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NATURAL RESOURCES

Final Report to the
GOVERNOR'S CONFERENCE ON IOWA IN THE YEAR 2000

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Preamble

The keynote speaker for the first plenary session of the Natural Resources Task Force Workshop laid out some trends for the participants to look at. Calling himself our fortune teller, soothsayer, predictor or forecaster, Gerald Schnepf developed eight high probability trends for us to evaluate, agree with, disagree with, refine or discard. The trends were:

A slow down of the decision-making process to allow for increased public evaluation and participation.

The establishment of a definite natural resource "Quality of Life" goal.

Improved projections of our natural resource demands and workable techniques for natural resource planning which includes Iowa's social and economic goals.

Decrease in the number of historical rights associated with land ownership.

A greatly improved educational system to impart an awareness of our environment and natural resources use.

Increased economic pressure on our resources as younger Iowans assume a greater responsibility for the increasing number of Iowans in the older age categories.

Increased pressure on both public and private lands for broader and more intensive management.

Our three panel responders had interesting and different things to say in response. Our workshop heard from them such thought provoking ideas as:

---Goals can and should be constant. The plan or strategy to achieve those goals should be flexible and open to change to allow for constant variables.

---We must be aware of and guard against making irreversible decisions. In Iowa most of our natural resource decisions are not irreversible. However, sometimes private decisions have irreversible effects. For example, the loss of top soil in this year's rain is irreversible, and private decisions about soil conservancy practices irreversibly influenced that condition.

---Loss of soil also has irreversible impact on water quality--since irreplaceable top soil becomes mud in river bottoms and locked-in chemicals pollute the water.

---Nobody ever really owns any part of planet earth--we are tenants for a short span of time.

---It has been said that when we passed eighty million population in this country, we became victims of an irreversible trend.

---A Michigan legislator has said that Iowa's land should be under the control of a national trust. It is a precious resource needed by our whole country, and actually the world.

---Don't get too far ahead of the public's understanding and acceptance if you want to foster real dialogue and public support.

---We humans live in an unreal, manufactured world. The other world is a world of air, water, land and non-human creatures. That's the real world.

---The dilemma of this era is that we know our potential for reproduction and consumption is infinite, but our resources are finite.

---In Europe in medieval times the village commons, a green area in the middle of the village, served as the common pasture where villagers grazed their cattle and swine; that livestock fed the village. The commons disappeared when medieval versions of the entrepreneur increased the size of their own herds and destroyed the common pasture by using it for their maximum personal gain. If we look at our productive earth as a "commons" can we solve the paradox or will we too destroy our "commons"?

When the session was thrown open for general discussion in response to the questions the panel had raised, it was immediately apparent that preservation of Iowa's precious and productive land through good soil conservancy practices was what people wanted to talk about, and they wanted to weigh the costs against the benefits. The group talked about the costs of terracing, holding and contouring to the farmer, and the possibility of partially subsidizing farmers for such practices out of the general fund, plus granting ten years for payment of some of the costs, in the way urban dwellers are granted ten years to pay special assessments for improvements.

Questions came. Is there money for that kind of use in the general fund? If it seems there hasn't been enough progress in developing good soil conservancy practices in the last thirty years under the voluntary program, and we don't want mandatory controls, and we don't want ten year assessments, how about tax incentives for individual cooperation? If farmers economically do need to use all the tillable soil, how about the state reimbursing them for restoring hedgerows, marshlands and greenery?

There was general agreement that the cost of doing what we said we want to do would be fantastically high, and also agreement that we must use present money differently if we want to get some place different.

A question about whether or not the terracing machinery used now needs to be redesigned because it is difficult to use brought agreement from farmers that indeed it does need redesigning. One ex-farmer said that his completely terraced farm was a showpiece but so expensive to maintain that he quit. He went on to say that many farmers are dangerously close to quitting now, and too many controls might push them over the edge.

The group discussed other practices, such as minimum tillage and its various advantages and disadvantages. We broke up into small groups to continue a very spirited discussion, after a plea that we use Iowa NOW so that Iowa as we want it will be here for the citizens of 2000.

Participants in the discussion groups worked through eight trends:

Trends

- A. More urban and rural development on agricultural land
- B. Maximum cultivation of the land
- C. Corporate rather than family farm ownership
- D. More highway construction; abandonment of more railroads
- E. Meeting recreational needs by constructing large, multi-purpose dams and encouraging the use of power vehicles
- F. Relaxing air quality standards to meet the current energy crisis
- G. Seek out more acceptable places to dump solid wastes
- H. Create new agencies to deal with natural resources planning and regulation

There was a surprisingly large area of agreement on the probability and the desirability of the trends and considerable agreement as to what changes would be needed. The following pages record the consensus reached by delegates in the natural resources task force.

