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State Planning
Board

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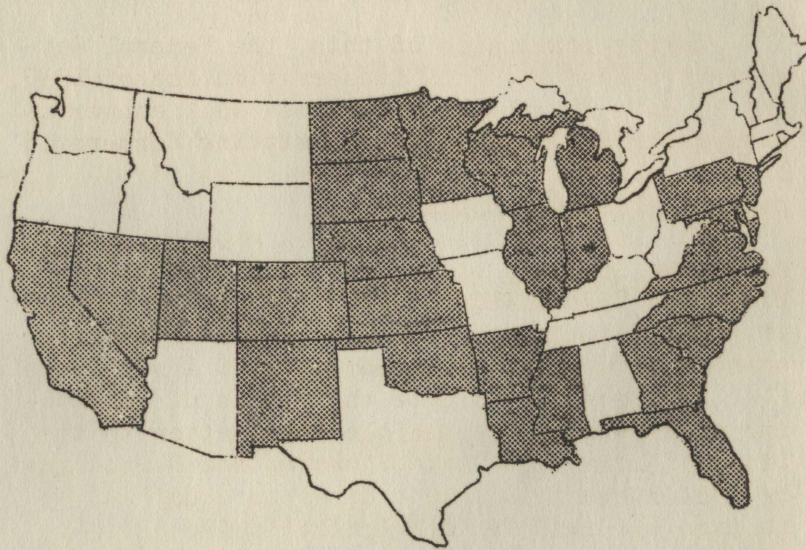
STATE LIBRARY COMMISSION OF IOWA
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SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS
DES MOINES, IOWA 50319
for Iowa?

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Iowa State Planning Board

SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

26 States had Passed Enabling
Acts by November 15, 1938



By November 22, 1938, 103 districts had been formed in 23 states. These districts covered approximately 54 million acres. Many more areas have petitioned for districts and are now in process of development.

(Cover photo: aerial view west of Knoxville, Iowa.)

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FOREWORD
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The serious rate at which erosion is progressing has been particularly noticed in the last few years because of an increased knowledge of manifestations such as dust storms and deep gullies.

Taking cognizance of this, the Federal Government passed the Soil Conservation Act of 1935, and to date 26 states have passed soil conservation districts legislation permitting farmers to organize locally controlled districts for the purpose of erosion control.

The laws in these 26 states are patterned after the Standard State Soil Conservation Districts Law, which was prepared at the request of representatives of a large number of states working with the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

In order to evaluate this means of combatting erosion and its possible application to the State of Iowa, the State Planning Board was asked by the Governor to make a detailed study and measure the reaction of representative agricultural groups. As a result of this study, made by a special Committee on Soil Conservation, it is concluded that:

Iowa's most important natural resource, the soil, is threatened by erosion the seriousness of which cannot be ignored.

Individual action, in the opinion of the farmer himself, is not adequate to withstand this threat.

Enabling legislation permitting farmers to engage, on a comprehensive scale, in such soil conservation measures as they themselves choose, is considered desirable by this committee as well as by the majority of the farmers contacted in the course of an extensive effort to obtain their opinions.

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REPORT OF THE SOIL CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

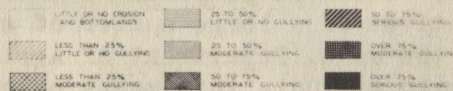
Reasons for Studying the Soil Conservation Districts Plan

Four main reasons prompted an intensive study in Iowa during the past year of the proposed soil conservation districts plan.

First - Iowa has an erosion problem. Although Iowa has 25 per cent of the Grade A land in the United States, erosion (according to a statewide reconnaissance survey) has destroyed about 30 per cent of the original surface soil since farming began here. Unless this rate of erosion is retarded, farmers will find it difficult to maintain production at satisfactory levels.

