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THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND: WILL THE U.S. EMBRACE THE LANDCARE MOVEMENT

LANDCARE- A CONSERVATIONIST'S PERSPECTIVE

Gary W. Mast
NACD President

This Land is Your Land: Will the U.S. embrace the Landcare Movement

Landcare-A Conservationist's perspective
Gary W. Mast, NACD President

Thank you, Larry. It is my pleasure to be here this morning to discuss Landcare. Earlier this month we had Brian Scarsbrick, CEO of Landcare Australia, address our annual NACD meeting on the subject of Landcare. He did and outstanding job of explaining this concept to our audience. And he and Landcare ideas were well received by our folks.

Since I served on the US delegation last May to visit Australia to study Landcare and attend a Landcare conference, I have been serving with a group of folks who are discussing how we might adapt the Landcare initiative underway there and help advance the cause of conservation in this country. I also serve as President of NACD so I am especially excited about how these efforts could tie into what conservation districts are doing across the USA.

Providing leadership for national conservation policy will always be a big part of NACD's way of determining the USA conservation picture, but I am excited about this new possibility for promoting conservation in our country. With the general public, there is little recognition or ownership of conservation activities in America. There is a tremendous amount of work done by our three thousand districts and our conservation partners including the several million landowners and users across the nation each year. Soil and water conservation districts are codified into state law and are locally led by citizens which results in lots of community involvement, even beyond the cooperating landowners. There are other groups of citizens that are in existence doing important conservation work - RC& D's, watershed groups, environmental clubs, CORE 4 groups and no-till clubs to name a few.

But the work done by these groups is known and recognized by less than 10% of the population in America. Why should we care? Because people only support, either with their legislators or with their money, that which they know and understand, or at the very least, recognize as valuable. We know that a healthy environment is an important value for many Americans. Yet we are failing to tap into that value, to enhance the crucial work we do.

In Australia, they seem to be more successful in tapping into that shared value in their society. As you have heard here this morning, they have formalized a conservation movement brand called "Landcare." The brand has a unique logo consisting of two hands brought together, with the shape of Australia in the palms of the hands. Landcare in Australia consists of many government and private partnerships in awareness campaigns and environmental repair projects. Eighty-three per cent of Australians recognize the Landcare logo and programs.

While I believe our conservation programs are stronger than those in Australia, we can learn much from that country about relating to the general public and obtaining private sector support for conservation. We should stop being America's "best kept secret!" We

need to increase the public recognition of our efforts and enhance those efforts with celebrity promotion, private enterprise partnership and endorsement, and additional opportunities for citizens to be actively involved.

I believe we can find ways to use the Landcare ideas and help advance the full conservation agenda here in the USA. It means that we will need to work together to form appropriate organizations and coalitions to make it happen. But we have an advantage in that many organizations and leaders are already in place. We can build on these to find common ground with one another and with new people who care for our land. Our general public needs to know the purpose and value of environmental, forestry, and conservation projects, programs and initiatives. For too long, many people have taken for granted the public benefits such as cleaner water, healthier soils and forests, improved productivity, open space, improved wildlife habitat and the many other outcomes of the conservation work in this country. Landcare can both help tell the story and invite participation of all who are concerned.

I can illustrate my point by telling a story based upon an ancient Asian legend. Four blind men in the village were friends and spent their days discussing things about the world. One day the topic of "elephant" came up. None had ever "seen" an elephant, so they asked to be taken to the elephant to find out what it was. One touched the side, another the tail, another the trunk and the fourth touched the elephant's leg. After their tour, they got together to discuss what they had "seen."

"The elephant is just like a wall," said the first blind man. "No, it is like a rope," said another. "You are both wrong, said the third. "It is like a large snake!" The fourth argued it was like a tree trunk.

Sometimes we, in caring for the land, get blinded by our perspective. We tell all those around us about what we see the problem and solutions to be. Landcare can help us all describe the whole picture, and an elephant has more appeal than its tail! The big picture for America is that the land is <u>your</u> land and it needs <u>your</u> care!

We will continue to study and learn more about this highly successful public and private conservation partnership and how Landcare might be adapted for use in the United States. NACD is willing to play a role, along with others, on this initiative in our country. Greater efforts in marketing conservation, which is one of NACD's main goals, can only strengthen and improve on conservation success in America.