TREND A

On the trend toward more urban and rural development of agricultural land, most people agreed that the trend would probably continue, although they thought it quite undesirable.

They want the top two or three soil classes kept for agricultural purposes - with land less suitable for cultivation put to other uses: as industrial and commercial sites, as recreation and wilderness areas. They want a strong comprehensive state land-use policy setting guidelines which would be implemented and enforced at the local level. No consensus was reached on limiting industrial growth.

Along with population control, participants called for rational development of our urban areas, revitalization of the inner cities to make them alive and attractive places for people. In this connection we should take a new look at zoning laws to see whether they are accomplishing their intended purpose.

Most felt there should be tax incentives to farmers to keep their Class I and II land in agricultural use and disincentives for converting it to non-agricultural uses.

There was a widespread feeling that the people are excluded from government. They want more citizen involvement--at the planning stage--not to review plans which have already been made by the experts.

They want more education in all forms--through the media--in the schools--in the colleges and teacher-training programs. They want advertising to help in the education process - getting the many isolated pieces of information into comprehensible form.

In the plenary session this morning we defined this goal for Iowa: The preservation of Iowa's best agricultural land for agricultural purposes and development of all classes of land for the most beneficial use of that land for the maximum number of Iowans - identifying our growth, energy and recreational needs and preserving our forests and wilderness areas.

There was a clear majority in agreement with this goal, although there was a noticeable minority.

TREND B

There was no consensus on the probability of the trend toward maximum cultivation of the land, although a majority agreed that maximum cultivation probably would continue and that it was undesirable. There was a stronger agreement on the need for more research and development on alternate methods of farming: crop rotation, minimum tillage, contouring, terracing, etc. One group wanted "true scientific farming". And they wanted the concept carried into the city on lawns and gardens. This was later defined as natural farming and maximum resource retrieval.

They want honesty of information about chemicals. The farmers asked for honest information, so they aren't forced to rely on salesmen. They objected to the careless use of pesticides and want the health hazards of chemicals exposed.

They want the city people educated to the problems of the farmers and vice versa.

There was strong support for mandatory erosion control..., whether from agriculture, urban, highway industrial or other causes.

One participant urged attention to extractive industries and their impact on the environment.

Another reminded us of the necessity for a resource capability inventory as a first step toward a land-use policy.

Water Quality: The group stressed the need for protecting public and school water supplies. They favor legislation strengthening the law so that testing and surveillance of such water supplies is mandatory and adequate state funds provided to staff and equip the DEQ. to provide surveillance and enforcement of standards protecting our public and school water supplies.

We also need licensing of well-drillers and of wells in rural areas. One delegate said, "Every person living in Iowa has the right to a safe clean water supply."

TREND C

There was some difficulty with the trend toward corporate farming. We don't all understand the same thing by corporate farms. Delegates favored the incorporation to family farms. But they are concerned about large companies buying farms for a tax dodge, or in vertical integration enterprises. Some suggested tax breaks for the small farmer, loans to new farmers and more thorough investigation of the buyer by the seller. Responsibility for decisions on corporate ownership was placed on the farmer, legislator and the banker.

The group showed mixed feelings about corporate ownership of the land, and talked about absentee ownership as much as size.

What we oppose is exploitation--whether carried on by small farmers or by large corporations.

TREND D

The trend toward more highway construction and continued abandonment of railroads was considered fairly probable but undesirable. To improve the situation, it was suggested by one group that we build no more interstates!, by another that we finish the highways already started rather than starting new ones.

One group wanted to maintain the lower speed limits, reassess and possibly close some of the less-used country roads. Some vacated roads should be planted in trees and shrubs and kept in public use. It was suggested we should finish shoulders in some areas of the state for buggies, bicycles, etc. Other suggestions: increased use of buses, expanded rail and river service, mass transit, new types of fuel and cars, one person suggested we outlaw the 8-cylinder car. Strong support for nationalizing the railroad tracks.

One participant said: "We should use county money for something besides roads. Life enhancement and energy should be considered!"

Two groups discussed public ownership of railroad roadbeds, with rolling stock being privately owned.

We agreed the public must watch, and force compliance with state and federal Department of Transportation regulations.

