congressional acts on endangered species, clean water, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness, and national forest management. They say these movements perpetuate “give away” public grazing and mining policies and foster new private property owner rights protection at the state and national levels. They claim these “grassroots” citizen actions are being fomented by resource extractive industrialists who would benefit from relaxing of public land management rules and from the weakening of regulation of private lands. They perceive the gospel of these movements as a narrow view of the “absolute rights” of land owners and users preached by charismatically anti-government stooges of resource-extracting industries who are motivated by insatiable greed and who blame the fears of farmers, ranchers, and loggers about loss of land-based income or jobs. Readers looking for a balanced discussion of private property rights and responsibilities should look elsewhere because the purpose of this book clearly is to increase awareness and reader actions intended to counteract or neutralize the wise use movement. Thus, persons wishing to find statements in support of wise use, private property rights beliefs instead should examine books or articles by movement proponents Ron Arnold, Alan Gottlieb, Richard Epstein, or Peggy Riegle.

The 369-page book, edited by National Audubon Society staffers John D. Echeverria and Raymond Booth Eby, contains articles by thirty-three authors ranging from political scientists and lawyers to journal editors and environmental activists. The articles are quite readable, for the most part, and are grouped by major theme. Thus, the opening section describes the agenda and tactics of the so-called wise use movement while the final group of articles in the book includes “how to” ideas for those wishing to combat WU or PPR propaganda. Another collection of articles details battles over mining, grazing, logging, and wildlife protection. Still other groups of articles provide insights on constitutional “taking” of private property.

Throughout the collection, article writers give examples illustrating their belief that there is seldom common ground for agreement about common lands, particularly in the western United States (e.g., northern spotted owl vs. old-growth forests). East of the Mississippi, as pointed out by other authors, the focus of the debate is government restrictions on privately owned land (e.g., Lucas vs. South Carolina Coastal Council).

Some of the authors are of the opinion that the wise use movement is an extension of 1780’s Jeffersonian view that democracy and social progress is derived from economic freedom. Others characterize the movement as a 1980s backlash to the environmental movement. Considered as a whole, a reader of this collection of articles might conclude that these older ideas have been married with modern eco-tactics thereby creating a powerful force that has become very important in shaping today’s programs and policies for public and private land management.

The movements discussed in the book will be involved with policies for public or private land management. The movements discussed in the book are likely to continue to gain strength in an era of growing hostility toward perceived excessive government control over individual freedom. They could be potent shapers of resource management policy well into the next century.

Whether a person is critical or sympathetic to WU and PPR tenets, resource management professionals and policymakers must become more familiar with the goals and strategies of the leaders of these movements. Therefore, persons who now are or in the future will be involved with policies or programs for public or private land management should review this collection of articles.

The book is available from Island Press for $27.50 (paperback) or 49.95 (hardcover).

—Review by Donald Last, Professor and Extension Specialist, College of Natural Resources, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

General


Agriculture


Bioreservation

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Ecology


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Soil Management and Conservation in the Tropics

Small farmers living in the tropics comprise a large sector of the world population. They operate in relatively stable subsistence agricultural systems using traditional technologies designed to achieve sustained crop production at very low yields and with minimum land degradation. However, there is a growing awareness that sustainability of subsistence agriculture is steadily deteriorating as a result of rapid growing population and over-exploitation of the land. Given the various limitations affecting tropical agriculture, few soil management and conservation options remain. This book explores potential avenues for developing strategies to maintain sustainability of tropical agriculture. To maintain sustainability, however, significant improvements in crop production must come from improved soil management practices focusing on soil and water conservation, improved crop management, and the use of cropping systems designed to reduce soil erosion and maintain soil productivity.


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Land Use


