

Natural Resources

It was Ellen Churchill Semple who wrote; “Man is a product of the earth’s surface. This means not merely that he is a child of the earth, dust of her dust; but that the earth has mothered him, fed him, set him tasks, directed his thoughts, confronted him with difficulties that have strengthened his body and sharpened his wits, given him problems of navigation or irrigation, and at the same time whispered hints for their solution. She has entered into his bone and tissue, into his mind and soul.”

The overriding theme of this quote is that natural resources and human life are inseparable. Man is totally dependent on the land. Too often, many of us forget how strong that connection is. We are all parts of the same natural ecosystem. That relationship will be no less important in the future. People have the unique capability of manipulating parts of the entire ecosystem, but we must always recognize that there are natural limits.

Our roots are in the soil. The plants are the base that supports everything else. Animals called herbivores eat the plants, and animals called carnivores eat the herbivores. This is known as a “biotic pyramid” with people at the top. But there is always a carrying capacity.

The Dust Bowl of the 1930’s has always been a sobering illustration. Poor agricultural practices and years of sustained drought caused the Dust Bowl. Plains grasslands had been deeply plowed and planted to wheat. During the years when there was adequate rainfall, the land produced impressive crops. But as the droughts of the early 1930’s deepened, farmers kept plowing and planting, but nothing would grow. The ground cover that traditionally held the soil in place was gone. The Plains winds whipped across barren fields creating dark clouds of dust for many miles. The skies would darken for days and dust would drift, like snow, covering farmsteads. April 14, 1935 became known as Black Sunday. It was the worse “black blizzard” of the Dust Bowl, causing extensive damage.

The days of the Dust Bowl brought the beginning of national programs for conserving soil and water resources in the United States. On April 27, 1935, only days after Black Sunday, Congress declared soil erosion “a national menace” and established the Soil Erosion Service in the Department of Interior. Since then, the agency was changed to the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) in the Department of Agriculture. Today we have Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) with United States Department of Agriculture.

In May of 1936 a soil conservation district law, which, if passed by states, allowed farmers to set up their own districts to enforce soil conservation practices was proposed. The thinking behind this concept was that new farming methods needed to be accepted and promoted by the owners and operators of the land rather than bureaucrats in Washington. Utah passed the state’s Soil Conservation District Law in March 1937. Today, Utah has 38 soil conservation districts divided into seven zones. Each district holds regular, open meetings to direct natural resource business within their respective areas. District boundaries are based on watershed or county lines.

Cache County has two Soil Conservation Districts. The North Cache District covers the north end of the county and Blacksmith Fork Soil Conservation District directs natural resource activities in the south end of the valley. Our two local districts are among the best in the state. Each district is governed by a board of five supervisors, elected by property owners within the district. Local soil conservation district supervisors are responsible for soil and water conservation programs within their respective areas. District services are available to farmers, urban, suburban and rural dwellers and area governments. Soil and water conservation programs are designed to maintain and improve our food and fiber potential for the benefit of generations to come. Among our primary goals is the prevention of soil erosion and continued improvement with water quality.

Natural resource agencies and organizations exist to help manage limited resources, but there is no particular reason to assume that representatives on these boards are more perceptive than individual stakeholders in prioritizing and maximizing resource services. As such, Cache counties two conservation districts are inviting residents to “grill district supervisors” on conservation issues as the supervisors “grill buffalo burgers” at an open house on Wednesday, September 27.

The annual “Grill Your Conservation District Day” is free and open to everyone who has an interest in natural resources. The event will run from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on September 27 at the USDA Service Center, 1860 N. 100 E. in North Logan. The information gathered at this open house will help the North Cache and Blacksmith Fork conservation district boards, and the sister agencies they work with, set priorities for natural resource conservation programs in the coming years. Please come, get acquainted, enjoy a meal, and provide the requested feedback.