TREND E

On recreational facilities, there was no consensus in the groups about whether or not the trend would continue - the split was almost even - but there was agreement that the trend toward large multi-purpose dams was undesirable. The groups said we should build no more dams! Instead, erosion should be controlled at its source and no dam should be constructed which would flood over 20 acres of land.

Different water resource areas should be designated for different uses: power vehicles in some places, non-powered in others. Everyone should be able to do his own thing.

Various suggestions for developing recreation areas were made. "Bike trails (underlined, exclamation points and asterisks)" said one recorder. Wilderness areas can be used for hiking. Communities should use vacant lots for parks and large cities should create parks in the inner city. School should be used for community recreation all year -- the "lighted schoolhouse" concept.

Schools should educate for lifetime participating sports rather than for spectator sports, using persons in the community as teachers.

The groups strongly approve the present open spaces program and the small watershed program. There was a suggestion to pay farmers for voluntarily making untillable land available for recreational purposes. One county is replacing bridges as they wash out with small dams to contain flooding.

TREND F

There was strong consensus among the groups that the trend toward relaxing air quality standards will continue, and almost equally strong consensus that the trend is undesirable. One group was split on the desirability of the trend.

Several needed changes were mentioned -- such changes as cleaner energy sources, greenbelts with their cleansing abilities, the coal research project, and more general research.

A value change was suggested -- giving up our attachment to gadgets -- which brought the rueful comment that economies, not values, would probably bring about that change.

One participant thought we really don't have much of an air quality problem in Iowa but there was very little agreement with that opinion. Rather, the agreement was that we must hold the line and permit no further relaxation of standards,

As to how the changes can be accomplished, there were not a lot of new ideas. Mentioned were mass transit systems, more technology, more public education, smaller power vehicles and greater conservation of energy.

TREND G

This trend was a surprise. Some participants were confused by the affirmative wording of this item. They assumed they were being asked to choose between alternate sites for dumping instead of looking at alternate way of solid waste management. They want more acceptable places to dump solid wastes. They also want more re-use and recycling.

They want less paper packaging, a ban on throw-away containers, and recycling facilities for glass and paper. "We are a wasteful people," they said.

One recorder added: "A case in point, (holding up a copy of the trend sheet) next time use both sides of the paper!"

One group suggested that Iowans protest the amount of money that goes into armaments by withholding 25 percent of tax payments to the federal government in a state-wide protest and send it to the state treasurer for use in Iowa. A more practical suggestion was to restructure tax rates on transportation of recycled materials.

TREND H

The final trend dealt with the creation of new agencies to handle natural resources matters. All groups believed this to be a very probable trend, and most groups thought it was undesirable.

They recommended combining agencies which deal with the same resource, and suggested a state coordinator over natural resources. An inventory of state agencies should be taken periodically and those which have not accomplished what they were set up to do should be abolished.

One group suggested a Futures Planning Agency and also said "Maintenance" agencies should take a broader view. In defense of agency employees, one participant said that if agencies are reorganized, we should pay better salaries to attract more competent people.

Some general observations can be made, for some messages came through loud and clear from all groups. Whether they were talking about what changes are needed or how such changes can be accomplished, people talked about the need for more education. They talked about education in the formal sense of units in schools, and they talked about more general public education about issues and our need to understand our seemingly conflicting needs and priorities.

Another example of almost complete agreement came in answer to a question asked about all eight trends: Who is responsible for decisions? In every trend, and in all the groups, the answer was first "the people". It was very evident that it was not a God, flag and motherhood statement but what can only be viewed with optimism as an affirmation of the citizen's role in government.

Other responses to the questions about who makes the decisions showed the same kind of uniformity; and almost every group also talked about our elected representatives. Refinements, depending on the subject, talked about agencies, and the various levels of government. There was a strong feeling that the federal and state governments should set guidelines, and such guidelines should be flexible enough for local interpretation, but implementation and control should be at the local level.

There was an almost unanimous consensus that we have too much bureaucracy, and such interesting comments as:

"Public servants who don't perform should be fired" and

"Agencies are self-perpetuating; when the task is over the agency should be abolished" and

"Cut the Corps of Engineers budget."

Such opinions echo the remarks made in this conference by Alvin Toffler and Robert Theobald that people want to take back their government.

As a final action this morning the group voted to include the summary from local and regional meetings as printed in the source book for ideas.

Many individuals expressed their hope the Iowa 2000 would be an on-going process.

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