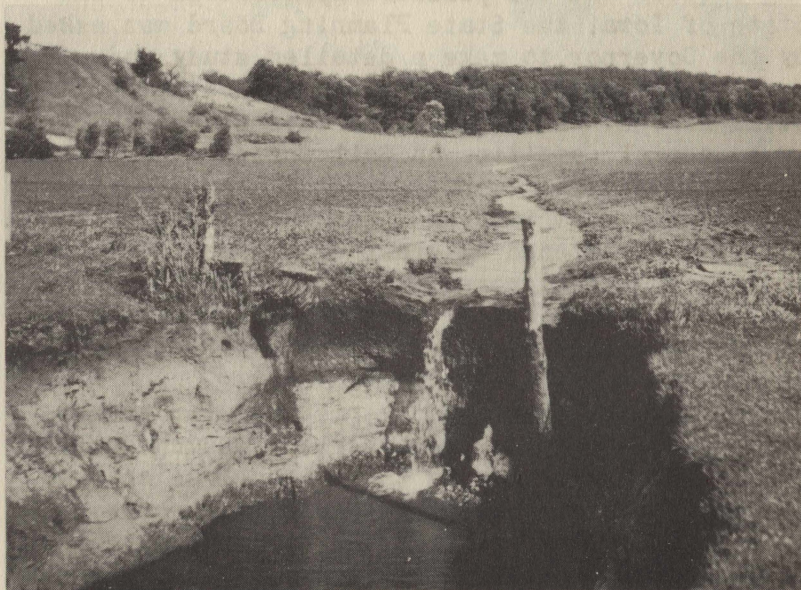
Second - Thoroughly good erosion control is not a one-man job. For one thing, scattered attempts at erosion control simply cannot equal the results of a community-wide program backed by popular enthusiasm and developed by local leadership. Another reason is that wind and rain are natural forces. They follow no pattern laid down by man. They respect neither fence nor property lines. Soil carried by water moves from the crests of the ridges down to the bottom lands along the streams. Therefore, if the man on the hillside does nothing to hold soil and water where they belong, there's nothing the man down below can do but grin and bear it when his crops and good soil are buried by sand and gravel and raw clay from eroded fields higher up.

Third - No action has been taken in Iowa which would permit local groups within watershed, erosion problem, or other areas to form legal districts and assume the responsibility of formulating and carrying out a practical and effective



% - estimated
top soil loss
from erosion.

Iowa has an erosion problem.



Natural forces respect neither fence nor property lines.

soil conservation program. The U. S. Department of Agriculture has recognized that its assistance in the field of soil conservation and flood control will be most effective if carried on in organized groups. It has adopted the policy of directing the major part of its activities in these fields into those states and communities where such local groups have been organized.

Fourth - The enactment of some form of soil conservation districts law would permit local organized groups to take care of those phases of the conservation problem which cannot be effectively handled by individual action. The enactment of such legislation would also place Iowa in a position to secure the maximum financial and technical assistance from the U. S. Department of Agriculture for erosion and flood control work.

Early Development and General Provisions of Soil Conservation Districts Legislation

The need of enabling legislation in the states, permitting the organization of soil conservation districts, became evident soon after the passage of the U. S. Soil Conservation Act of 1935. A standard or model soil conservation districts law was then prepared by the U. S. Department of Agriculture at the request of and in cooperation with representatives of a large number of states. This standard act was sent to the states for study and to be used as a guide in preparing suitable state legislation.

The districts plan studied in Iowa provides that 25 or more farmers may petition for a district. A state committee would be set up to receive petitions, hold public hearings in proposed districts, conduct referendums, and so on. If the farmers vote to form a district, then

three commissioners would be elected by the people to serve as the governing body of the district. After a district has been formed, co-operative agreements would be made with individual farmers, and assistance would be given in the control of erosion. After a period of time, if it be found that the practices followed by certain farmers tended to nullify the erosion control work of other farmers, the plan provides that a referendum may be held to decide on the question of land-use regulations. If regulations were passed, they would apply to all farmers in the district. A court of arbitration would be formed to consider cases in which the following of land-use regulations would impose unnecessary hardship upon any individual in the district. Provision is made in the plan for discontinuance of the district if so voted by the people of the district.

It should be noted that a soil conservation districts law, if it followed the model prepared by the U. S. Department of Agriculture, would be merely enabling legislation, and would not make the formation of any districts compulsory. Such legislation would make it possible for farmers to join together and form legal districts for the purpose of soil conservation. After a district has been formed, cooperation by the farmers is voluntary unless they see fit at some later date to vote more stringent controls upon themselves.



