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LAND USE TRENDS IN THE 1980'S*

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JUN 4 1981

The topic you have given me suggests I am expected to play the role of the prophet. The first definition my dictionary gives for prophet is "One who speaks for another, especially for God or a god." Thus to prophesy is "To utter with or as with divine inspiration". I cannot claim to be qualified to do this, but I do notice that the whiter my whiskers get, the more accepting people seem to be when I try to open the window to the future.

Before we can look at likely changes in land uses I think we have to talk about the kinds of land we have to use. We begin by recognizing that for us there are fundamentally two categories of land on the planet--theirs and ours.

I do not propose to concentrate on theirs--and by that I mean all the surface of the earth outside of the United States, but I do point out to you we do have concern over what they do with their land. We do care if more land becomes desert. We do care if the agricultural land base outside the United States is improved or allowed to deteriorate. We do care when political arrangements discourage good land use and bring lowered land productivity. We even care how settlement patterns take place. Witness the recent interest about Israeli settlements.

The point I want to make is we do care about what others do with their land. There is a similar concern others have about what we do with our land--especially since we have such

*Presented to Cape Girardeau County Soil and Water Conservation District annual meeting on 21 March 1980.

an unusually large chunk of the good agricultural land of this planet. So it isn't as simple as everybody just worries about his own.

Now let's look at our land--that in the United States of America. That, for each of us, comes in three categories--ours, yours, and mine. I am referring to the status of land ownership. Some is owned by the public, the government at some level. Some is privately owned and some lies in between, as Indian reservations which are, I guess you could say, group owned. Here, too, it is not as simple as the government worries about government land, Indians worry about reservations, and private owners worry about private land.

Obviously, the people through government do concern themselves with the use of public lands. The people's wishes, if expressed, do have impact on how public officials manage public land. The Forest Service will try to give us more rabbits and fewer trees if that is what we want. The Bureau of Land Management will give us less grazing and more recreation land if they are convinced that's what we want.

The Indians are less than sure their land is all theirs when it becomes valuable, but that's not now a big problem in Missouri. I am unaware of there being any Indian land here.

So that gets us down to your land and my land--that which is privately owned. It turns out you don't just worry about your land and I just worry about mine. We worry about each other. You do worry about your neighbor if he is doing something on his land that hurts you.

As a matter of fact, it turns out our land, the privately held land, isn't as much ours as we sometimes think.

The state retains the right to determine who gets your property if you fail to leave a will.

The state has the taxing power and it uses it. I've heard no suggestion it be given up.

The state has the right of eminent domain. That's the right to take our land for public purpose providing just compensation is paid.

The state has police power and it can exercise it in planning and zoning and have no need to pay compensation.

I am not enough of a legal theorist to tell you how the Corps of Engineers or EPA get into the act, but we know they do have impact on the use of private land.

We live in a society in which there is increasing public interest in how land is used, both public lands and private lands. I do not expect that interest to lessen and I do expect that in the 1980's there will be continuing and heated debate on public policy for the use of both public land and private land.

I do not expect to find the 1980's having us transfer massive amounts of land from private to public ownership, but we will debate--and forcefully--how we use public lands and how we can use public lands so as to encourage more acceptable patterns of private land use.

There will be in the 1980's much public debate on private land use. It is the public debate on the use of private land on which I want to concentrate because it is the debate which seems to touch us most forcefully and it is the debate which seems the newest and to some the most sinister.

The debate on public policy with respect to private land shows up in several ways.

National Agricultural Lands Study

In response to growing expressions of concern about the availability of agricultural land, the United States Department of Agriculture and the Council on Environmental Quality have jointly initiated an 18 months federal study of the availability of agricultural land--particularly prime farm lands--and their conversion to other uses. The study is attempting to evaluate the economic, environmental, and social effects of the conversion or retention of agricultural land and to ultimately make recommendations for consideration by federal, state, and local governments.

The study is intended to look at the quality, quantity, and ownership patterns of the agricultural land base. It will also look at the current pressures on the agricultural land base.

This will likely mean consideration of such things as urban and industrial development, transportation, and energy requirements.

The study will also attempt to evaluate the economic environmental and social effects of agricultural land conversion and retention.

Another aspect of the study will be to attempt to assess the impact of federal programs and policies on agricultural land and then to look at the combination of actions at the federal, state, and local levels which might be taken to assure adequate agricultural land availability.

The whole study is to be completed January 1, 1981, and it is to be presumed that the President will then draw whatever recommendations for action he thinks appropriate.

RCA

The United States Department of Agriculture has been mandated by the Congress to take a serious look at itself, what it has been doing, and what it might do in order to improve conservation on privately held land. Public Law 95-192, more formally known as the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act of 1977, is what most of us call RCA. You have a slide tape presentation here tonight which is going to handle the explanation of RCA much more eloquently than can I and I will defer to it in a moment, but before I do that, I want to make the following assertions:

1. The 1980's are likely to be a time of growing awareness of the unacceptability of our using our soil and water resources in any way other than as careful stewards. The tenth annual report of the Council on Environmental Quality indicates that despite investment by the federal government of more than 20 billion dollars in support of conservation practices since 1935, erosion of agricultural lands remains one of the nation's most serious problems.
2. There will be a great deal of discussion of how we develop specific measures that are appropriate to help us do a better job of conservation. Everybody is for

conservation in the abstract. It is just when we get down to the specifics that we find it difficult to develop a satisfactory system.

3. Greater concern over the retention for agriculture use of land with good agricultural characteristics will make it harder to convert farm land.
4. It is possible that slowly we are inching toward a no erosion ethic, maybe even making erosion illegal.
5. More farm land will be used for energy production.
6. Non-farm people will be becoming more interested in public policy affecting farm land.
7. During the 80's there will be multiple opportunities for each of us as citizens to express ourselves about the issues of how we shall develop and put into effect effective and acceptable public policy regarding the uses of private land. The slide set you are about to see will give you one very specific opportunity to express yourselves. Utilize that opportunity. The issues we face are:
 - (a) What level of care must we give to private land in order to be able to survive?
 - (b) What mixture of enticement and coercion is appropriate?
 - (c) What is the appropriate level or mixture of levels of governmental action necessary to assure that America continues to render her abundance?