Above -- Soil erosion in Iowa.

Below -- Contour farming in Iowa.



Object of the Present Study

The purpose of the study made by the Soil Conservation Committee of the Iowa State Planning Board was to secure the opinions of representative people regarding the desirability of such legislation and to secure suggestions for changes and improvements in the proposed Standard Act. The general provisions of the Standard Act, as outlined above, were used as a basis for this study.

Sources of Opinion

Material outlining the purpose and provisions of the districts plan was presented to the following in order that they might know of the basic provisions and record their opinions and suggestions:

1. The County Agricultural Planning Committee in each of the counties in Iowa.
2. The Farmers Union.
3. The Iowa Farm Bureau Federation.
4. The Iowa State Grange
5. A special questionnaire was prepared and submitted to all farmers in Franklin Township in Marion County, Lincoln Township in Page County, and Grand Meadow Township in Clayton County.

The County Agricultural Planning Committees who were asked to assist in studying the suggested legislation were set up two years ago and consisted of farmers who had an intimate knowledge of local conditions or problems connected with erosion and land-use. Through two years of effort and study they had developed recommendations of rotations which they felt should be followed in their counties under the different soil conditions if crop yields are to be maintained and serious erosion prevented. Because these committees consisted of representative farm

leaders in every county who had already studied the local conservation problem, the State Planning Board Committee on Soil Conservation requested that they submit suggestions regarding the soil conservation plan.

Opinions

Erosion is clearly recognized as a problem in Iowa. A brief summary (*) of the answers which were given to the questions on erosion included in the questionnaire distributed to the organizations and individuals supplying opinions follows:

One of the first questions was: "Are there any erosion problems in your area or on your farm?" Almost 100 per cent of the people contacted reported that erosion is a problem in greater or lesser degree.

Another question asked was whether or not it was desirable to make a special effort to conserve the soil by reducing any erosion now occurring. The answers to this question were almost unanimously in the affirmative.

The question following this was: "Do you think that soil conservation and effective erosion control can be accomplished by individual action?" The majority of reports indicated that it could not be handled by individual action alone.

Another item which indicated the seriousness and extent of erosion was the number of reports showing that there were many fields on rolling lands which were once considered highly productive from which the top soil has been washed off, leaving light-colored clay spots or small ditches.

*The complete report of the operations sub-committee is on file at the office of the Iowa State Planning Board, Des Moines, Iowa.

Another question was: "Do you have any small areas or entire farms in your community that have been partly or wholly abandoned because of loss of top soil and serious gullying?" Many reports answered this question in the affirmative.

The answers to these questions in general confirm the report of the reconnaissance survey in Iowa, indicating the seriousness and extent of erosion in the state.

The last question asked previous to definite questions regarding the proposed act itself inquired whether or not some form of enabling legislation, which would provide a means for cooperative action and which would set forth a procedure for establishing areas with defined powers and procedure for soil conservation purposes, would be desirable.

Answers to this question indicated that there is general agreement as to the desirability of such a step. A substantial majority of the individuals and committees contacted were convinced of the necessity for cooperative action to control erosion.

The foregoing statements and reports of farmers' opinions confirm two important things:

(1) Erosion is a problem in Iowa.

(2) A majority of the people who have made a thorough study of the Standard Soil Conservation Districts Law, as modified to meet Iowa conditions, have indicated definitely that some plan along this line providing for cooperative action is desirable.



Gullies on the hillsides.



Silt on the lowlands.

N O T E

This bulletin is based on the findings and report of the Soil Conservation Committee, whose members (see opposite page) were appointed by the Governor at the request of the Iowa State Planning Board.

In case any specific legislation may be considered by the Iowa General Assembly on the subject treated in these pages, it is respectfully suggested that:

(1) The Standard State Soil Conservation Districts Law, which was prepared at the request of representatives of a large number of states working with the United States Department of Agriculture, be used as a basis for consideration.

(2) The opinions expressed by Iowa farmers, and summarized in the complete report of the operations sub-committee of the Soil Conservation Committee, be considered in altering this "standard act" to fit Iowa's requirements and the sentiment of those most directly concerned.

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